

LaGrange County Economic Development Plan

Key Informant Interview Report

LaGrange County is working to create a strategic economic development plan. The purpose of the plan is to create a vision of LaGrange County's economic future and to develop a clear set of objectives to reach the goals of this vision.

The executive committee identified 33 key informants from the county and Northeast Indiana region whose opinions on economic development issues were considered valuable. Key informants included representatives of small business, major employers, health care, education, workforce development, banks, media, government, industry, real estate, agriculture, as well as other community members and regional partners.

Several attempts were made to schedule interviews with key informants. Prior to scheduling interviews, the executive committee contacted all of the potential key informants inviting them to participate in the planning process. The consultant made up to three attempts to contact each key informant by phone. When phone interviews were not feasible, key informants were asked to share their opinions via an online interview form.

Eight of the key informants who participated in the interviews were people who worked primarily outside of LaGrange County. In many cases, these professionals are involved in regional economic and workforce development efforts. Many of these "non-resident" key informants were less familiar with specific issues in the county. As a result, the number of "Don't Know" responses tended to be higher on some questions.

Interviews were conducted with community stakeholders between March 31 and April 22, 2011 via phone and email. The following twenty-three individuals participated:

Name	Organization
Charlie Ashcraft	LaGrange County Council, President
Don Babcock	NIPSCO, Director of Economic Development
George Bachman	LaGrange County Commissioners, President
Mark Becker	Northeast Indiana Fund, Executive Director
DeWayne Bontrager	Town of Topeka, Clerk Treasurer
Dale Buuck	Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, Director of Business Development
Peter Cook	LaGrange County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Board President
Dean Domer	Town of Wolcottville, President
Greg Gunthrop	Gunthrop Farms, Owner
Loren Heinlen	LaGrange County Community Foundation, Program Officer
Mark Hockstetler	Honeyville Metal, Inc., President
Michael Hughes	City of Sturgis, Michigan, City Manager
Kevin Lambricht	Trading Place America, Owner
Freeman P. Miller	F&N Woodworking, Owner
Kathleen Randolph	WorkONE Northeast, President/CEO
Jane Rich	Indiana Small Business Development Center Northeast, Director

Name	Organization
Mike Rowe	J.O. Mory, Inc., President
Mike Rowlison	Town of LaGrange, Clerk Treasurer
John Sampson	Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, President/CEO
Gale Shutz	South Milford Grain/IN Northeastern Railroad, Owner
Brooke Steed	Indiana Economic Development Corporation, Director of Northeast Region
Mark Ulrich	Zacher Co., Realtor
Randy Zimmerly	Westview School Corporation, Superintendent

Key informants were asked questions about specific aspects of LaGrange County's economic environment. The following analysis presents their responses.

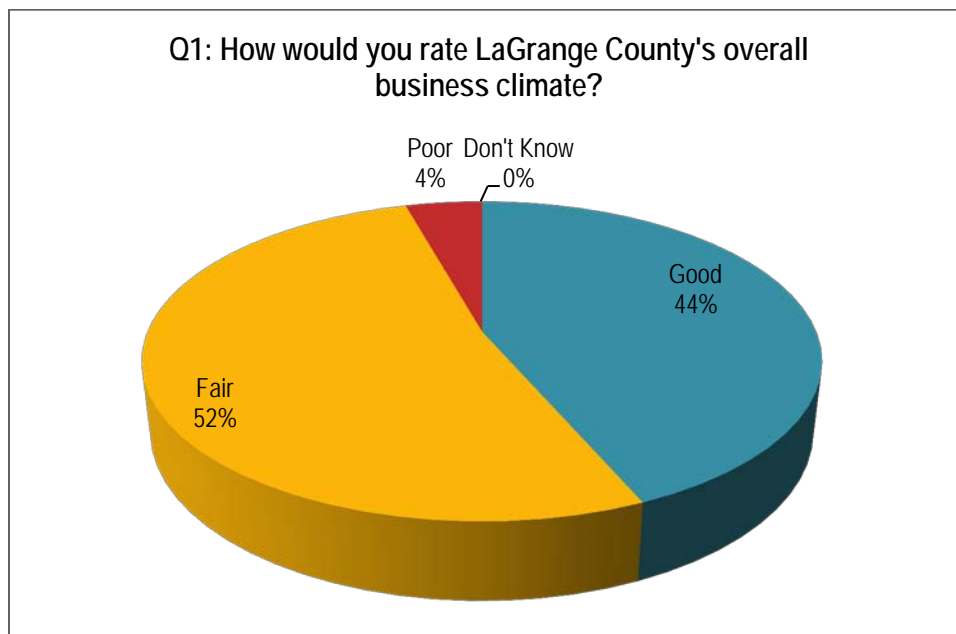
With a few exceptions, the report follows the sequence of questions that the key informants answered. Several questions asked key informants to rate various aspects of the county's business climate, and their answers have been quantified. In each instance, the scale used for quantification is identified. Any additional comments made by key informants are included below each chart.

For open-ended questions, the complete response of each key informant is either included in the body of this report or included in the Appendix that follows.

Business Climate

Key informants were first asked to rate LaGrange County’s overall business climate before focusing on individual issues. Respondents were asked to rate the business climate as good, fair, or poor. The majority of informants, 52.2 percent thought the county’s business climate was fair. The chart below illustrates these results.

In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating was 2.39.



Q1 Comments:

Because of Fawn River Crossing industrial site, which is a great opportunity for business.

I think what they have is good, but there could be more.

It's between Fair and Poor based on what I know.

It's dismal, stagnate here. We pick up a few opportunities, and then we lose some.

It's good to work in.

Sometimes I feel that we don't have the friendliest county officials. With business incentives and information about permits.

The state tax climate impacts this a lot.

This is an upgrade from poor. I think the LaGrange county economic development director has made improvements to benefit the entire county.

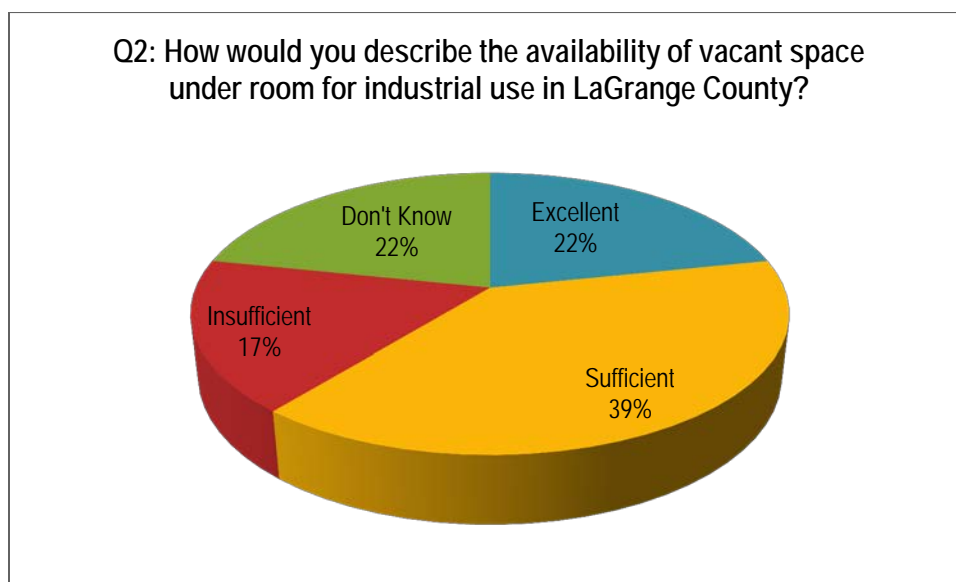
We have good workers, incentives are there, but difficult for businesses to consider us because we might appear to be a depressed area or a lower income area. Climate is good, though. You can't just look at demographic reports.

Capacity for Business Expansion or New Development

Industrial Development

The vast majority of respondents found LaGrange County’s availability of vacant space under roof for industrial use to be sufficient (39.1 percent) or excellent (21.7 percent). These findings are depicted in the chart below.

In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Sufficient = 2, Insufficient = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages, but it is worth noting that 21.7 percent of the key informants made this response. The average rating of LaGrange County’s availability of vacant space under roof for industrial use was 1.61.



Q2 Comments:

I assume they have a number of vacant buildings. They might not have sufficient ceiling heights.

I can't say because I don't know the demand for specific employers.

It's between sufficient and insufficient. There is one quality park near the toll road that can be shown off. I'm not sure of other vacant space in the area. I'm not sure if there's space in the Howe park.

looking through tourism perspective.

My limited perception: some vacant building areas?

Six months ago I would have said there was an abundance, but new occupancies have reduced the amount significantly. There is just over 700,000 square feet that is openly marketed. That amount is down from 1.5 million over the last 6-9 months(CONT'S)

Sufficient for current demand.

Respondents almost unanimously indicated that they preferred to see development for industrial use in the already existing industrial parks. There are two industrial parks in the county. However, informants identified the Fawn River Crossing Industrial Park in Howe, which is along the I-80/90 corridor, most frequently as a preferred location for industrial development. The county's other industrial park is located in Topeka and a few informants favored industrial development there.

The SR 9 corridor was another preferred location for industrial development in LaGrange County.

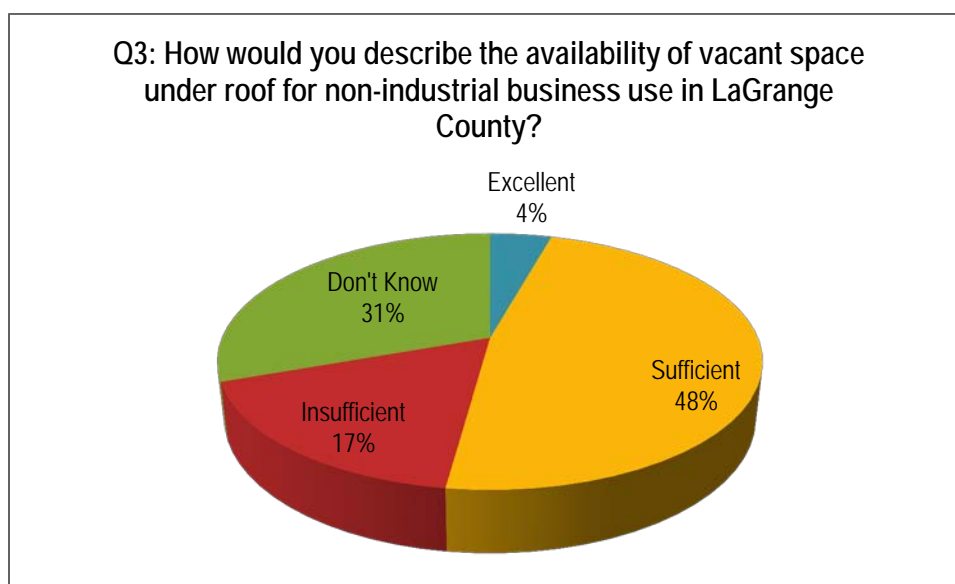
A couple of the key informants mentioned that they would prefer to see industrial development happen near South Milford where there is a rail connection.

Q6: Where would you prefer to see development for industrial use?
Along SR 9 from LaGrange to the county line.
Along the 80/90 corridor. Within 3-5 miles of the interstate. The closer the better.
Definitely up at the interchange on the toll road. In each of the developed towns in the county.
Fawn River at the 80/90 Howe exchange
Howe 121 Industrial Park.
Howe/ Fawn River area (State Rd 9) because the buildings are there. And also Topeka is a possibility.
I would prefer to see development adjacent to the 80/90 interchange.
I would really like to see it restricted to industrial sites that already have utilities. Continue to support Amish if we can.
In the new industrial park.
Intersections of major highways or major intersections served by utility infrastructure. Those intersections are so prime, and they need to be planned for development. It's critical that the community has control of those areas.
LaGrange and Howe. These are close to I-80 and US 20. Those are the key roads in the county.
North, in our TIF district.
On the north end upon River Crossing. I'd like to see some development in the southeast corner, too.
On the toll road at pond river crossing (because that's where the amenities are).
Probably along the toll road.
The best opportunity is along the toll road.
The east side of Fawn River Crossing has potential because of the infrastructure. The east side of SR 9 and toll road. I'm not familiar with the areas along SR 20 that can be developed.
The Howe 120 park at the toll road is a great location. Even South Milford and Wolcottville have some opportunities. We have rail in South Milford.
The main one would be the Fawn River Crossing site in Howe. South Milford is another area.
Toll Rd corridor, Howe, State Rd 9 corridor to LaGrange.
We've got some industrial parks in Topeka and along the toll road. All along SR 9 there's land in industrial parks. That's a logical place to start because it has infrastructure and good roads.
Wherever you can find land. A lot of the land is already owned by farmers. The groundwater in the southeast part of the county impedes development there.

Non-Industrial Development

When asked to describe the availability of vacant space under roof for non-industrial business (office space), more than half of the key informants (52.2 percent) thought that LaGrange County's supply was sufficient or better – while 17.4 percent said the supply was insufficient.

In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Sufficient = 2, Insufficient = 1. "Don't know" responses were not counted in the averages, but it is worth noting that 30.4 percent made this response. The average rating of LaGrange County's availability of vacant space under roof for non-industrial use was 1.26.



Q3 Comments:

It depends on the community you're looking at.

