TIPTON COUNTY STRATEGIC VISIONING PLAN

Creating a strategic vision for Tipton County, from the ground up.

Final Report — November 29, 2021

Photo Credit: Dennis Johnson

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

CREATIVE INSIGHT
community development

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Executive Summary

In spring of 2021, the Ball State Indiana Communities Institute (ICI), along with consulting firm Creative Insight Community Development (CICD), were contacted by the Tipton County Foundation ("The Foundation") to work with stakeholders across Tipton County to create a strategic vision to guide the county's future. The goal of the project facilitators, ICI and CICD, was to create a strategic vision that maximized citizen and stakeholder input. This input would then be given equal priority to the goals of formal leaders within the county, as citizens, employees, business owners, youth, and retirees often see their community through a different perspective than traditional leadership.

Through a series of listening sessions held across Tipton County, facilitators used a variety of creative and constrained brainstorming methods to identify and prioritize the most important issues facing Tipton County, and the best ways to address those issues given the unique culture and context of Tipton County. Facilitators then took the citizen data received during the sessions and analyzed it, developing key themes that were used to create a strategic vision statement and five key goals to guide Tipton County's development from 2021 onward. The proposed strategic visioning statement for the county is:

Tipton County is a family-friendly environment filled with caring people, a safe, community-oriented culture, and rural charm, situated right in the middle of everything. Every year in Tipton County, you will find more and more:

• New housing opportunities in a peaceful setting, but still close to major commercial centers

• Great schools with even better teachers

• Emerging downtown destinations with new shopping and restaurant options

• Recreational opportunities for the whole family, including pedestrian and bike trails

• Connectivity through improved physical and digital infrastructure

• Family-oriented events and amenities where the focus is on the people that make Tipton County great

• Development that is appropriate for our communities; that preserves not only our historic structures, but also considers our historic legacy of agriculture.

The five key goals to guide ongoing development are:

Goal #1: Promote a strategy for quality of life development including broadband connectivity, amenities, and recreation.

Goal #2: Promote successful strategies that improve healthy housing options including affordable housing, blight removal and remediation, and infill lots.

Goal #3: Develop a comprehensive transportation strategy that includes access and connectivity including but not limited to U.S. 31, county roads, downtown walkability, and trails.

Goal #4: Promote marketing to position Tipton County as a centrally located lifestyle alternative for living, working, recreation, and small business development that focuses on its key cultural strengths of family, character, and community care.

Goal #5: Promote community development of high quality education from early childhood to lifelong learning.

Greater detail on the process, the vision and goals, and specific recommendations for attaining those goals can be found in the remainder of this report.

Project Summary

In spring of 2021, the Ball State Indiana Communities Institute (ICI), along with consulting firm Creative Insight Community Development (CICD), were contacted by the Tipton County Foundation ("The Foundation") to work with stakeholders across Tipton County to create a strategic vision to guide the county's future. This strategic vision is intended to capture both the aspirations of the people who live and work in Tipton County, as well as some concrete goals to be accomplished over the next ten years. The final deliverable for the project is a cohesive strategic visioning plan that originates with citizen perspectives about what is important to them in the places they live and work, and that can be used to guide decision making well into the future.

Methods Overview

The goal of the project facilitators, ICI and CICD, was to create a strategic vision that maximized citizen and stakeholder input. This input would then be given equal priority to the goals of formal leaders within the county, as citizens, employees, business owners, youth, and retirees often see their community through a different perspective than traditional leadership. Our methods are designed to give balanced weighting to both formal and citizen expertise to create a final product that citizens of the county feel that they had a hand in creating. A successful plan is one in which citizens can see their input and ideas come to life on the plan's pages. It should represent a creative process that is conscious of what is feasible — an optimistic approach to planning with citizen-driven ideas about how to best overcome constraints. And, it should include opportunities for action across the county and across diverse stakeholder groups, not just by the county government.

