

Chapter 10

Public Input



Introduction

The Decatur County comprehensive planning process has included a significant amount of public input and discussion to make the plan appropriate for the community and able to be implemented. The input has been in several forms, ranging from key person interviews to public workshops. Each of the input techniques used and a summary of the results are included in this chapter.

Key Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted with twelve individuals on August 22 and 23, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. These interviews were fairly informal discussions between the person being interviewed and the interviewer. The purpose of the interviews was for the consulting team to gather information on the challenges and future of the Decatur County community from local people with specialized knowledge or interests. The highlights from these discussions are:

Zoning Issues

- Lots of speculation with Honda, how will it affect residential and industrial development?
- Challenges include: city planning, reparation of housing and industrial areas, designated areas for industrial, outdated comprehensive plan
- Separate uses
- Rural residential, considering ground
- Plan from 20 years ago wasn't followed, rural residential a problem, have no businesses there
- Right-of-Way encroachment
- Proper setbacks
- Hard not to grant exceptions (doing the right thing makes people upset)
- Concerns about rezones
- Balance between property rights and concern for negative impact
- Need design guidelines, especially with vacant buildings needing to be fixed up

Annexation

- Questions involving Honda and higher taxes
- Butting up against rural water, doesn't offer fire protection
- Money spent getting Honda
- Pulling more into the city may not necessarily be a benefit

- Annexing Honda fine, but not residential nearby

Agriculture

- CAFOs – fair regulation on both sides, currently seems to be under control
- Question of livestock in city limits and absence of slaughterhouses
- Concerns with well water in area
- Biofuels – Rush county getting biofuel would be positive, raise crop prices
- Farm/agri-business
- Hobby farms – conflict
- Drainage
- Flood plain issues
- Farmground taxes increase
- Don't want rural losing out to industry
- Controversy over dairy being subsidized
- Technology important (GPS, etc)

Social/Recreation

- United fund agencies, youth focused
- People coming back to community to give back
- Learning center, asset
- Philanthropic community
- County library, library not highly used in New Point
- Festivals (New Point)
- Need trails study
- High Speed internet throughout county would be great
- Need restaurants and quality retail
- YMCA good and handles a lot of needs

Transportation

- Proposed roads
- Existing roads, congestion on north side, request for widening and synch signals
- Bypass – promoting industrial or commercial?
- Rail improvements? Prefer rail to trucks
- Issue with moving equipment around, causes back up on roads and truck traffic
- Count on 300N, SR3
- Fire, road width
- Bridges, too light/narrow
- SW60 is semi-route, need crossing at Ireland St.

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Sidewalks and Playgrounds – new regulations
- Slow growing, considering impending Honda plant

- Designating growth areas
- Demand for moderately priced homes – high, affordable housing important
- Starter homes vs. upscale, what is/should be built
- Issues with narrow streets, not having sidewalks, and no open space
- Live/work downtown

Economic Development

- Honda, raising average income, bringing in smaller business as well
- Farmers Market, good response, hard to start
- HOTT city
- Woodmiser saw mills

Water and Wastewater

- Current limitation on water supply for when Honda opens up shop (they might need 2 MGD)
- Issues with providing fire protection with current water supply
- Broken water mains (421)
- Older infrastructure
- Reservoir – no recreation, liability
- Wells too close to agricultural land
- Putting a lot of housing on septic is not good. Need proper utilities
- Lake Santee positive work on sewer, revitalized
- Discourage sprawl by forcing developer to pay for water/sewer

Schools

- Controversial, property taxes
- Possible vocational school (?)
- Consolidation (tax burden not equal)
- City and county can't agree on issue
- Community needs a school, without they disintegrate
- Technology bringing additional classes to students
- Should base schools on population in areas, not random boundary lines