Sufficient space is available. As the county seat LaGrange has been and continues to be the natural location for office space. However, innovation has reduced that requirement. There is visible space, particularly in Lagrange, but if your business is a destination, not requiring traffic counts; and/or if it can share space with another occupant the availability is much stronger.

Unless you had a high quality tip-up concrete-walled buildings. You can see those at Ameriplex at the Port in Portage and NorthWind Crossings in Hobart.

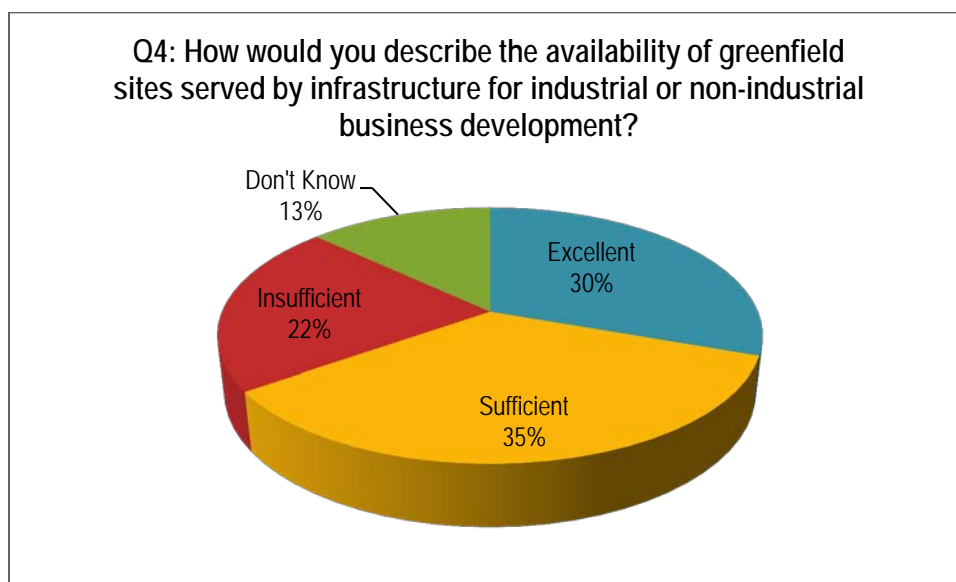
Informants most commonly cited town centers and existing buildings as the preferred locations for non-industrial business development. They cited the prevalence of empty store fronts in the county's downtown areas. One person commented that "there's a need for each major community to have an updated downtown revitalization plan or land use plan."

Q7: Where would you prefer to see development for non-industrial business (office space) use?
Along SR 9 from LaGrange to the county line.
Any place where there are existing buildings. There are many empty storefronts in the towns.
Any town. There aren't that many big town.
Around city and town centers. Some of the areas need to be cleaned up. There's a need for each major community to have an updated downtown revitalization plan or land use plan. The challenge is that if you don't have a plan for the downtown area, the development goes to a greenfield site outside of the community. I don't know if LaGrange County has an updated land use plan, but they should update if they haven't.
Around the city cores like LaGrange and Shipshewana.
Don't know
Downtown--there are some empty buildings,
Either in LaGrange or Shipshewana.
Frontage on I-9 in proximity to the interchange or properly zoned areas.
I would like to see it in the downtown LaGrange area, but effort needs to be put into the infrastructure. Any of the towns would be good for office space development.
I'd love to see that in downtown LaGrange. There may be opportunities for that type of development along the toll road.
In communities outside of the Town of LaGrange.
In our downtown areas and strip malls. These communities could use some uptown development. There's a lot of empty store fronts.
In the county seat, La Grange.
LaGrange and Shipshewana.
LaGrange is the natural, being in the center of the county, housing local government and being the basic center of non-tourism commerce. Howe and Topeka have some capacity, and makes the most sense, based on the industrial occupancies in these towns.
More within towns. LaGrange has great opportunity for non-industrial use.
Probably the northwest corner.
The best opportunity for that is along the western side of the county near Shipshewana.
We need it in Topeka
Where the utilities are already available--in town.

Greenfield Sites

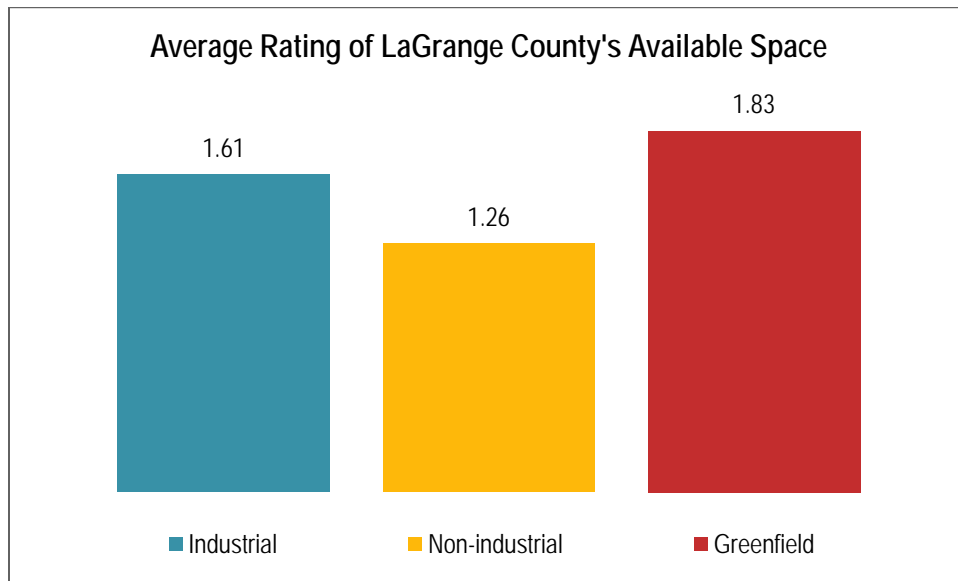
The majority of respondents described the availability of greenfield sites served by infrastructure as either sufficient (34.8 percent) or excellent (30.4 percent). The chart below illustrates the responses.

In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Sufficient = 2, Insufficient = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating of LaGrange County’s availability of greenfield sites was 2.13.



Q4 Comments:
Got one area that is under development and the infrastructure is on the way. But it is all in one place.
I think we have 3 or 4 sites.
There are fawn river opportunities
There is decent opportunity in two areas, 5 & 20 area and 121 area.
There's one developed area in Howe, but the county overall is insufficient.
They have done a lot along SR 9. The water supply system has insufficient capacity for the sprinkler system. There are still vacant spaces with a lawsuit on it.
They've made significant progress with this site in Howe.
This has been the goal of the county over the last few years and is now a reality. In particular, the preparation that has occurred at the Howe 121 industrial park.
We have a one site. We have a general lack of ready sites. There are insufficient numbers of industrial sites available. Non-industrial would been sufficient.

The chart below compares the average ratings of LaGrange County's availability of industrial, non-industrial, and greenfield space. The county's greenfield sites received the highest rating of the three and were generally perceived as sufficient.

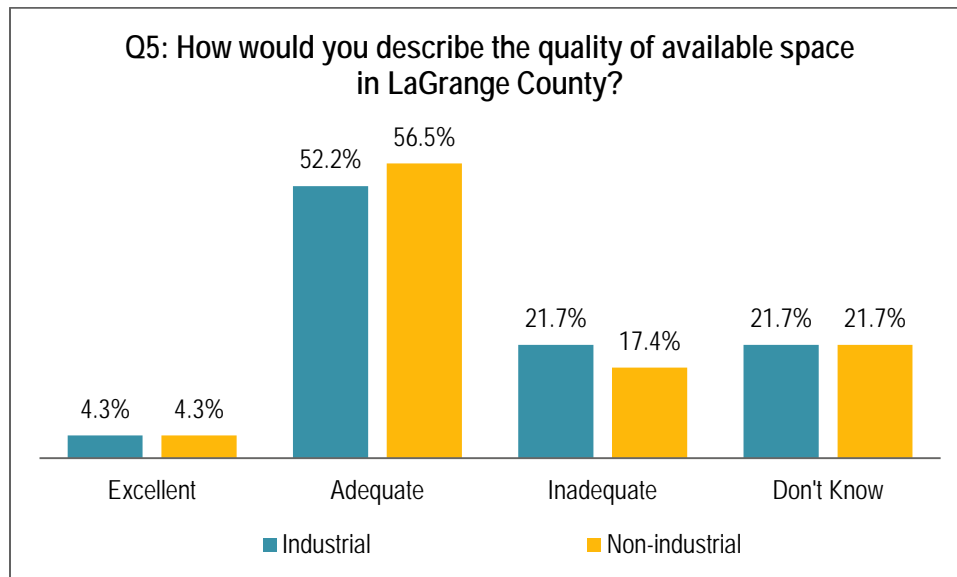


Quality of Available Space

Key informants were asked to describe the quality of available industrial and non-industrial space that is available in LaGrange County.

In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Sufficient = 2, Insufficient = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating of the quality of the county’s industrial space was 1.39 while non-industrial space was rated at 1.43.

As shown in the chart below, most key informants felt that the quality of available space was adequate. A considerable percent responded “Don’t Know” to this question.



Q5 Comments:

I know industry benefits from having access to city services and utilities. I don't think the infrastructure is as adequate as it should be especially in areas where business parks are developing.

I would actually rate this as good, but that is not offered. I cannot say the space is excellent, but adequate does not justify it.

Quality is always defined by the customer, so I cannot say anything about the quality of the space available.

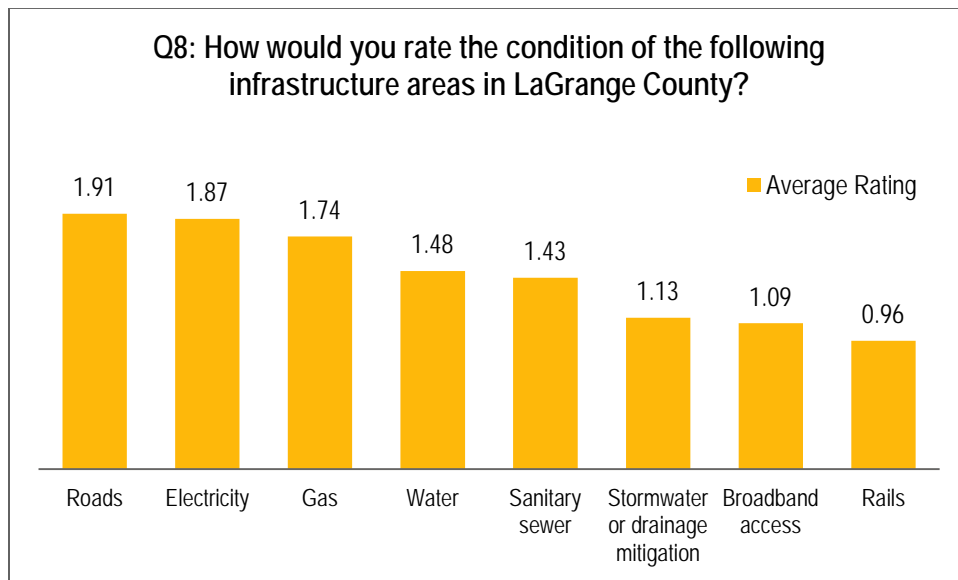
The construction and infrastructure requirements. If we had rail, that would be good.

The facilities and space I've seen have all been really good. That is a strength.

Infrastructure

Respondents were asked to rate the condition of the county’s infrastructure. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Adequate = 2, Inadequate = 1. The results were averaged and ranked from the highest to the lowest rated infrastructure. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The chart below illustrates the results.

All infrastructure areas rated between adequate and inadequate with the exception of rails, which ranked at the bottom of the list. Ten respondents indicated that they did not know enough about the county’s rail infrastructure to rate it. This may partially account for the low average rating of that infrastructure. Eleven respondents did not know enough to rate the county’s stormwater or drainage mitigation infrastructure. Table 1 in the Appendix illustrates informants’ ratings for each infrastructure category.



Q8 Comments:

- Broadband needs work, especially at West View for education. We can't get fiber in in a cost effective way.
- Most of the Major Moves money has been spent on the main roads. I don't know of significant rail lines.
- Rail is very limited. Water depends on where you are at--only in town and Fawn River Crossing.
- Rail service is really only in South Milford. South Milford doesn't have any service that I know of.
- Roads could be improved, but we have them which is good.
- Sanitary sewer and stormwater service condition varies from place to place.
- The SR roads are good. The county roads in smaller towns don't lend as much to industry. They just put water improvements at the Howe site but not the South Milford site.
- There are a lot of unpaved roads between the communities. That makes intracounty travel difficult.
- There is no rail, but it's not needed. There might be rail service near the north side of the toll road. The specific situation at the industrial park with the water supply is an issue.
- They're working on broadband.
- US 20 and other major roads are good.

There was little consensus among key informants regarding priorities for improvements. Several respondents wanted to see general infrastructure improvements to the county's industrial parks. As one informant said, "The more that can be done to make sure the sites are well-served by infrastructure the better." In addition, two informants noted the need for infrastructure improvements in the South Milford area where one of the county's two rail connections is located.

Five informants emphasized the need for road improvements and four said there was a need for increased broadband access. The sanitary sewer system was identified as a priority in three responses.

Four informants did not know how to prioritize infrastructure improvements in LaGrange County.

It should be noted that some respondents included more than one infrastructure area in their responses.