ICI and CICD followed the following steps to gather data for the strategic vision plan:

a) Hosted initial planning calls to coordinate action among the facilitation team and clients on March 12 and March 29, 2021.
b) Created a basic community profile with a selection of important community-level socioeconomic trend data to provide a context for the visioning exercises. Data from this profile was presented at each strategic visioning session in each community.
c) Four town hall-style strategic visioning sessions were conducted at four strategic points across Tipton County: Kempton (inlcuding Jefferson and Prairie Townships) on April 8, 2021; Windfall (including Wildcat and Madison Townships) on April 15, 2021; Sharpsville (including Liberty Township) on April 22, 2021; and finally Tipton (including Cicero Township) on April 29, 2021.
d) A data analysis stage that compiles and simplifies data from each town hall meeting, organizing diverse responses into a cohesive vision/goal across all four sites.
e) Analysis of key participants and potential collaborations/partnerships that emerge from the process.
f) A data presentation was given to the consolidated group as a "member check" on September 2, 2021 to ensure that the vision and strategic action goals are relevant and representative to all members, and to gain valuable feedback prior to completing the final report.
g) Delivery of the final vision and action plan at the end of September 2021, and fully edited plan by the end of November 2021.

Strategic Visioning Sessions

The visioning process selected for Tipton County was designed to gather data from a wide range of stakeholders in a short amount of time using an expansion-alignment-compression-prioritization methodology facilitated brainstorming sequence. The facilitation began before each session with a challenge to The Foundation to invite as diverse a population as possible from each community. The Foundation accomplished this by using multimodal advertising for the event, including social media, newspaper advertising, and physical mailers. Participant diversity is absolutely necessary to ensure that a full range of perspectives is gathered from various parts of the county and from diverse groups facing different circumstances across the county.
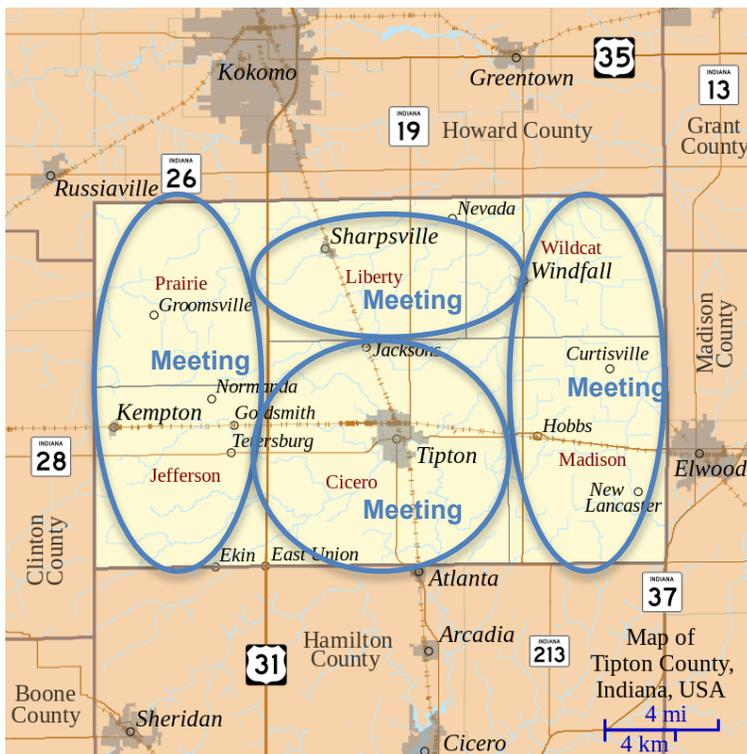
Since the population of Tipton County is heavily concentrated in the city of Tipton, the facilitation team took great care to avoid making the strategic visioning process seem like a Tipton City-focused exercise. To do this, separate visioning sessions were held sequentially in Kempton (25 participants), Windfall (40 participants), Sharpsville (50 participants), and Tipton (65 participants), with Tipton being held last on purpose to avoid the perception that other communities were "follow-ons." The geographic diversity across these meeting sites was found to be very important, as different communities within Tipton County have different histories and aspirations. The sequence of meetings and the areas served can be seen in the map at left.