Future Growth

- Growth to the north along 35 and on 421 to Millhouses Rd.
- Farmers opposed to sales adjacent to 74 on N. side
- Adams twp proposed industrial development
- Growth from Honda bringing in about 300-400 home in SW
- More infrastructure needed, city limits may expand
- Layout for future land use, pay attention to land value
- Greensburg acquiring north of I-74
- Slow residential growth
- Expectations of some business growth, especially restaurant/hotel

- Rising Asian population, other immigrant populations, language barrier
- Don't want to be metro area, like distance to the city
- Managing growth
- There are no planned developments

Concerns

- Honda's track record with diversification
- Prospect of Honda is overwhelming
- Post Honda, tier 1 and tier 2 companies not as community friendly

Focus Group Meetings

Four focus groups were convened as a part of the Decatur County planning process. These focus groups were: I-74/US 421 Interchange, Transportation, Agriculture, and Small Towns.

The I-74/US 421 Interchange focus group met on September 19, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. The focus group meeting was a discussion between members of the group, facilitated by a member of the consulting team. Highlights from that meeting were:

- Water and sewer need to be brought north of I-74
- Land uses need to be compatible with one another
- Growth needs to be controlled
- New development should be industrial uses with interstate-oriented commercial uses
- Highway commercial uses are fine
- An agriculture business park should be considered

The Transportation focus group met on September 27, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. The discussion of the group was facilitated by members of the consulting team. The issues identified included:

- The right-of-way on county roads is too narrow
- New construction and road widening are needed
- Bridges need to be over-designed in order to meet INDOT standards for funding
- 95 miles of county roads are gravel
- New road construction need pedestrian connections (sidewalks and/or trails)
- Historic bridges become a problem for maintaining transportation efficiency

The Agriculture focus group met on September 20, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. The focus group meeting discussion was facilitated by members of the consulting team. Highlighted issues were:

- Agriculture hasn't had a voice in the Honda discussions
- The public (city or county) shouldn't pay for right-of-way acquisition
- Subdivisions from a parent tract need to be better regulated
- Differentiated pricing for building permits should be done to encourage development in growth areas and discourage it in other areas
- Infrastructure has not grown to accommodate growth
- Reverse setbacks are needed to separate agricultural and non-agricultural uses
- A right-to-farm notice should be required for all development approvals outside of the limits of municipalities
- Development is putting a lot of pressure on farms
- A food and beverage tax should be used to pay for road clean-up
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The Small Town focus group met on October 17, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. The focus group was facilitated by members of the consulting team. Highlights from the discussion include:

- Westport has water and sewer challenges
- Sewer is the biggest challenge to future growth in Westport
- Westport is a bedroom community for Columbus, Greensburg, and North Vernon
- New Point gets their water from the Napoleon Water Company
- New Point's sewage is pumped to Batesville
- Railroad crossings could become a problem in New Point
- New Point is working on a grant to build a new fire station

Steering Committee

A Steering Committee of 14 members was appointed to be the liaison between the consulting team and the community. This committee met jointly with the City of Greensburg Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee early in the process to ensure compatibility between the two processes.

The first joint Steering Committee meeting was held on August 24, 2006 at the Decatur County Courthouse. The purpose of this meeting was to introduce the process to the committee, to share preliminary data findings, and to begin soliciting input from the committee. The exercise conducted asked the steering committee members to select ten words or phrases from the worksheet that they would like to see in Decatur County in the future and also to select five words or phrases that they would not like to see in the county. The results are below:

Top ten words or phrases respondents would like to see:

1. Increased home ownership
2. Tourist attractions
3. Walkable neighborhoods
4. Historic preservation
5. Neighborhood elementary schools
6. Family farms
7. Colleges/Universities
8. Downtown
9. Manufacturing
10. Farmers Market

Top four words or phrases respondents would not like to see:

1. Adult-oriented entertainment/business
2. Mobile home communities
3. Confined feeding operations
4. Energy plants

Other Steering Committee meetings were held on November 13, 2006 (with the City Steering Committee), January 18th, and April 26th. These meetings were to review the planning principles, vision, goals and objectives. At the April meeting the Steering Committee considered alternative land use scenarios and reviewed the proposed Transportation/Thoroughfare Plan.