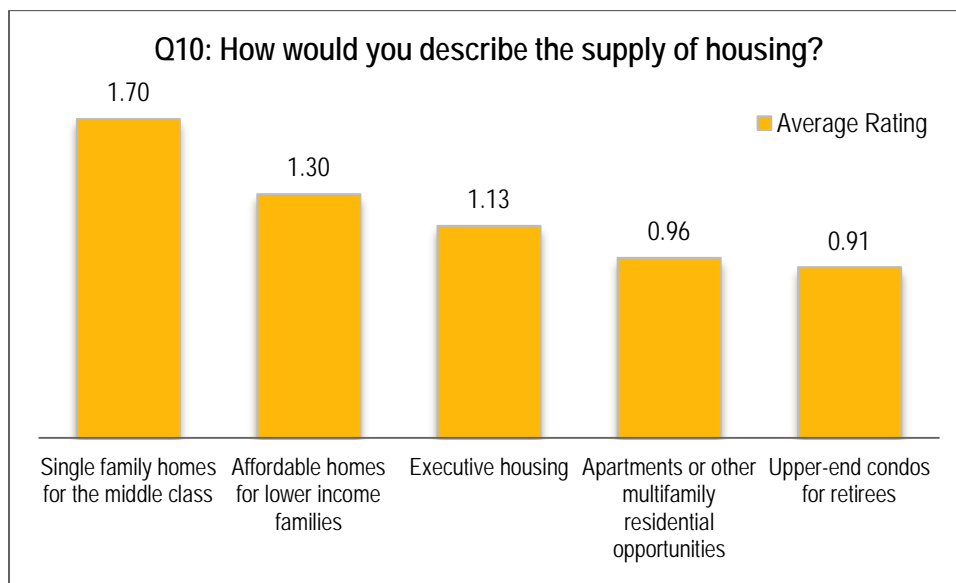
Q9: What would your priorities be for infrastructure improvements in LaGrange County?
Broadband access is an issue throughout the region. The commitment of the community to extend the utilities up to the toll road was a long-standing priority that they finally accomplished. The more that can be done to make sure the sites are well-served by infrastructure the better.
Definitely broadband.
Develop adequate broadband access. The need for broadband services is still strong.
Getting TIF district in South Milford and creating jobs.
I don't have any right now
I don't know
I don't know.
I don't really have any.
Make sure everyone has access. Wolcottville used to have two railroads and now there are none.
Make sure that major intersections are well-served by infrastructure.
Need some street repair
Paving county roads and those that link communities. Topeka to LaGrange is an example.
Rail, gas, and electric upgrades for utilities.
Roads, State Rd 9 corridor, new toll road interchange close to Shipshewana. Broadband access is a must.
Sanitary sewer should be present in Howe and to the handful of lakes that do not already have it.
Sanitary sewer.
The most infrastructure improvements we need would be in the South Milford area.
There are too many areas in the county with poorly paved or nonpaved roads. I don't think LaGrange County has many industries that utilizes rail much. I don't think natural gas is available outside of the towns.
There's a large portion of rural areas that don't have access to natural gas and three-phase electricity.
Water, sewage and roads are first. They're most important.
We need a strategic plan on what businesses we want to attract. We need infrastructure for viable businesses that will actually locate here.
We need to look at improvements in South Milford to get an industrial park going down here.

Housing

Key informants were asked to rate the county’s housing supply in five different categories. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Adequate = 2, Inadequate = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The chart below shows that three of the five categories of housing ranked between adequate and inadequate.

Thirteen of the respondents indicated that the supply of single family homes for the middle class was adequate, while 13 said that the supply of condos for retirees was inadequate. Ten key informants indicated that they did not know enough to comment on the supply of apartments or other multifamily residential opportunities in LaGrange County.

Some informants shared comments about the county’s housing supply. Two people indicated that there may be a demand for rental housing. One person commented that “I hear of people having trouble to find places to rent.” In contrast, another respondent said that “a lot of people with rental properties are out of business.” Another person felt that housing demand was low because people moved to places that offered more quality of life amenities.



Q10 Comments:
I don't really have a good sense of the housing needs in the county.
I hear of people having trouble to find places to rent all the time.
People move to other areas because of no swimming, band, soccer in schools and housing. Lower income is low supply because people buy up land. We need to zone with big land area to sell to Amish.
Retiree demand isn't great so we don't need too many.
There are empty foreclosure houses around.
There are not many condos or apartments.
Upper-end condos for retirees, I've never seen listings.
We've got great places around the lakes. Affordability is hard to define. A lot of people with rental properties are out of business. We don't have upper end condos for retirees.

For a complete illustration of informants’ ratings of the supply of housing by category type see Table 2 in the Appendix.

Eight key informants did not have any suggestions for improving housing in LaGrange County. A few of the respondents felt that demand for new housing would follow job creation. One person said, “I am concerned about industrial growth--we need jobs that will pay enough for a good housing situation.”

Another concern was a need for executive housing. One person explained that the county does not “have anything to attract high-end residential for high-end jobs.”

A few of the key informants indicated that the condition of available properties needed to be improved. One person noted that there were several empty properties in the county and that “many of the empty homes are older and need some repairs.”

A couple of the key informants noted a need for senior housing developments in the county. As one person explained, the county has “an aging population among the English population.”

The table below includes complete key informant responses concerning how to improve LaGrange County’s housing supply.

Q11: Do you have any suggestions for improving housing in LaGrange County?
Based on demographics, condos or developments for the senior population.
Don't overbuild.
Focus on senior condos. There's a movement called Aging in Place, which advocates having housing near centers with key services for seniors. We have an aging population among the English population.
I don't have any.
I don't really have suggestions for improving housing in LaGrange County.
I know that Region III-A has a group looking at housing needs in the area including LaGrange County. Executive housing is always important.
I'm not sure about affordable homes. Limit locations for mobile homes. This creates some obnoxious looking housing developments.
I'm not very familiar with what types of housing are needed.
It goes back to the development of the communities. They need to determine where they want people to live. Communities need a broad spectrum of housing. Housing could be near the many lake communities and near intersections for quick commutes to work.
It is market drive, no suggestions.
Make the economy improve. People can't afford to do much with the housing that is available.
No
No.
None right now
Probably not. I think it is out of my area of expertise. I am concerned about industrial growth--we need jobs that will pay enough for a good housing situation.
The number one thing would be creating jobs. You've got to have jobs for people to need housing.
There could be some more high end subdivisions in places. That would be my focus first of all.
There's tons of empty houses. Many of the empty homes are older and need some repairs.
We don't have anything to attract high-end residential for high-end jobs.
We have two housing developments in LaGrange, and one ready for just outside town. We are going to get about 30 houses in new one.

Small Business Development and Entrepreneurship

Eight respondents identified the LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) as a local resource for assistance with small business development and entrepreneurship. Five respondents identified the LaGrange County Chamber of Commerce as another local resource.

Four informants said they did not know of any resources that provide assistance with small business development and entrepreneurship in LaGrange County.

Several key informants mentioned regional resources, many of which are based out of Ft. Wayne. Five people said the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Ft. Wayne provided services to LaGrange County. Other regional resources that were mentioned include: the Community Development Corporation in Ft. Wayne, the IPFW Office of Engagement, and Women's Enterprise.

Other resources identified by key informants included: local banks, grants, JumpStart, SCORE, USDA, and WorkOne.

Complete key informant responses about small business assistance resources in LaGrange County are included in Table 3 in the Appendix.

When asked what additional resources are needed for small business assistance, informants had several ideas. A few of the informants suggested that promoting awareness of the resources already available in the county would be beneficial.

Informants identified several areas where additional resources for small business development and entrepreneurship would be advantageous. Recommendations included having a small business incubator, providing workforce training programs, and offering assistance with permits. Access to business financing was also mentioned.

A couple of the informants were concerned about the lack of available grant funds to provide this type of assistance.

The most commonly occurring response to the question of what additional resources are needed for small business assistance was "Don't Know." Six of the 23 informants responded in this manner.

A complete list of key informant recommendations for additional resources is included in Table 4 in the Appendix.

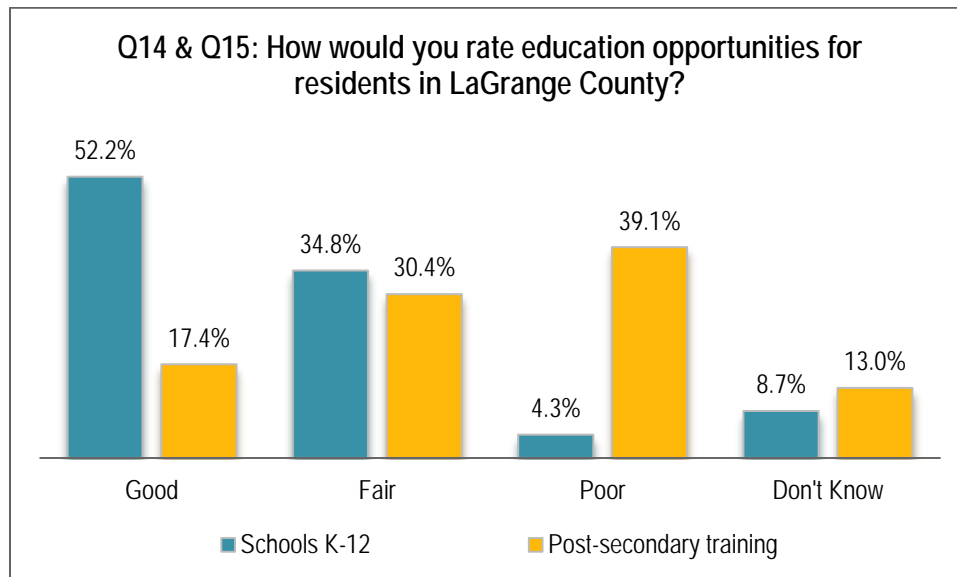
Education and Workforce Development

Key informants were asked to rate the county's education and postsecondary training environment. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. "Don't Know" responses were not counted in the averages.

The average rating of LaGrange County's schools K through 12 was 2.30, while postsecondary training opportunities were rated 1.52.

As illustrated in the chart below, there was quite a disparity in how the key informants perceived educational opportunities in LaGrange County. 52.2 percent of informants identified LaGrange County's K-12 schools as good, while 4.3 percent rated them as poor. In contrast, 17.4 percent of informants rated the county's postsecondary training opportunities as good while 39.1 percent identified them as poor.

Many rural communities struggle with some degree of disparity between K-12 education and postsecondary training, but the difference is striking in LaGrange County. There are very few postsecondary training opportunities offered in the county, and most residents need to drive to nearby counties in order to access such training.



Q14: How would you rate the schools K through 12 in LaGrange County?**Comments:**

As with most school systems the reduction of staffing has hurt, but there seems to be a strong dedicated group of educators, that is somewhat telling by the ages and experience of the staffs. Lakeland High School has dedicated a great deal of (CONT)

excellent

I feel like we are pretty good, but we are fairly small. For the amount we charge for our tax rates we are very adequate. Provide opportunities for kids to achieve and develop. Large percentage of school is Amish, only have them until 8th grade.

I haven't heard anything negative.

I haven't seen performance data. Talent Initiative, a Lilly Endowment funded program, funded 6 new tech high schools. Their school leadership is some of the best I've seen.

I'm only really familiar with one school system.

The schools are improving.

There's one or two that's really good, and one on the poor side.

Q15: How would you rate post-secondary training opportunities for residents in LaGrange County? Comments:

Because of libraries and online classes.

Only because there are good opportunities, but you have to travel to Fort Wayne. We promote training at our business.

Surrounded by them, but they aren't that close--half hour in every direction.

This is limited. However, there are some nice opportunities within a reasonable (15-30 minute) drive. With Glen Oaks Junior College (Centreville, MI), Trine University (Angola), a number of opportunities in Fort Wayne, Kalamazoo, Elkhart, and (CONT'S)

Trine has satellite at Howe

Unless you can do it online, there are not a lot of training opportunities in the county.

We don't have that many close opportunities, but we are looking at different possibilities. Looking at programs through high schools. The industry here hasn't encouraged it! People in the area haven't needed degrees.

We have some small colleges nearby, and the high schools have courses that you can get college credit for.

We have some, just not in the right place (physically too far if you're on west side of county)

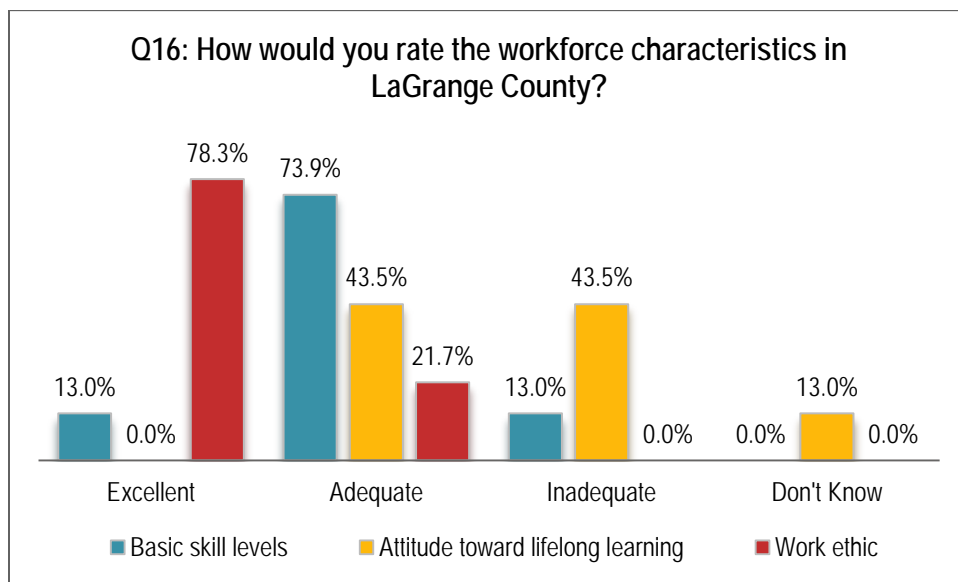
Within the county it is poor, but they have access to training outside of the county. Some counties offer access to computers at libraries for online learning.