Visioning sessions included these steps:

1) Recruitment of diverse participant groups
2) Introduction of the facilitation team
3) Expansion: "Postcard From The Future" exercise
4) Alignment: Presentation of Community Profile and Socioeconomic Data
5) Compression: Turbo-SWOT exercise
6) Prioritization: Dots exercise

This series of exercises ensures that participants first gain a level of comfort with the facilitators. They then use the "Postcard From The Future" exercise to imagine Tipton County in 10 years, whether good, bad, or neutral. By writing a postcard to a friend who lives out of town, participants enter a more positive, imaginative frame of mind that removes them from thinking about their community in technical terms, or

in terms of tasks they would like to see accomplished. Instead, they are able to paint a broad, creative vision of the future they would like to see — not for the facilitators, but for a friend. This <u>expansion</u> step widens the sphere of ideas about the community beyond common "issues" and issues-related language and focuses in on what participants really care about. Participants were asked to share their postcards with the group as a means of sharing diverse perspectives with others but were not forced to do so, as this exercise can be quite personal in nature.

At this point, participants were given a data-driven community profile presentation. This presentation included data on economic, population, educational, healthcare, and housing trends. The purpose of this step was to create a sense of collective understanding about some of the objective forces acting on the community. Attention was given to drawing out any "surprises" in the data, such as the size and scope of the agricultural sector (smaller than many participants realize, but culturally and economically important), or the fact that Tipton County currently outperforms many similar rural communities in terms of basic measures of health, well-being, and housing availability (pointing to areas of strategic advantage for the county). This <u>alignment</u> step explicitly follows the expansion step as a way to "get everyone to the same table" after being expansive in exploring big-picture ideas and aspirations. It is also a way to improve the situational awareness of the county among participants.

Next, participants took part in an exercise we call the "Turbo-SWOT." SWOT is a standard "Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, and Threats" exercise, which is still a superior method for encouraging participants to think in terms of both needs (a deficit-focused approach) and opportunities (a solutions-oriented approach) with both an internal and external locus of control (i.e., strengths and weaknesses are controlled by the community, opportunities and threats are not). Both deficits and solutions, along with internal and external situational understanding are important in identifying future directions for action. The "Turbo" refers to the speed at which the exercise is conducted. In only about half an hour, participants are taken through the entire exercise, which forces participants to think viscerally about the greatest SWOT components, and to decide on the top two or three most important ideas in each SWOT category as a table (generally 4-8 people). This ensures that participants do not over-think the situations they face but respond with their most urgent and pressing answers instead of relying on slow thinking about past conversations or complicating factors. While both fast and slow thinking are important to crafting strategies, at this stage we are seeking the most viscerally important ideas about what matters most to participants. The Turbo-SWOT introduces important, realistic constraints and <u>compression</u> into the analysis about the real and perceived situations facing the community. Following the open-ended postcard exercise, this step ensures that the big-picture ideas explored earlier are appropriately feasible and viewed in the light of the real weaknesses and threats facing the community.

The results of the Turbo-SWOT (all identified SWOT components) are recorded table-by-table in real time and posted for all participants to see. Redundant answers are simplified by either identifying repeated answers publicly or by modifying existing answers to capture related ideas as well. In Tipton (a large crowd), facilitators utilized a round-robin style report-out of SWOT components. Each table had one spokesperson who would report out one SWOT component, and this would continue around the room until no new SWOT components emerged (i.e., spokespeople would "pass" if they had nothing new to contribute from their table).

Finally, participants engage in a "dots exercise." Each participant is given three dot stickers. Participants are asked to walk up to the results of the Turbo-SWOT exercise and to place one dot on the three most important ideas anywhere on the SWOT. This helps to identify the relative importance of each idea on the SWOT to each individual person in the community — giving each participant an opportunity to break from the group and prioritize the issues and ideas they feel are most important and require the most immediate attention.

