

# LAGRANGE COUNTY



*Economic Development Plan*

July 25, 2011      Brian O'Neill, Strategic Development Group

## 2 Executive Summary



## Plan Creation

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- The LaGrange Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has created this strategic plan to more efficiently and effectively achieve its mission: to better the lives of LaGrange County citizens, both individual and corporate, through the responsible growth and enhanced opportunities that economic development brings.

## Secondary Research

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- A demographic and statistical analysis of the community
- A performance comparison with ten peer communities in the Midwest
- A Regional Location Quotient Analysis

## Primary Research

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- Two public meetings
- A public hearing
- Five focus groups
- 25 key informant interviews
- An economic summit
- A public survey

## SWOT Profile

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- For a rural county, LaGrange has some strong assets, especially in regard to transportation, site location, small business development, and tourism.
- The county also has significant challenges in regard to educational attainment levels, lifelong learning, and housing.

## Strengths

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- The county has bucked the national trend in that it experienced a steady increase in the percent of total jobs in manufacturing going from 34.5 percent in 1980 to 45.3 percent in 2000 and then holding steady through 2009.
- It has the highest concentration of Amish in the United States as a percent of total population.
- The community has some prime industrial sites.

## Challenges

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- The county is dependent on jobs in the manufacturing industry which is cyclic.
- The educational attainment levels in LaGrange County are very low.
- As in many communities historically dependent on manufacturing, the county lacks a culture of lifelong learning.

## Amish Assets

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- The Amish population is recognized for the excellence of its work ethic.
- Although they do not as a rule attend high school, they are skilled craftsmen who are considered to be adaptive and innovative in the workplace.
- The Amish have established themselves as successful entrepreneurs.
  - Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association (NIWA)
  - Michiana Event Center (MEC)

## Opportunities

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- Potential for greenfield development
- Unique incentives:
  - LEDGE
  - Major Moves Fund
- Amish entrepreneurship
- Tourism-based small businesses

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## Objectives and Action Plans



## Objectives with EDC as lead organization

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- Provide leadership in developing shovel-ready sites in partnership with local government, property owners, and developers.
  - Provide assistance to local government in collaborative policy development and implementation to achieve shovel-ready status for additional sites on the I-80/90 interchange including a mega-site of 400 to 500 acres.
  - Initiate discussions with the towns in LaGrange County in regard to the development of industrial sites adjacent to or within the town limits.
  - Advocate for the simplification of permitting and zoning process for new business prospects and current employers.

## Objectives with EDC as lead organization

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- Maintain state of the art economic development tools for the EDC.
  - Continue working with local governments to maintain effective tax abatement and incentive policies.
  - Review and update marketing materials on the EDC website and for distribution to site consultants and companies.
  - Provide formal “non-partisan” information series for all declared candidates before the primary election.
  - Monitor and provide nominations for the redevelopment and plan commissions in local jurisdictions and advocate for policy positions on land use regulation and the establishment of special taxing districts as necessary.
  - Continue to utilize Economic Development for a Growing Economy (EDGE) Tax Credits.

## Objectives with EDC as lead organization

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- Secure adequate and stable funding for EDC.
  - Maintain continued local government support.
  - Pursue grant opportunities independently and in partnership with the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and other organizations.
  - Conduct a marketing campaign to increase funding from local industry.

## Objectives with EDC as lead organization

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- Initiate an aggressive new business recruitment (NBR) strategy focusing on the sites at Fawn River Crossing and the Topeka Industrial Park and successfully recruit one employer at each site.
- Initiate an aggressive retention and expansion program.

## Objectives with EDC as supporting organization

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- Support a Sewer and Water Summit to promote coordinated planning among all relevant jurisdictions in the county.
- Encourage the revitalization of downtowns in LaGrange County. Focus initial efforts on the Town of LaGrange.
- Promote small business development and entrepreneurship.

## Objectives with EDC as supporting organization

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- Partner and support the CVB on creating a more inclusive brand for LaGrange County and on providing support services for tourism-based businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Promote lifelong learning and career development.

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## Vision Statement

THE VISION LOOKS FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE ABOUT 10 TO 20 YEARS.  
IT REFLECTS WHERE YOU EXPECT YOUR COMMUNITY TO BE.

## Vision Statement

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LaGrange County has retained and expanded its strong clusters in Fabricated Metal Products and Transportation Equipment. In addition, it has diversified its economy through an aggressive and successful new business recruitment program. Several greenfield and shovel-ready sites, including one 500 acre-mega site, have been developed at the I-89/90 interchange with SR 9 and in the Topeka Industrial Park. Companies which have located at these sites include automotive suppliers, food processors, and smaller life sciences companies providing parts in the supply chain for larger medical device companies.

## Vision Statement

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Amish small business development has made LaGrange a national woodworking center for the production of high end, handcrafted furniture. The Michiana Event Center has become a regional exhibition and conference center. The Amish business incubation program provides mentoring services to emerging entrepreneurs and small businesses. The Amish workforce continues to provide manufacturing companies, including advanced manufacturers, with a mechanically skilled, inventive, and motivated source of labor.

## Vision Statement

The English workforce has steadily improved its educational attainment levels. In part due to more long-time residents seeking postsecondary degrees and in part due to more educated people moving into the community because of job opportunities, low cost of living, family friendly small towns, and reasonably priced housing opportunities. The local schools are highly respected for promoting innovation and best practices in their classrooms.

## Vision Statement

The SR 9 and SR 20 corridors have become attractive gateways into the community and the Town of LaGrange. Core neighborhoods in the town are being successfully redeveloped and provide housing for many of the workers commuting to the interchange. These workers have brought new capital into the downtown economy. As a result, niche retailers and new restaurants have been returning into the trade area. Building facades have been restored and streetscapes improved. The development at the interchange has also had a similar impact on Howe where commercial activity has steadily grown to serve the new employment centers.

## Vision Statement

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Shipshewana remains a strong retail and tourist center. A multiuse trail stretches across the county connecting key tourist and natural assets such as Shipshewana in the west and the Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area in the east. Additional hotels have opened to accommodate the demand for extended stay visits. Mongo and Wolcottville and other smaller communities have also participated in the residential growth and new commercial opportunities.

## Vision Statement

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LaGrange County is perceived within its region and nationally as culturally diverse and business friendly community.

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## Planning Outcomes



## Final Plan

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- A long-term vision of the community's economic future
- A set of goals and objectives and a projected budget – income and expenses
- A plan with written text and appendices fully documenting the planning process, various sources and types of input, and expected actions and results
- Action plans showing responsibilities, time schedules, benchmarks, and costs
- Individuals task and organizational work plans for groups responsible for specific steps in action plans
- A schedule and process for plan revision and updating

## Public Hearing of Record

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- LaGrange County Commissioner's Meeting  
County Office Building, Commissioner's meeting room  
114 W. Michigan Street, LaGrange, IN  
Monday, August 15, 2011  
9:00 A.M.

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## Contact Information



## More Information

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- Local Point of Contact
  - Keith Gillenwater, LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation
  - <http://www.lagrangecountyedc.com>

## Consulting Team

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