WorkOne is one of the best workforce development systems.

Key informants were also asked to rate LaGrange County’s workforce in terms of basic skill levels, attitude toward lifelong learning, and work ethic. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Excellent = 3, Adequate = 2, Inadequate = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages.

The chart below shows the distribution of key informant responses. The average ratings of the workforce characteristics were as follows: work ethic = 2.78, basic skill levels = 2.00, and attitude toward lifelong learning = 1.30.

Work ethic was the most highly rated workforce characteristic with 78.3 percent of informants rating that category as excellent. Informants were divided in their rating of the workforce’s attitude toward lifelong learning with 43.5 percent identifying it as adequate and 43.5 percent finding it to be inadequate. The basic skill levels of the county’s workforce were largely considered adequate.



Q16 Comments:

Based on western half of county.

Basic skill levels are extremely great at some things (manual labor, woodworking, etc.), not others (technology)

Now a lot of the Amish are going to get GED because the workplace requires that now.

The reason they are inadequate is because there is such a large Amish population that only pursues education until 8th grade. Also, they resist being trained for construction, etc.

The work ethic borders between excellent and adequate.

Their significant Amish population impacts the county's education levels. Commitment to lifelong learning is undervalued in the community.

Unless you're willing to commit to lifelong learning, you don't have a good work ethic.

We don't know anything else but how to work hard.

People who participated in the interviews had multiple suggestions for improving education and workforce development in LaGrange County. The vast majority of respondents made recommendations regarding postsecondary education and training opportunities.

Several key informants felt there was a need for trade skills and technical training in LaGrange County. Most of the county's adult education opportunities are offered through the workplace. Therefore, informants said it was important to "continue to understand the needs of businesses, particularly industry" in order to meet training needs. Another informant reiterated the need to provide training that directly connects with employers: "As a region, we need to strengthen our focus on workforce development for targeted industries."

Another theme among the key informant interviews was the need to cultivate a culture of lifelong learning. One respondent's suggestions for improving education and workforce development in LaGrange County consisted of "Instilling attitude of lifelong learning at a young age, get more higher education opportunities, more partnerships with other schools from region."

One of the challenges for LaGrange County residents is that most postsecondary training opportunities are offered outside of county boundaries. Rising gas prices and a slow economy translate to fewer people being willing to invest in traveling long distances for additional education. As one informant explained, "the closer the training is, the more apt people are to take advantage of it."

New educational initiatives in the county's high schools were recognized by several key informants. The new tech program at Lakeland was one of the new programs mentioned. Some key informants noted a shift in how educators emphasize postsecondary education to high school students. One respondent said, educators "could do a better job making sure we understand what jobs are available for kids. English parents want kids to go to college. The reality is [that] many kids aren't headed there. We need to improve what opportunities are out there for these kids. How do you get a child ready for what is in their immediate future? Probably not college in many cases in LaGrange. [We] need to have them learning trades, too."

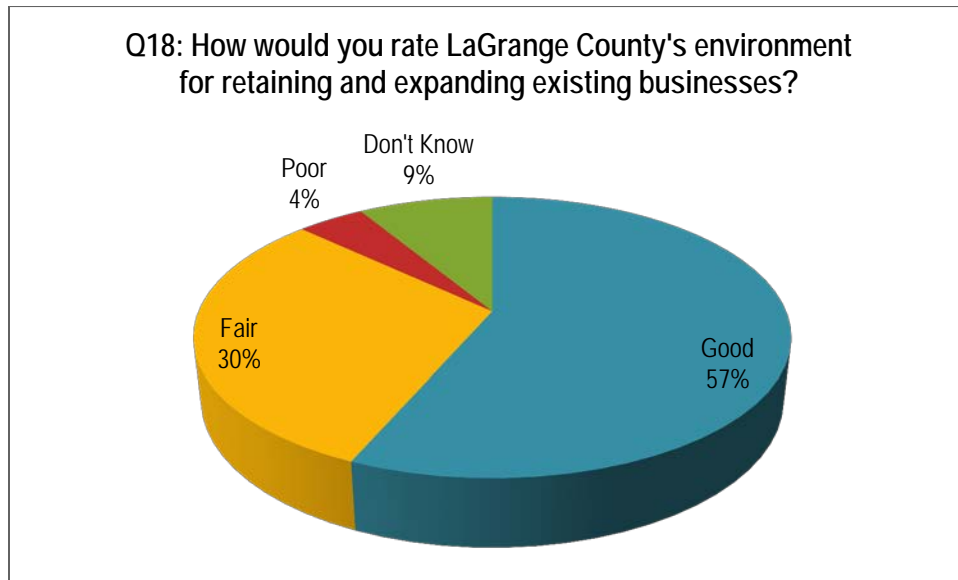
The Amish population was another topic that arose in some interviews with key informants. It was universally recognized that the low educational attainment level among the Amish cannot be overcome or ignored. As one person explained, "the Amish [population] has a low educational attainment level. However, these are high quality, great residents to have in the region." It was noted that many Amish workers pursue training in the workplace if it is required.

Complete responses can be found in Table 5 in the Appendix.

Retention and Expansion of Employers

Key informants were asked to rate LaGrange County’s environment for retaining and expanding existing businesses. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating was 2.35.

The majority of informants, 56.5 percent, rated the retention and expansion environment as good. Several of the informants applauded the LaGrange County EDC’s retention and expansion efforts. The chart below illustrates the key informant responses.



Q18 Comments:

Between Fair and Don't Know.

Keith is a good, dedicated leader for the community. The county has also made a significant commitment with the new tech park.

Keith is doing really well.

Our EDC is doing a great job of working with businesses.

Retention has been difficult, when multi-location industries scale down the county seems to suffer. I am not sure why, we have a nice supply of blue-collar workers, who I would assume, are not expensive; we have a good road system; and a (CONTINUES)

The environment is welcoming

Very good because we have a great economic development corp.

We might be a little bit out of kilter by providing too many incentives for businesses.

Key informants identified a number of advantages and obstacles for local employers in the LaGrange County economy.

Several respondents acknowledged the county’s hardworking workforce as advantageous to local business. Although the county’s workforce is perceived as hardworking, it remains a low-skilled workforce. Some key informants noted that there is a need to develop an educated workforce for both

R&E and new business recruitment. As one informant explained, “we don't have a workforce to support high-tech businesses for the time being.”

Transportation assets were also identified as supporting R&E. One person summed up these assets, saying, “One of the advantages is that there are employees available for new employers. The county also has access to the toll road and access to markets.”

The LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) was also mentioned as a resource for improving the environment for R&E efforts. One theme that reoccurred among several responses was the need for improved local incentives for retention and expansion for existing businesses. A key informant explained that “having an organization focused on economic development is good, [but] elective officials could be more attentive to the needs of business. The EDC is working on cases when more support is needed. Elected officials could offer more incentives for R&E.”

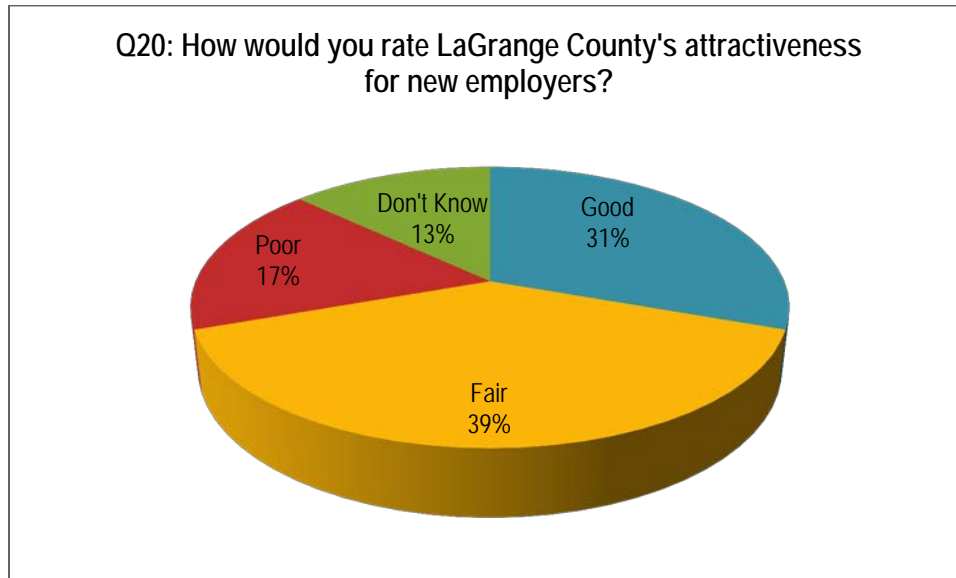
Some key informants felt that existing businesses needed assistance with permitting and zoning issues. Another need was for lending assistance. One informant noted that “LaGrange County could have a stronger commercial lending environment for businesses.”

Table 6 in the Appendix presents complete responses concerning business retention and expansion.

New Employer Marketing

Key informants were asked to rate LaGrange County's attractiveness for new employers. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. "Don't Know" responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating was 1.87 or fair.

As the chart below illustrates, 30.4 percent of the respondents considered LaGrange County definitely attractive to new employers, but 17.4 percent found its attractiveness to be poor. 39.1 percent of the informants felt that the county's attractiveness to new employers was only fair.



Q20 Comments:

Depends on what the business wants. If they want a non-skilled workforce, we're probably appealing.

Fair to poor.

It's good for smaller companies, but it doesn't have the attractiveness for bigger companies.

It's good until you run into a problem with zoning or permits.

Overall I'd say 1.5. For certain types of jobs, the county is very attractive. For knowledge-based jobs, the county would be poor.

What's not to like? Good transportation systems; personal cost of living levels including housing are excellent; excellent and improving medical facilities and good school systems, etc.

A few of the participants noted that the county's attractiveness depends on the type of employer looking to locate. One person commented that the county is "good for smaller companies, but it doesn't have the attractiveness for bigger companies." Another person shared a similar opinion based on the skills of the county's workforce: "For certain types of jobs, the county is attractive. For knowledge-based jobs, the county would be poor."

Key informants identified the following advantages in LaGrange County for attracting new employers: Major Moves funds, transportation assets, available space and land for development, natural resources such as lakes and parks, and a large workforce.

The following are representative comments by key informants regarding the county's strengths regarding new business recruitment:

- “Aggressive use of Major Moves money, especially in infrastructure investment. Potential incentives for attracting quality industry that pay above average wages and are a good fit for the county's workforce and quality of life.”
- “We need a change to show them the other side, show them the transportation possibilities, available land, beautiful homes on beautiful lakes at beautiful prices, and the volume of blue collar workers who just want to work.”
- “They have several existing employers who have positive things to say about the community. The county is sitting on a lot of Major Money. There's a new willingness to use that money strategically. This is advantage for the county that hasn't been used yet.”

By and large, the obstacles to attracting new employers to LaGrange County boiled down to the low-skilled workforce. Many key informants felt that the county's lack of an educated workforce and limited postsecondary training opportunities presented challenges to attracting new employers. The following statements by key informants are representative of these sentiments:

- “The lack of an educated workforce and the lack of development ready sites.”
- “Workforce talent and human capital for the jobs that require higher education is a real barrier for the county. For low skill labor positions, the county would be very competitive.”
- “Accessibility for training in the work place. This type of training is not as available in LaGrange County. They need more opportunities.”

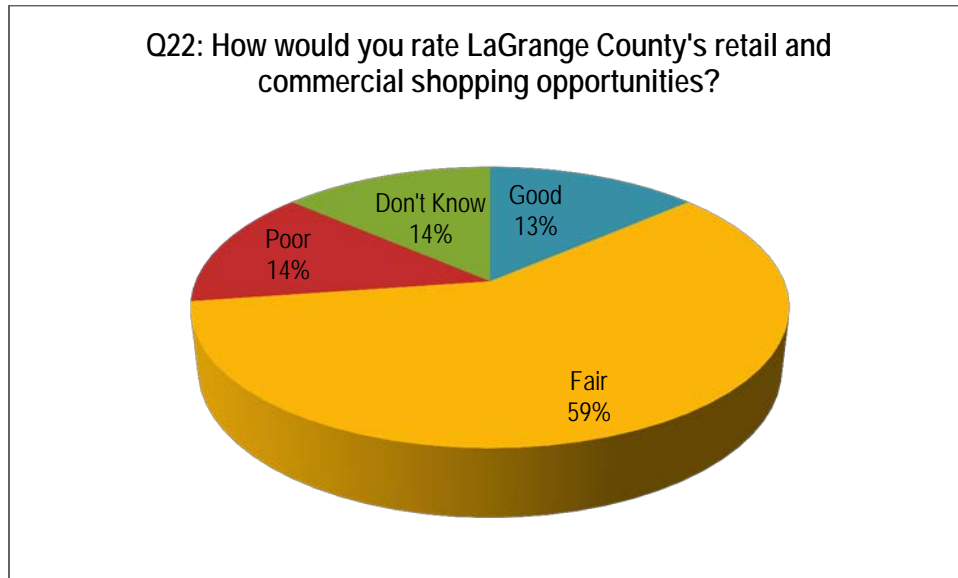
Key informants identified other obstacles to attracting new employers such as the lack of executive housing and quality of life amenities.