The process of idea generation through expansion, alignment, compression, and prioritization can be seen in the figure below:
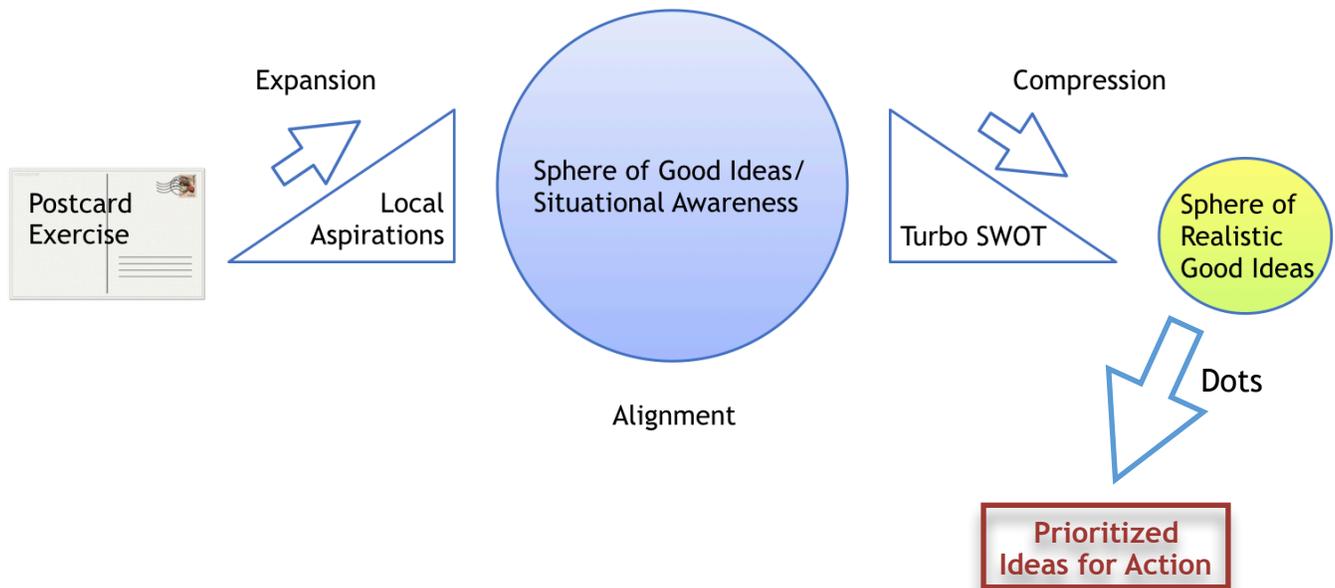
Data Analysis Methods

The community visioning sessions described in the previous section produced a large amount of data that must be simplified and streamlined, without omitting important and unique ideas that may belong to marginalized and oppositional voices. As we would do in a rigorous case study analysis, the facilitation team analyzed all data acquired from the strategic visioning sessions using thematic coding, case-based triangulation, and pattern matching techniques to identify key themes for the strategic vision, and prioritized the most important ideas for local action. Facilitators used as much data as is available to create a comprehensive picture of the goals identified by participants and to create a broad vision that captures as much public sentiment as possible. The facilitation team did not omit unique viewpoints that may differ from the mainstream for the sake of simplicity, and it is noted when there is county-wide disagreement on a particular topic.

Additionally, the facilitators identified patterns across all four sessions where there may be mutual interest in addressing certain goals. This can be the seedbed of future collaborations, especially during future action-based planning efforts.

The postcard exercise was analyzed using Nvivo qualitative analysis software to create word frequency tables, a word cloud visual representation of results, and to conduct a data reduction step by combining

synonyms for similar ideas. This exercise revealed the top key words, phrases, and ideas that should be used in any comprehensive vision statement, capturing the highest ideals expressed by the community for the future they would like to see in the county. These key words and ideas are also quantified and prioritized later in the report.

The Turbo-SWOT results were also compiled on a community-by-community basis. Ideas are ranked and prioritized based on feedback from the dots exercise. These ideas are then combined across communities to determine the most important ideas and issues facing the entire county. Presentation of both sets of data enables decision makers to isolate and address issues that are important to each community within Tipton County, while also understanding their priority in the broader context of the needs and opportunities facing the county as a whole. This analysis is followed by key observations identifying integrated patterns that emerged from the data.