Public Meetings

Gathering input from the public early in the process is critical to the success of a comprehensive plan. For the Decatur County Comprehensive Plan, two of these early workshops were held to solicit input from the community and raise awareness of the planning process.

The first of these workshops was held on October 11, 2006 at the Westport Community Center, where 30 people attended the meeting. A second, identical, workshop was held on October 18, 2006 at the Greensburg Learning Center, where 52 people attended. The workshops consisted of a brief presentation by the consulting team about comprehensive planning and planning trends and a series of three exercises to solicit input about the county's future.

The first exercise was an Image Preference Survey where participants were shown 20 different images of community features and asked to rank them from -5 (strongly negative) to +5 (strongly positive). The images, their rating, and comments on the images follow:

Image Number	Average Rating	Comments	Image
1	2.61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rustic Old Home, well-maintained - Looks like home - Comfortable good place to live - Looks hard to heat 	
2	0.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well laid out, similar facades - Variety of stores - Looks like Everywhere, USA 	
3	-0.35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development adding to tax base - Haphazard - Not well laid out, not well used. 	
4	2.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rustic, older homes - Sidewalks - Inviting Community - Landscaping - Looks like hometown 	
5	-0.04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If not active farm, rolling ground good for taxes - meanders around - Could have been farmground. 	
6	3.98	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nice place for tourists, bring in tourist dollars. - Welcoming – trees and fences - Too narrow of road - Very rural and serene 	
7	0.68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neat, well put together - Homes fit together well - Sidewalks - Homes too generic - No place to play except street 	
8	-0.96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greenery around fast food. - Good for Indianapolis - More urban feel, not in strip at edge of town - Like low sign 	

9	-1.98	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closed factory or mall - Bare, nothing going on, just asphalt - Utilitarian, serves purpose 	
10	0.56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Industrial – good tax revenue - Not inviting – would not want to live next door to this. 	
11	3.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real inviting, like Main Street - Nice sidewalks, trees, well laid out - Very Homey, Mom and Pop stores 	
12	0.65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's the community we live in, the way of life - Wide Road, paved shoulder - Lot of danger 	
13	-1.47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Just a mess, just see signs - Tax revenue, in right setting it's good. - Idea that there is some landscaping. - Access Management 	
14	2.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Way it is now. - Don't like drives of state roads - Trees on either side 	
15	-0.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ponds and curved isolated roads go together - Agriculture and housing conflict - Big residential development brings noise 	
16	1.18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excellent Architecture/design - Waste of public money - Safety, bridge is scary 	

17	-2.48	- Promoting alcohol on the road	
18	1.93	- Need bike/walking paths	
19	0.34	- Awesome homes, nice setting - Not usable farmland - Nice tax base - Too close for how big they are	
20	2.29	- Like the bridge - Wide enough to have sidewalk on bridge - Soil erosion	

A second exercise, the community identity exercise, asked participants to review ten images that could be used as identity pieces for the county and rank their top three. The results were as follows:

Top 3 Responses:



Tree City – Home of the Tower Tree (48)



Family-Friendly (39)



Farming Community (39)

Remaining Responses:

Title	Number of Responses	Image
Community Festivals	25	
Future Home of Honda	23	
Historic Buildings and Structures	21	
Small Town Charm	15	
Hog Capital of Indiana	12	
Agricultural Tourism and Activities	7	
Regional Shopping Destination	5	

In the third exercise, participants were asked to consider the quantity and location of growth. Participants were asked to place dots representing residential, commercial, industrial, and other development on a map of the county and to use markers to indicate new roads, road widening, or other needed road improvements. The minimum amount of growth that they

were asked to place was based on the baseline population projections for the county for 2030. The maximum amount of growth was based on an aggressive projection of the 2030 population based on the impact of Honda's location in the county.

The maps that resulted from the exercise were used to build the development scenarios considered to form the future land use map.