See Table 7 in the Appendix for the informants' complete responses regarding new employer recruitment.

Availability of commercial and retail shopping opportunities

Key informants were asked to rate LaGrange County’s retail and commercial shopping opportunities. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. “Don’t know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating was 1.73 or fair.

The chart below depicts that people see some room for improvement to LaGrange County’s retail and commercial shopping opportunities – only three people described the current retail environment as good but 13 described it as fair.



Q22 Comments:

Don't have a lot of big name stuff, but a lot of small businesses.

If I look at Shipshewana, then it's good.

It's good in Shipshewana, but Fair to Poor in the other towns.

Knick knack shops are great, but there is no Wal-mart or general shopping.

Shipshewana markets itself as a community. They want the community to be a better place. The SRMA is a dynamic group.

Somewhere between Fair and Poor. Shipshewana has specialty stores, but everywhere else has few opportunities.

There's not a lot of big name type stores, there's more mom and pop.

They have some unique, niche opportunities with the Amish in Shipshewana. Your day-to-day shopping would be poor.

Several key informants noted the lack of variety in the county’s retail and commercial shopping. Shipshewana was an exception to this perception. The shopping opportunities that the county lacks – big box retailers such as Wal-mart – are not likely to move in based on population and income demographic trends.

When asked to describe specific deficiencies in the county's retail and commercial shopping, overwhelmingly informants stated that there was an overall lack of retail opportunities and very limited selection in LaGrange County. The biggest complaint was the lack of variety and difficulty finding everyday essentials.

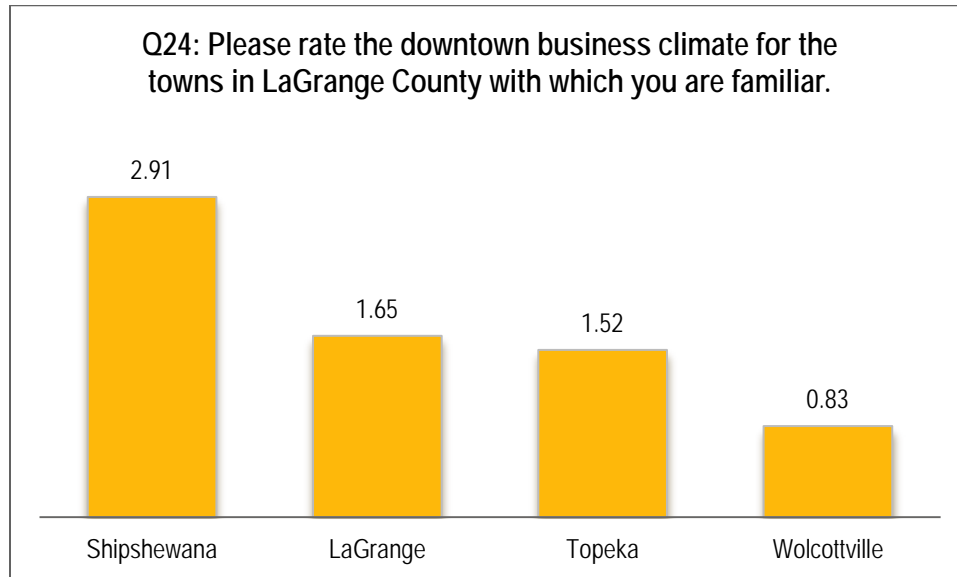
The following are some representative comments from key informants regarding deficiencies and opportunities for shopping in LaGrange County:

- “We don't have any superstore of any kind, no malls or anything. We just have the downtown areas. So, people load up and drive to Angola or other areas just to go shopping.”
- “Our shopping opportunities are unique. People come to the lakes and specialty stores.”
- “It's good in Shipshewana. The other communities in the county have less retail. There are gaps, but there are opportunities to have more local businesses.”

Thoughts on retail deficiencies in LaGrange County can be found in Table 8 in the Appendix.

Downtown Development

Key informants were asked to rate the downtown business climate for the towns in LaGrange County with which they were familiar. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The chart below illustrates the average rating of the four incorporated places in LaGrange County.



Q24 Comments:

LaGrange (Good) is a typical old town downtown area, but one that still exists and has not moved to the outskirts. There are professional offices, some retail, some restaurants and some empty space. The town is clean, and there is pride in storefronts. An example of local businesses staying compact is: The local hardware moved out of town several years ago, so far out of town you had to take a car to get there, but not so far that the Welcome To LaGrange sign is in the front yard of this store. Other towns in the county have some uniqueness to them. Topeka (Good) has progressive, enthusiastic town managers with foresight and initiative thinking and always have something in the works. Wolcottville (Fair) has some vacant space. Howe (Fair) is somewhat of a crossroads, where two main roads intersect. However, there are some positives in Howe in the form of revitalized available space with substantial character.

Many towns are fairly vacant. They're not bringing in commerce from outside.

Most of the other little towns would be considered "poor" in terms of business climate.

Shipshewana is focusing on niche markets. People think of tradition and high quality when they think of Amish. That could be leveraged into a strategic advantage. Perhaps that could be implemented in other industries.

Shipshewana outshines them all. Roger Brooks has done a lot to help the community. He specializes in tourism marketing and branding. His work started about 3 years ago and is still ongoing.

So many downtowns are dying. Retail businesses are really struggling. Shipshewana is thriving due to tourism. Topeka is in the heart of Amish country and manages to keep up.

There's nothing in Wolcottville for people.

Topeka and Wolcottville are more between Fair and Poor. Howe's downtown business climate is fair, too. LaGrange has a lot of vacancies downtown. It's good space, but it's not full yet. Signage is a huge detriment to doing business in the community.

We have a lot of vacancies along Main Street in Wolcottville.

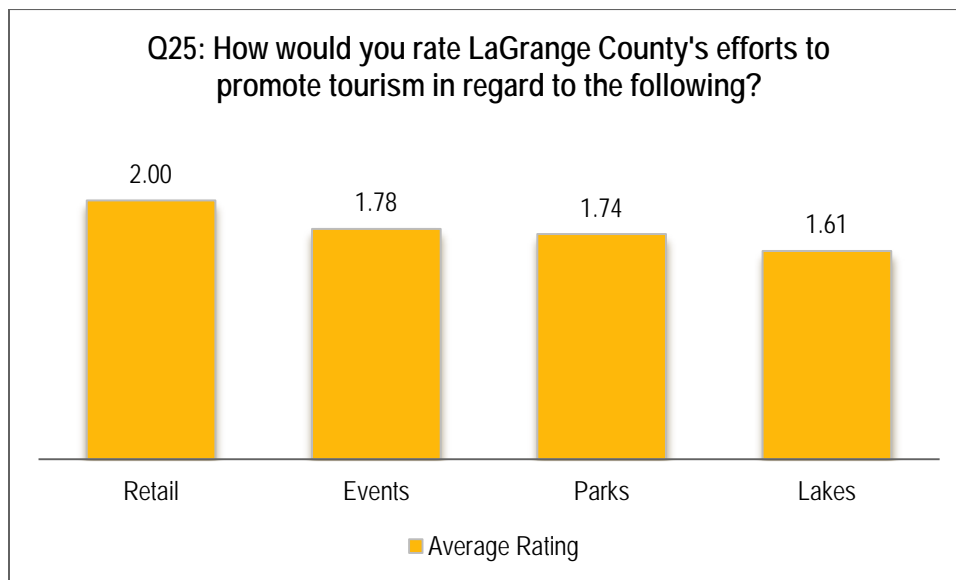
We should include the other downtowns in the area in this survey and planning process.

Twenty-one of the 23 key informants described Shippshewana's downtown business climate as excellent. One person felt that Shippshewana's success was due to "focusing on niche markets." This informant continued to explain that "People think of tradition and high quality when they think of Amish. That could be leveraged into a strategic advantage."

Informants noted that the downtown areas in LaGrange, Topeka and Wolcottville have more empty storefronts and are in need of attention and revitalization. One of the challenges for these other towns is to bring in commerce from outside the county. The informants felt that, with the exception of Shippshewana, the county's towns are primarily serving local residents.

Recreation and Tourism

Key informants were asked to rate LaGrange County's efforts to promote tourism with regard to lakes, parks, retail, and events. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. "Don't Know" responses were not counted in the averages. The chart below illustrates the average rating of the four tourism areas asked about in the question. Overall, the ratings for all areas were fair.



Q25 Comments:

County perspective

CVB is working hard to do this. Everyone might now agree with how they do it, but they are doing it.

I don't see many advertisements. There are only so many parks.

I'm not sure people want tourists coming to lakes because it is residential. The hotels and such are not there. The game preserve is a tourist area. Curious to see what will happen with Pumpkin line railroad connecting Shippshewana and Middlebury.

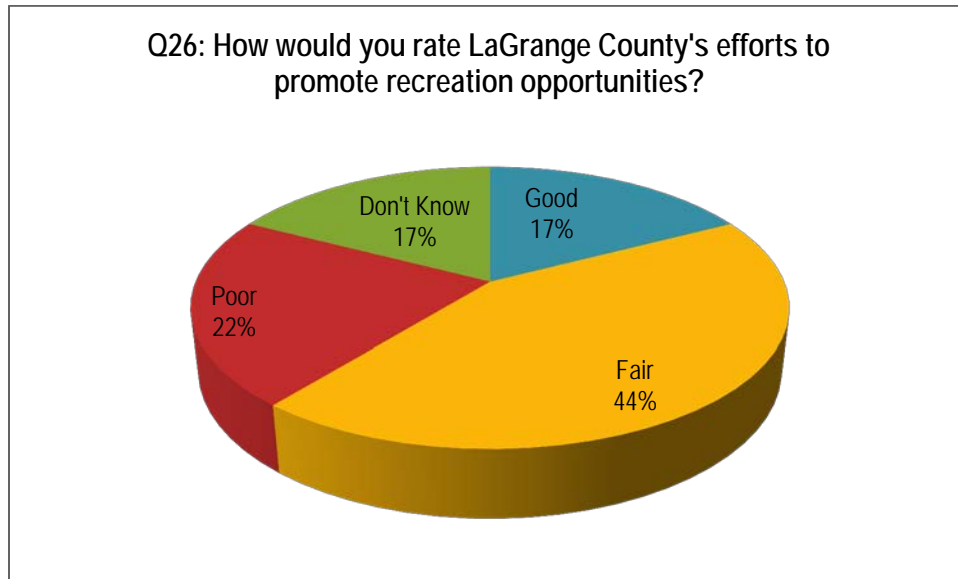
LaGrange has a lot to offer that it hasn't promoted as well as say Auburn.

Obviously Shippshewana is the drawing card for tourism and events, not only in the County, but also in the area. The park system is operated well, it is somewhat of a hidden gem that locals may take for granted. I am not sure the publicity (CONTINUES)

Shippshewana does a great job of promoting retail. I don't see a lot of promotion, but I don't really look

The only thing you could do to improve retail is to get all the oversight groups to work together

Key informants were asked to rate LaGrange County’s efforts to promote recreation opportunities. In order to quantify the results, we assigned the following values: Good = 3, Fair = 2, Poor = 1. “Don’t Know” responses were not counted in the averages. The average rating was 1.61 or fair. The chart below illustrates the distribution of responses.



Q26 Comments:

County Govt seems to be pretty proactive. 4H and soccer programs in the western part of the county are great.

I know some of the places do trade shows to promote.

The county's efforts focus 100% on Shipshewana. They haven't done a good job of promoting other amazing things in the county like the canoeing in Mongo.

The kids have been surveyed, and they wanted hang out places. We have great parks here.

We have several websites.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

After discussing specific issues, key informants were asked to identify three primary strengths and three primary weaknesses in the overall business climate in LaGrange County. Their complete responses are included in Table 9 and Table 10 in the Appendix.

Strengths

The most cited strengths included the LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and the county's workforce. Key informants praised the leadership and accomplishments of the EDC, which is a relatively new organization in the county. The county's workforce was viewed as having a strong work ethic. Key informants noted that the county has an available workforce that is skilled at physical labor.

Another strength identified by key informants was the county's pro-business climate. Several respondents perceived a willingness among residents and local elected officials to welcome new business to the community.

Other strengths that were identified included: available sites for development, transportation assets, LaGrange County's location in relation to nearby markets, the Amish culture, and natural resources that add to the county's quality of life.

Weaknesses

The topics that dominated the discussion of the county's weaknesses included the local political climate and economy. Criticism of the local political climate ranged from minor issues such as claims of provincialism to more critical concerns that local governments are not supportive of business. Many key informants worried that LaGrange County's economy was "too concentrated in RV and manufacturing industries." This concentration puts the county at risk of suffering the uncertainties of a cyclic economy.

Closely related to the county's dependency on the RV industry are low educational attainment levels. A few informants felt that there is an "ongoing need for secondary or non-traditional education" in LaGrange County. This is particularly important for the workforce, which had previously relied on high-paying but low-skilled jobs. As one person explained, LaGrange County needs "better opportunities for continued education for our workforce. It takes an educated workforce to attract skilled jobs."

Some informants felt that another weakness in the county's overall business climate was the need to establish an identity for the community that could be used in marketing to tell the story of LaGrange County. One person noted that "educational and economic demographic reports, which aren't really accurate in reality," need to be explained to the larger public.

Key informants noted the following other weaknesses in the county's overall business climate:

- Lack of amenities
- Lack of broadband access
- Lack of investment from Major Moves funds
- Lack of strategic planning
- Low population density

- Transportation assets not being used to potential
- Need for downtown revitalization
- High electricity rates
- Lack of markets
- Unpredictable tax rates

Treats

Key informants were asked to describe three opportunities and three threats that confront LaGrange County in its economic development efforts. Their complete responses are included in Table 11 and Table 12 in the Appendix.

The county's dependence on the RV and manufacturing industries was considered the greatest threat by several key informants. The county's economy is susceptible to downturns in the RV industry that can have a huge impact locally. One informant said, "We're very tied to the RV industry. If that suffers economically, it hurts everything."

Reliance on the RV industry and high-paying manufacturing jobs has contributed to a culture that does not value secondary education. As one person said, "Our major employment has been RV and housing, which don't require much education. If you could graduate in the 8th grade and can swing a hammer, you could make 60k a year--not so anymore." The county's workforce is still adjusting to the new economic reality following the 2008 recession.

The lack of an educated, skilled workforce was also mentioned as a threat to future development. One key informant said, "We need a higher educated workforce to attract skilled jobs." Brain drain – or the loss of high school students who pursue college degrees and do not return – was also cited as a threat to the county's economic development prospects.

Globalization was considered another threat to LaGrange County's economic future. Some informants felt that competition with nearby counties in the region was a threat.

Other threats to development included: the county's aging population, degraded transportation assets, inadequate infrastructure, lack of funding, and a limited housing supply.

Opportunities

Although there was little consensus among the key informants, they identified several opportunities for LaGrange County in its economic development efforts. Among the opportunities listed were the county's number of available sites for development. The county's workforce was also viewed as an opportunity to attract new business.

The Amish culture was also considered an opportunity. Several key informants recognized that the Amish population contributes to the county's uniqueness. The Amish also bring a strong culture of entrepreneurship to the county.

In addition to the Amish, the county's natural resources and recreation destinations are opportunities to expand tourism efforts.

Key informants felt that LaGrange County was a culturally diverse, progressive community that offered many quality of life amenities with its lakes and parks.

The results of this and other strategic planning efforts were considered other opportunities for the future.

Community Vision

Finally, key informants were asked to envision their ideal community in 10 years. Overwhelmingly, people wanted to balance development while maintaining the rural charm and natural assets of the county. Key informants envisioned LaGrange County with a more diversified economy that included knowledge-based jobs. Most preferred for development to occur along the toll road, in town centers, and along SR9. Protecting the natural landscape, maintaining the rural setting, and promoting the Amish culture that attract tourists were also of prime importance to key informants. Improving educational opportunities was another goal for the future.

The following are a few comments from key informants regarding their vision for LaGrange County in 10 years:

- “The community embraces and adopts a culture of lifelong learning. The local elected officials are supportive of business development. They are known for collaboration between local governments and business.”
- “We want to see investment in high-paying advanced manufacturing jobs in a diversified economy. A community that has access to training opportunities.”
- “Well I hope it's thriving. I'd like to see the towns growing.”

Table 13 in the Appendix includes a complete list of informant’s visions for their community.

Table 14 in the Appendix includes additional comments shared by some key informants regarding this planning process.

Appendix

TABLE 1.

Q8: How would you rate the condition of the following infrastructure areas in LaGrange County?				
	Excellent	Adequate	Inadequate	Don't Know
Roads	2	18	2	1
Rails	0	4	14	5
Water	4	10	2	7
Sanitary Sewer	2	13	1	7
Stormwater or drainage mitigation	2	10	0	11
Gas	9	5	3	6
Electricity	9	7	2	5
Broadband access	3	6	4	10

TABLE 2.

Q8: How would you rate the condition of the following infrastructure areas in LaGrange County?				
	Excellent	Adequate	Inadequate	Don't Know
Executive housing	1	8	7	7
Single family homes for the middle class	4	13	1	5
Affordable homes for lower income families	3	9	3	8
Apartments or other multifamily residential opportunities	0	9	4	10
Upper-end condos for retirees	0	4	13	6

TABLE 3.

Q12: What resources are available for providing assistance in small business development and entrepreneurship in LaGrange County?
All sucks. Nothing at federal, local, state to help small businesses. Just more regulations.
The Economic Development leader, Keith Gillenwater, is becoming more visible and accessible. I think people need to be comfortable that they have a resource that does not have their own agenda and Keith appears to be a good person for that. A committee of successful, retired volunteers to assist and guide would be a plus for the county; again, as long as there is not a hidden agenda within the committee. A successful small business provides many benefits to the community that go unseen. But, the guts or know-how to start up and continue through difficult periods is a concern, if there was a supporting group to call upon for help I think there would be more potential and more successful entrepreneurs. I believe, particularly in a small community, that local lenders need to be in supportive roles for existing small businesses and start-ups. Our local lenders seem to be aggressive enough when the economy is not questionable, and the local small businesses need this type of lender to work with them. I would like to see small businesses need this type of lender to work with them. I would like to see small communities utilize local small businesses as much as possible. For example, when new construction is needed, particularly by government type entities (schools, etc.), keep the dollars local if comparable bids are submitted. There is a limited amount of demand and when the supply comes from outside the community and the dollars leave the small community does not feel the full benefit. I would like to see a tax benefit to keep business on a local level in small communities. It would be beneficial to be more informative as to what services and manufacturing capabilities are available on a local level. There are many hidden local businesses that the community is not aware of, particularly Amish craftsman, etc. Again, a tax benefit or a local discount would keep local dollars working.
Being a member of the Chamber, I feel like Beth and Cara are good contacts. If someone wants information, they can get it. Chamber is good--very helpful. Farmer State Bank helps small businesses as well. Through banks and Chamber people get a lot of support.
Don't know.
Hard work--a lot of good resources, but people need to get out there and go for it.
I do not. If there is something, it's news to me.
I don't know much except for what the chamber of commerce offers. There are organizations that provide services for employment that might help. These might not be based in LaGrange County.
I don't know of anything. Other business owners tend to help new entrepreneurs. Education for Amish only goes so far. I had excellent opportunities to learn through my job as a manager at a manufacturing firm. I used all that information and experience when I started my business.
I don't know of specifics for LaGrange County. They have access to the SBDC based in Fort Wayne. There may be services available from South Bend. JumpStart is working to develop a guide for small business development regional support for entrepreneurs.
I'm aware that there are resources through the LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation. They are working on virtual accelerator. I don't have a lot of details but i know that's something that they are working on.
I'm not very familiar with that.
Not a bunch. There's the extension service offers some. The USDA rural development is supposed to be a resource, but they don't provide much. The EDC does a good job. There's not enough of a unified effort to assist small business development.

Q12: What resources are available for providing assistance in small business development and entrepreneurship in LaGrange County?
Regional small business development center, womens enterprise in Ft Wayne (regional group), Indiana Purdue Ft Wayne office of engagement, community development corp out of Ft Wayne.
SBDC
The EDC can get people started. We don't have a whole lot of resources beyond that other than a good business climate.
The EDC website has several listed. In reality they are very limited.
The LaGrange County EDC and the LaGrange County Chamber of Commerce. There are other resources through the state and other agencies.
The LaGrange EDC, chamber of commerce, SBDC, SCORE (Service Core of Retired Executives)
The town tries to get them grants through the state government
There's not a lot of resources unless you're interested in agriculture. The USDA and Farm Service Agency and Purdue Extension all provide assistance.
We have a regional office for the SBDC out of Fort Wayne. They do a good job of getting out in the regional counties.
We've got the LaGrange County EDC and COC
Work One provides financial support for training in entrepreneurship. And HR support for small businesses all at no cost.

TABLE 4.

Q13: What additional resources are needed for small business development?
Based on what I hear, I think there is a myriad of legalities that small businessmen have to go through. Maybe they need help with these permits and processes. Constant balance between community and businessmen.
The biggest problem is attempting to get money. There are programs but no one knows how to use them. No education to help small businesses use what is there to help them.
Demand is an issue. LaGrange County is a tough sell for this type of training. The dichotomy of culture seems to influence this. Training is typically on-site among companies. There's not much of a demand, which drives the supply. The folks here are used to being workers in an industrial background. Becoming entrepreneurs is somewhat of an adjustment.
Don't know.
Have some good resources, but probably manpower for those organizations for countries outside of Allen.
I don't know.
I don't know.
I don't really know what avenues are available.
I really don't
Need to self motivate and use the resources that are out there.
Not aware
Sometimes educational training academies are beneficial for small business. I don't think the county has too much of that. But the county has an Amish population, which doesn't shun education but doesn't encourage beyond basic education.
The chamber is a one-county organization. The chamber could do more outreach to communities other than the Town of LaGrange. More staffing at the EDC to support existing businesses. And more staffing for the SBDC so that they can spend more time there. Right now the SBDC can only allocate one day a month in LaGrange County.
There could be something for entrepreneurs to guide through the process. Financing for business development.
There's definitely a need for a clearing house of information for people to make it through the regulatory hurdles. In agriculture there are groups that keep trying to get going. Possibly an incubator of some kind.
They need incubation resources--funding to support incubation activities.
Times are tough--just need money. Loans aren't really going out.
We need better access to business entrepreneurial support. It includes access to capital in the early stage. We're trying to develop a regional system. Last year, we launched a process called Vision 2020 to develop a vision and supporting action plans. We engaged 2,000 individuals in conversation about what is needed to grow economically. Vision 2020 has items of need and opportunities for growth.
We're applying for grants for the downtown Main street. The grant money is drying up.
We've had people who try to provide training for the Amish without taking into their unique considerations. Communication is not just about talking. Listening is a huge part in communication.
What Jump Start is looking at the life cycle of an idea into a business.

Table 5.

Q17: Do you have any suggestions for improving education or workforce development in LaGrange County?
Workforce development is being worked on by the county and they're doing a good job. The state comes in and helps. high school education is good. For post-secondary we need more facilities.
Continue to understand the needs of businesses, particularly industry. More collaborative efforts between schools and industry. Retention and expansion survey by the EDC in cooperation with the chamber of commerce and elected officials and school officials. Need to determine what is needed by the business community and explain what those needs are. Then let the educators decide how best to meet those needs.
Could do a better job making sure we understand what jobs are available for kids. English parents want kids to go to college. Reality is, many

kids aren't headed there. We need to improve what opportunities are out there for these kids. How do you get a child ready for what is in there immediate future? Probably not college in many cases in LaGrange. Need to have them learning trades, too.
Good as it's going to get or better. Some training for kids would help the situation. Price of gas is killing RV.
I am a big promoter of JA and Classroom Achievement; we just need to get involved with youth. We need earlier contact with students.
I don't have any.
I know that Ivy Tech is engaged in surrounding communities. That's the easiest place to start with training.
I think the Howe School would be a perfect fit for partnering in improved adult education with local technical schools. There is space available, certainly Howe could use additional revenue, and it is an easy commute for the entire area. \$4.00 gas will keep some people from attending classes, so if online classes are not an answer then the more local locations the better. The Howe School is an idea location for this.
Industry could work with schools to offer training for specific skills. The RV industry needs certain skills that we don't provide classes for in school. Our schools do a good job at sending kids to college, but not a good job with preparing people for skilled labor.
Instilling attitude of lifelong learning at a young age, get more higher education opportunities, more partnerships with other schools from region.
It would be good if we had some kind of trade school access so folks could add to their skills and knowledge base.
LaGrange is definitely a resilient workforce. Many non-Amish will readily be trained.
Leadership needs to take the initiative to change the culture of lifelong learning. Trine University has been offering training.
New tech schools are required in our region to have technology education. The new tech school at Lakeland High School will have a huge impact on the community. As a region, we need to strengthen our focus on workforce development for targeted industries.
No. One of the universities is trying hard to develop something in the area, but I don't know where.
Online and non-traditional learning sources.
Partnership with community colleges or other institutions. They are trying to partner with such programs. That's the right path.
The Amish finish school at 8th grade, but they learn on the job. The best students graduate and go on to college elsewhere.
The Amish use the public school system. If there is a way to expand the education attainment level, it would be good.
There is a four-county vocational training school in Kendallville. They focus on adult education training. They have a nice facility. They just expanded their campus two years to accommodate more students. The closer the training is, the more apt people are to take advantage of it.
This is an area we're focusing on as a region. The Amish has a low educational attainment level. However, these are high quality, great residents to have in the region. We need workers who have 2-year certifications or degrees or above. We want to help workers with lifelong learning.
Try to keep the younger generation home for jobs. Attract small industry might keep some home.
We've got the LGI - learning generation initiative - for dropouts. Lincoln HS is collaborating with Ivy Tech.

Table 6.

Q19: Could you describe the advantages or the obstacles that local employers confront in remaining profitable or creating new jobs in LaGrange County?
The economy. All businesses are struggling big time.
As I stated earlier, the county needs to feed itself as much as possible. When dollars leave the community for construction purposes, retail, etc. these are opportunities lost. Certainly not everything can be kept local, and should not be for competitive purposes, and the county does benefit from tourists' dollars in Shipshewana, so I do understand this is a two way street. I do believe gas prices will keep more local businesses local; I would also hope that gas prices will affect vacations, bringing more traffic to Shipshewana through bus travel and localized vacation travel.
I haven't noticed any of that.
It appears that sometimes local employers are more involved in competition with other regions than with each other. There are some infrastructure issues, like the highways are not rated high enough. If we had higher rated highways, we could have heavy industry move in. If we are looking at white collar, we have to ratchet up wireless connectivity--get fiber connected. In western half, it is a major necessity right now. Also, the county demographics on paper do not match the actual workforce. Everyone looks uneducated and poor.
Keith and the EDC are attentive to this. Having an organization focused on economic development is good. Elective officials could be more attentive to the needs of business. The EDC is working on cases when more support is needed. Elected officials could offer more incentives for R&E.
My sense is that there's a friendly business environment and a progressive economic development organization in the last few years. I've seen some real improvements in the formal organization, especially with staff capacity. They're ability to invest in that capacity.
Not controlling expenses, people thinking they're worth more than they are but it isn't because of something they did. It's because they invested well. Society itself needs to change. The government sticks their nose where they shouldn't.
One of the advantages is that there are employees available for new employers. The county also has access to the toll road and access to markets. I don't know of any particular cluster industry strength other than manufacturing. The ability to have employees who can build things has implications beyond the RV industry.
One of the big hurdles is there is a huge variation in the wage scale because of the amount of companies that had been RV or manufactured housing jobs. Those were high pay but low skill. They were piece rate jobs. General manufacturing jobs have average wages. Competing with those wages was difficult, especially when the economy was stronger. This is less of an issue now with the slower economy, but if things ramp up this creates an obstacle.
One of the obstacles is that we don't have a good transportation network out here. Rail is especially inadequate. We have a business-friendly

Q19: Could you describe the advantages or the obstacles that local employers confront in remaining profitable or creating new jobs in LaGrange County?

environment. We don't have a workforce to support high-tech businesses for the time being.
Our unemployment rate has gone down from 18 to 10 percent. Our people are driving outside of county to work.
Part of it would be making sure they have access to an educated workforce. Work ethic is high and is a plus for the area. I think LaGrange is still seen as an agricultural community and we need to get over that.
Some of it's transportation. We're out here in the middle of nowhere. We do have 80/90 going through the county and we're near I-65. Some of the ports are far away.
Some of the local banks help with financing. There is workforce development engagement locally. Some of the stakeholders who control incentives may not take into account how competitive the market is.
The advantage is that we've got a hard working workforce. The general economy is somewhat of an obstacle. Sometimes local governments don't do enough proactively to help companies that need to expand.
The availability of help and quality of workers (advantages). Some local government officials have passed very restrictive zoning requirements, especially with regards to signage. This has been an issue since the comprehensive plan was adopted in 2004.
The biggest disadvantage is the bureaucratic process we go through with government. Permitting and zoning are sometimes hurdles to jump through at the local level. The window of conception to digging is so short, it can detour development if something slows it down.
The wages are poor. People want to go where they can make the most money. We have very few people moving to the community because of the job market.
There are some notable exceptions. There's low commitment to education and a non-competitiveness on an academic level. There's a strong resistance to change of any kind that is cultural.
Trying to identify new markets. The community was heavily tied to the RV manufacturing industry. LaGrange County could have a stronger commercial lending environment for businesses. Most lending is in agro-business right now.
We had a couple of companies come back from Mexico, which is definitely helping. They don't pay the best but they're trying.
We have a relatively low-skilled work force, but they will get trained (except Amish--they don't want to be trained)

Table 7.

Q21: Could you describe any obstacles or advantages in LaGrange County for attracting new employers?

Accessibility for training in the work place. This type of training is not as available in LaGrange County. They need more opportunities.
Advantage is Fawn River Crossing because it's all set to go with utilities. And the county has some money to help attract business, which they can do through tax abatement.
Aggressive use of Major Moves money, especially in infrastructure investment. Potential incentives for attracting quality industry that pay above average wages and are a good fit for the county's workforce and quality of life.
Back to question 19 with insurance and making it attractive.
Good for manufacturing because of location and strong workforce. The skill levels of workers may be an obstacle.
I have lived here for 65 years--it can be done, but you have to be a worker. Wages just don't compare here.
I think about half of our county's population is Amish. That has a huge impact on our education and workforce statistics.
I think everyone sees it as rural and not a center for manufacturing other than the RVs. The Fawn River Crossing is prime for development--will be a huge plus.
I think the number one obstacle to overcome in bringing a potential new employer to the county is in bringing the decision makers here to begin with. If they are looking at LaGrange County, they know about Elkhart County and its well publicized problems, they may know LaGrange County as a tourist area, they know it is rural, probably suspect the lifestyles are not for their management; I am not sure our proximity to Michigan and thus unionization scares anyone off, but it may have some impact. We need a change to show them the other side, show them the transportation possibilities, available land, beautiful homes on beautiful lakes at beautiful prices, and the volume of blue collar workers who just want to work because they grew up thinking as adult they should have jobs and they are embarrassed at not having a job.
It's a quaint community. The Amish community makes it a unique place. We should be able to attract outdoor enthusiasts.
Low-Skill workforce.
Obstacles: everyone wants a tax abatement and so new people get let off the hook and old companies get stuck with all the taxes.
One obstacle is that as the economy gets strong, the RV industry pulls employees in especially from other counties. It's good that it generates revenue, but it creates competition for the work force.
Part of it is educational attainment levels. We're working on that. We have a lot of high school dropouts not just among the Amish.
Putting together an EDC and hiring a good director.
The lack of an educated workforce and the lack of development ready sites.
There's a lot of vacant space around and good workers. There's good access with the toll road and State Roads. South Milford isn't far from I-69.
There's not enough work being done to promote LaGrange County as a good place to locate. Keith is trying his best to attract people, but he can only do so much.
There's not much here except for the RV industry. There are big buildings that are now empty, but no businesses are moving in.
They have several existing employers who have positive things to say about the community. The county is sitting on a lot of Major Money. There's a new willingness to use that money strategically. This is advantage for the county that hasn't been used yet.

Q21: Could you describe any obstacles or advantages in LaGrange County for attracting new employers?
We don't have the executive housing and quality of life amenities that would attract huge employers.
We don't look successful. There's a low-risk mentality among the leadership with a few exceptions.
Workforce talent and human capital for the jobs that require higher education is a real barrier for the county. For low skill labor positions, the county would be very competitive.

Table 8.

Q23: Could you describe any specific deficiencies to LaGrange County's retail and commercial shopping?
In the current environment, I don't see anything that would entice big box stores to come here without a large population.
It's good in Shipshewana. The other communities in the county have less retail. There are gaps, but there are opportunities to have more local businesses.
Just proximity, but that isn't really changing. We aren't going to be able to put in a large shopping area and have it be profitable.
More of a challenge. The population density is lower than in other counties. As you build the economy - and focus on long-range plans - you'll get growth. It takes planning and emphasis on high quality investments. It's setting high expectations.
People drive outside of the county for groceries and basic necessities. The selection of items in the towns is usually more expensive.
Poor community organization within this sector. They can't compete with big box stores in Sturgis and Angola with price and variety. LaGrange County doesn't have the volume of population needed to attract bigger retailers.
Poor have to go out of county for any shopping other than socks.
Probably missing out on some large scale stores & retail outlets.
Shipshewana has specialty tourism. I don't the county overall has too many large commercial stores, but there's access to such stores close by.
The rest of the county doesn't pull in tourists. There's not enough customers. We don't have any box stores. All the essentials are here.
The Town of LaGrange downtown area doesn't have a lot of retail shopping opportunities. If that's our county core, it doesn't leave the best impression.
There could be more variety.
There is ample opportunity because the buildings are there.
There is not a lot of variety, except for Shipshewana. Downtown LaGrange would benefit from focusing on making investments in the community.
Fair, there is not a mall or even a Walmart, so this is negative. On the other hand, you can visit Shipshewana for the downtown retail, or the flea market. When you see the car traffic and bus loads of tourists coming to Shipshewana to buy items that are a simple 15 minute drive for locals, then we need to consider that we may need to drive 40 minutes to a mall, but we do not need to take a bus to get to Shipshewana.
There's limited franchise retail and commercial opportunities. Consumers have less access to variety.
There's not a lot of variety. What's there is very connected to the Amish culture which is good. If you're not interested in that, then there's nothing for you.
We don't have a lot of variety of shops or stores. People go to Sturgis or Kendallville.
We don't have any superstore of any kind, no malls or anything. We just have the downtown areas. So, people load up and drive to Angola or other areas just to go shopping.
You have to travel. We don't have larger, big box stores. Our shopping opportunities are unique. People come to the lakes and specialty stores.

Table 9.

Strengths	
One of the business strengths is that people pay their bills. That has something to do with the Amish culture. That's a strength in the county.	Amish culture
The Amish community is connected with the business community. They work in concert with one another.	Amish culture
Some of the resources in land and infrastructure are strengths.	Available sites
The availability of property for development.	Available sites
We do have land available and shovel-ready land.	Available sites
Chamber of Commerce, SRMA, and the commitment of small stores to customers services.	Chamber
The people are friendly.	Community
The county stakeholders seem to be working well together.	Cooperation
Standard of living for employees	Economy
We have a lot of business opportunities. There is a lot going on in LaGrange County.	Economy
I think our EDC is a strength and I think we have a forward thinking county government.	EDC
Creating the EDC and it's current leadership	EDC
Full time EDC.	EDC
Proactive organization in the EDC and a willingness to partner regionally.	EDC
The implementation of the county's economic development corporation.	EDC
The EDC.	EDC

Strengths	
The EDC has strong leadership. They just need more people.	EDC
We have a very active EDC, which we didn't have a few years ago.	EDC
Good leadership in RDC and EDC	EDC
The culture is supportive of entrepreneurship.	Entrepreneurship
Fawn River Crossing and opportunities at Howe and toll road Interchange.	Fawn River Crossing
The community's commitment to develop the park in Howe is a great strength.	Fawn River Crossing
Support of elective officials of economic development efforts	LEOs
Another strength is our geographic area in Indiana.	Location
Our accessibility to major markets is a strength.	Location
They have an advantage with the major moves funds.	Major Moves
Major moves money.	Major Moves
Our strengths would be our lakes and recreational land.	Natural resources
Our lakes add to the quality of life.	Natural resources
People want new business to come in and are willing to work.	Pro-business climate
The business community has a proactive attitude about expanding.	Pro-business climate
Once you're in business, we have a decent, good working relationship with the local government.	Pro-business climate
We're not overburdened by government regulations	Pro-business climate
We're generally pro-business government climate	Pro-business climate
Willingness to do business	Pro-business climate
We have a decent quality of life here; it depends on what you're looking for. There's a lot of peace and quiet.	Quality of life
Achieving a partnership with a community that's across the state line.	Regional partnerships
We have easy access via roads.	Transportation
The toll road is a huge asset for the county.	Transportation
Transportation	Transportation
Work ethic of people in community	Workforce
A skilled workforce in the RV and skilled trades industry.	Workforce
The available labor force is a strength.	Workforce
The overall strength that we have in the business climate is our work ethic.	Workforce
The work ethic is strong.	Workforce
Blue collar workforce	Workforce
We have a good labor force.	Workforce
A good physical workforce.	Workforce
Workforce	Workforce

Table 10.

Weaknesses	
There could be more emphasis on downtown development.	Downtown revitalization
The biggest weakness is the economy. Once you get past that, it's good. The gas prices have killed the RV industry. We need to expand TIF district.	Economy
Too much of the workforce is in the RV industry. It is not diversified.	Economy
This is an issue of the economy.	Economy
The county's economy is too concentrated in RV and manufacturing industries.	Economy
Money talks and people walk. Unless you're in management, there are not a lot of jobs that people are going to go after.	Economy
They want the other guy to take the risk, and we want a guaranteed home run.	Economy
The county's low educational attainment level is a weakness.	Education
The ongoing need for secondary or non-traditional education.	Education
Secondary training opportunities	Education
The electricity rates through NIPSO may be a deterrent for business development.	Electricity rates
We don't have a lot to offer sometimes.	Lack of amenities
Amenities do not compete with cities (i.e. entertainment, public transportation, etc.)	Lack of amenities
The general lack of broadband access.	Lack of broadband access
The Internet is slow up here. Any business that needs high-speed Internet is not going to look here.	Lack of broadband access
Lack of investment out of the major moves money.	Lack of investment
The county has a lot of money from Major Moves for infrastructure improvements. The county is using the money for road improvements and Lakeland School got funding, too. However, the county is not being invested in now.	Lack of investment
Successful business almost need to be basic employers to succeed in the area.	Lack of markets

Weaknesses	
Lack of strategic leadership, lack of strategic planning, and lack of strategic organization. A lot of that is driven by our tribalism. The communities have developed their own identities. A lot of it is because of families and schools. They focus on one thing.	Lack of strategic planning
Not having a strategic plan was a weakness. I'm glad that they're working on one. I'm not familiar with what incentives they have.	Lack of strategic planning
We are sometimes shortsighted--want the fast dollar, but they don't care if the market goes south and the County is destroyed. Too shortsighted.	Lack of strategic planning
We are unclear in where businesses should grow, where zoning laws are set up.	Lack of strategic planning
Limited access to markets with exception of toll road	Limited access to markets
People don't know about the county	Marketing identity
Overcoming Ag stereotype.	Marketing identity
The county's approach to tourism outside of Shipshewana. There could be more outreach to communities by county groups such as the chamber.	Marketing identity
Public perception	Marketing identity
Educational and economic demographic reports, which aren't really accurate in reality.	Marketing identity
There are a lot of elected officials, and it can make things political. There is a lack of unity in some cases.	Political climate
Government is not as supportive of business as it could be.	Political climate
There is a lot of provincialism among residents that keeps people from making investments in the future. I know you can't please everyone, but you have to make decisions that are best for the community.	Political climate
County government and getting through the bureaucratic process.	Political climate
There is a lack of cooperation between the communities. There's competition. Shipshewana is an exception.	Political climate
Jealousy factor of who benefits from growth	Political climate
Low population density	Population density
The lack of a large population center for commerce.	Population density
One of the weaknesses is that the town centers close at 5 pm.	Retail
Tax rates are unpredictable.	Tax rates
Lack of additional toll road interchange.	Toll road
The 80/90 corridor isn't as developed as it could be.	Transportation
Lack of good transportation – rail and interstate	Transportation
High tech employee numbers	Workforce
We need better opportunities for continued education for our workforce. It takes an educated workforce to attract skilled jobs.	Workforce
We have a lesser educated workforce. But they're great physical workers.	Workforce
Education of our workforce	Workforce/Education
Lack of an educated workforce and the political climate.	Workforce/Political climate

Table 11.

Threats	
The county's aging demographic is a threat.	Aging population
Rarely do people go away to college and return to this area to work as opportunities for college graduate are basically in the educational field.	Brain drain
Brain drain is another threat. There is a continued resistance to excellence in education. The public response to Lakeland's "Edge program" has been underwhelming.	Brain drain
One threat is the road that connects Shipshewana to Middlebury. The road has a low speed limit because of the buggy lanes. Most of the county roads have higher speed limit.	Degraded transportation asset
Idea that bigger is better is wrong. A small multiple cottage industry is better than a ONE huge industry that could ruin the town.	Economic development
The deindustrialization of globalization of manufacturing is a real threat.	Globalization
The globalization of the economy. LaGrange County needs to understand that they need to compete on a global level.	Globalization
The county needs to have adequate utility infrastructure. This is critical for business attraction.	Inadequate infrastructure
A threat is the changing economy where many of the jobs created will be in knowledge-based fields more focused on human capital and less on land and infrastructure.	Knowledge-based economy
The biggest threat for expansion is availability of funding.	Lack of funding
The threat is not following through with the strategy. The county has achieved some good things with the EDC. The challenge is to sustain long-term efforts.	Lack of strategic planning
Until very recently we have not had land available for development, we have limited upper income housing availability.	Limited housing supply
One of the threats is the educational attainment. The Amish stop at 16 and others dropout, too.	Low educational attainment

Threats	
There's a threat from an education level. We need a higher educated workforce to attract skilled jobs.	Low educational attainment
The low skill level of the workforce is a threat.	Low skilled workforce
Low-risk attitudes about Major Moves money.	Major Moves
Getting someone in commissioners' chairs that do not want to grow or move forward.	Political climate
The other surrounding counties are threats in terms of where they're at in terms of marketing.	Regional competition
The market for industry is very competitive especially in the northeast Indiana region.	Regional competition
We don't want to change. We always do things the same.	Resistant to change
Although transportation level is a plus, the Indiana Toll Road (I 80/90) was leased to a foreign company a few years ago. Higher rates and poor maintenance have become an issue for travelers and not only is this local plus losing its appeal, other east-west roads will need additional attention as they become more heavily traveled thoroughfares due to these negatives.	Toll road
The toll road is sometimes not a great opportunity. More people are driving on the state highways now.	Toll road
In addition the county needs to diversity its employee base away from the heavy RV and tourism trades.	Undiversified economy
The biggest threat is to the industrial and manufacturing industry. That may never completely recover.	Undiversified economy
A big share of our manufacturing is in RV. We probably relied too much on that industry.	Undiversified economy
The economic downturn that hurts RV and mobile home business.	Undiversified economy
Our major employment has been RV and housing, which don't require much education. If you could graduate in the 8th grade and can swing a hammer, you could make 60k a year--not so anymore.	Undiversified economy
We're very tied to the RV industry. If that suffers economically, it hurts everything.	Undiversified economy
Weakening our basic values, that we are sometimes willing to weaken our values just to generate business. (In tourism, not industrial).	Weakening of values

Table 12.

Opportunities	
I'd take the Amish brand and apply it to other industries.	Amish brand
Interacting more with the Amish community. The Amish are part of what makes LaGrange unique.	Amish community
The county can leverage its strengths. Can the Amish community be an active participant in confronting the county's talent needs? The Amish community is not a challenge. How do you get the Amish community to help on the talent side?	Amish culture
There's Twin Mill park. The county could try to attract general manufacturing.	Available sites
There are opportunities to pursue different types of industry to come in here. There's lot of space.	Available sites
We have some culture differences here. We've got some Spanish American culture, too. The county's population is becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse.	Cultural diversity
Some good things are happening in schools.	Education
Home-based entrepreneurship is another opportunity. However, we're barely moving with high-speed internet. Most of our people live in rural areas. It's an opportunity, but we need to get creative.	Entrepreneurship
The military academy in Howe could also be an opportunity.	Howe military school
Another opportunity is that our county still has some Major Moves money. If they can come up with a good, practical way to use that to make some improvements.	Major Moves
The county has a lot of assets that could be leveraged by marketing.	Marketing
Key words are critical for people to find you. These can be good opportunities for new employers.	NBR
The recession has somewhat stabilized in the area. There are now some opportunities for attracting business.	NBR
Gain greater consensus around those plans - land use and downtown revitalization	Planning consensus
We like the country-style living, but we want to be progressive.	Progressive community
Collect public input	Public input
A third opportunity would be promoting a quality of life culture to attract residency and services. LaGrange County could be viewed as a residential community. If we could attract people from surrounding areas, it might be good.	Quality of life amenities
We're right on the Michigan state line. They keep passing higher taxes and regulations that may drive businesses over here.	Regional competition
Working with Sturgis is a real opportunity for future development.	Regional partnership
Partnerships that they have with Sturgis.	Regional partnerships
Need for a stronger long-term plan for the county and each communities	Strategic plan
Doing this plan will provide detail about the opportunities in the county. I hope this plan serves as a guide for the EDC's efforts.	Strategic plan
Expanding tourism is probably an opportunity for the county.	Tourism
Build upon our natural resources such as lakes, parks, fish and wild life. These assets bring more tourism into the county. The major events bring people from out of the county.	Tourism
We could do a better job of promoting recreation in the county.	Tourism

Opportunities	
An outside company looking to relocate might see the workforce is really good here.	Workforce
Come up with business sector that could use highly motivated and hard working workforce that's not highly educated. There's an opportunity if someone solves that riddle.	Workforce
We do have a good work ethic and sites available. We do have people who want to improve.	Workforce/Available sites

Table 13.

Q29: What do you want your community to be like in 10 years?
Not to change a great deal. Our history is agriculture and it should mainly stay that way. Shouldn't be a metropolis. I want to stay a lazy little tourist county. BUT we need to find jobs to keep kids in town when they graduate.
A place that is pleasant to the eye. Offers education and employment to those that have grown up here.
Each of our towns have something to offer. We have to build a patchwork of support for these communities. Then they can find their common ground. When communities feel left out or overlooked, that's part of the problem.
Hard to say because it is not my community. Keep focusing on entrepreneurial opportunities. That they have taken advantage of SR 9 and toll road corridor.
Hopefully, we can improve on all the weaknesses. Improved education opportunities. Improved transportation and utilities. A diversified economy. It would be nice to see improved retail in the town centers.
I want it to keep on growing. I want the Town of LaGrange cleaned up and old buildings restored. I'd like to see SR 9 to keep developing. I'd like the Amish to keep doing their thing. We need to find more opportunities in this area in other economic industries beyond RV manufacturing and wood working.
I want to maintain the family atmosphere. It's a place where you can relax in the evening. We have wildlife in this community. I want to protect the natural landscape. I want to see development in areas near the town centers.
I would like it to be more predictable: we need to know where business is happening and where growth is happening. It would be nice to be more unified among cities and areas of County. More unity--can you even talk about LaGrange as ONE county? it is so diverse.
I would like to see continued vibrant tourism environment. There are some real opportunities in the county for such development. I would like to see a strong economic base with some transition to knowledge-based jobs.
I'd like for the county to have strong community centers. Leverage the future of the military academy at Howe. That's an opportunity to capitalize on the toll road. There's a potential for a community billboard for both east and west traffic. Get people off the toll road into the county, or the get the LaGrange County message - whatever that is. You want people to remember the community. There could be an overall toll road strategy. It could promote the existing businesses and city centers.
I'd like to see industry in specific areas. I'd like to maintain the historic and rural qualities of the county. It would be great if some of the towns would grow.
I'd like to see more people live in the community. I'd like to see people earning higher wages. More cooperation. The landscape still looks like an Amish landscape.
I'd like to see new business opportunities. Investments in the town centers and neighborhoods. We have an ethanol plant and windmill that is supposed to bring jobs, but that's years away.
In ten years, I would like to see LaGrange County embracing the toll road for development purposes. Most development is attached to interstates. Could they do a spec building along the interstate? The county will have an active ongoing plan for development of their talent pool. They new high tech high school in LaGrange should be fully participating in this process. The community embraces and adopts a culture of lifelong learning. The local elected officials are supportive of business development. They are known for collaboration between local governments and business.
More of what it is today. I'd like to see more self-sustaining communities that meet the needs of residents with shopping and entertainment. Creating more dollars and keeping more dollars. I'd like to see each community be able to promote what makes it unique in the larger fabric of LaGrange County.
One of our qualities is the rural setting - the lakes, the small towns - I'd to see that continue. I'd like to see development in the industrial parks.
Standing for what is right and not what is politically correct. We need integrity.
The Howe 121 industrial park should be full, with a diversification of companies. At the same time, another industrial park should be started, to provide options and to allow for controlled expansion. The sewer system should include all lakes, and the town of Howe. The toll road maintenance needs to be corrected.
They're a community that's committed to preserving their heritage and culture. The Amish presence there is strong and a wonderful thing. The leadership in the Amish community is very strong. It invests in itself and invests in unique assets. Continue to invest and support the growth of existing companies and new business. They develop and sustain vibrant downtowns and educational system.
We want to see investment in high-paying advanced manufacturing jobs in a diversified economy. A community that has access to training opportunities.
Well I hope it's thriving. I'd like to see the towns growing.

Table 14.

Q30: Please share any additional comments relevant to this planning process.
I have lived in LaGrange County my entire 54 years. I was a banker in the county for 23 years; I was a minority owner in a manufacturing company; I owned a company that developed real estate throughout the Midwest and I have sold and appraised real estate locally. So, I have somewhat of a diversified background to understand real estate and the County. I fear that local leaders have too many hidden agendas. In this type of community we need to make sure we do not lose a prospective business based on one of those agendas. The welcoming committee needs to provide an understanding of the community, but make sure it is more of a crosswalk than a roadblock.
I hope that people listen to what is being said through these interviews and take advantage of it because this is really needed.
I think the county is looking at trying to grow the county. It either expands businesses or agriculture. General industry is where the growth is.
I think this is a great thing to create a plan. Trying to get people involved. We're headed in the right direction.
I'm really pleased that the county is doing this planning process.
In doing this survey, people will have answers depending on where they live. Different places around the County are diverse and people see things in different ways because of the unique situations around the county.
Keith's presence and support from the EDC is refreshing and critical for the county's long term success!
Set up a tour of major industrial parks in Indiana. Visit several with EDC and business leaders. Take a look at what others are doing. Get out of the county. Seek State of Indiana input through IEDC. I'd find communities that were perhaps struggling and have turned the corner. Other communities are emphasizing entrepreneurship and innovation. The more you can find and discover, the better for the county.
The County will only be as pleasant as the people that inhabit it. We must find the good in everything. Amish are in general very family oriented and they are great in helping each other. They are still grounded in values and Christianity--don't try to interject another source. As a whole, Amish are good businessmen and not opposed to learning, but they don't like to have outside values pushed on them.
There is a seasonal influx of residents in the summer. They could make it more year-round. Each of the communities seem to operate in an isolated way. A lot of the services are out of LaGrange.
There's a good handful of people who have been working hard. Forming our EDC was a big accomplishment. This is a huge step for us. The people in the community want to see things change and grow. The Howe 120 Park is a great example of these efforts.
There's value in regional partnerships and looking at opportunities to work with partners.
We are on the right track. There are a lot of obstacles. We have to subsidize rates at pond river crossing.
We identify Amish as strength and weakness. They are an opportunity for tourism--especially handcrafted furniture. But their low education attainment and unwillingness to be trained are weaknesses.
We're trying to bring more people here for tourism. Our county is extremely unique with the Amish farmers. It ties together with the experience of coming to LaGrange County. We need to keep people coming for the Amish and other natural assets.
We've got to look beyond ourselves. We need to put the community's needs first when we create a long range plan.
When I moved here I was told that there was one traffic signal in the county (30 years ago) and now things are improving for the better.