Member Check and Final Draft

ICI and CICD created a draft final report and presented their findings via Powerpoint presentation at two separate meetings: A meeting with the Tipton County Foundation on July 9, 2021 to refine final goals and recommendations, and one last, centrally-located meeting at the Tipton County Foundation on September 2, 2021 with former participants and the general public. The facilitation team presented the analyzed data, draft strategic vision, and identified county-wide goals in person at a two-hour workshop. This gave participants the opportunity to ask questions about the results and to clarify any issues that may be unclear to the group or identify areas that the facilitators may have missed in the data analysis phase. This stage, known to researchers as "member checking," is critical for ensuring the validity of the data and that all data were captured accurately by the facilitation team doing the study. Facilitators encouraged "brutal feedback," as this is important to ensuring an honest and transparent interpretation of the data. It also provided an opportunity for participants to interact with the findings prior to the final release, which generated new perspectives that were important in catalyzing action.

ICI and CICD then incorporated this feedback into this final report. Facilitation was used to resolve discrepancies where possible. Where differences in opinion occur, these differences are noted along with a management strategy for maximizing the benefit for all parties. CICD and Ball State ICI will remain available for feedback via e-mail, if further questions or concerns remain.

In this report, ICI and CICD will provide strategic recommendations on taking quick, collective action on the issues identified in the strategic visioning exercises. These recommendations can be used by local leaders and proactive citizens alike. Strategies that worked well in other communities facing similar issues may be presented if relevant, although these "best practices" are only suggestions for action, and will only be considered in the context of feedback received by the community as to their potential efficacy. The final plan will be delivered in both electronic (.pdf) and hard copy forms to The Foundation on or before the agreed upon end date.

The next section of the report presents key results, findings, and observations. These results incorporate important feedback and clarification about the data and its interpretation from the September 2 member check meeting.

Results: Postcards

A frequency analysis was conducted on the key themes found in the postcard exercise. The results showed housing to be a top issue with "new" (primarily referring to amenities) immediately following. "Great," "family" and "schools" were seen as important assets, as were "people" in the community. Some of the common amenities listed in the future vision included shopping, restaurants, trails, and a better downtown area. The frequency analysis of top thematic words can be found in the chart below:

Top Words by Frequency from Postcards from the Future (excluding words like "dear," "Tipton," "County," etc.)	
Housing/Homes	57
New	52
Great	51
Family	49
Schools	41
Shopping	39
Restaurants	38
Trails	38
People	35
Downtown	30

It should be noted that not all future views of Tipton County were rosy, while several were. Many expressed a general enhancement of community activity and energy and growth in both population and amenities, while others followed specific themes about technological threats, the faith-based community, and specific local initiatives like trails. Thus, the responses received and therefore participants' vision of the future was varied. The facilitators isolated the following "postcards from the future" that reflected some of the variation in responses received:

*"Tipton County is a **great place**. The **community is growing** and new families are moving in. The farm community is having great harvests and **schools are growing**. There is a thriving Christian influence and **families are happy and reaching out to one another** as neighbors and friends. The future looks bright and the **towns are expanding**. Hope to see you soon."*

*"This is an interesting **ghost town**. Lots of **vacant buildings** and a cool old courthouse that is now the corporate control center of thousands of **agricultural robots** that work the fields around the old town. It's kind of like a **cultural desert**. There is so much to do north and south of here, but few people stayed when the robot farms took over and **restricted young families from moving in**. Well, I'm leaving this god forsaken area and going back to civilization."*

*"My Dear Friend, You would be amazed to see how much our little **town has grown**. There have been **two new restaurants** that have opened since you were last here. One prepares the most delicious steaks and the other is a breakfast restaurant that prepares fresh pastries. We have also seen some **new shopping areas that sell the cutest little homemade gifts**. This area has really turned into the loveliest place to spend a Saturday afternoon. Hope to see you soon!"*

In crafting a strategic vision for the county, we recommend that the vision must include/address the following:

- New and improved amenities
- Family-oriented and people-centered as central values
- Housing abundance as a fundamental goal
- A recognition of diverse opportunities within this vision
- An overall optimistic tone with recognition of local challenges

Results: Turbo-SWOT

In any SWOT analysis, ideas in any category can be a major priority. What differs from category to category is how communities deal with the identified issues.

- Strengths: Communities should maximize and focus on leveraging these important local assets, especially when they are unique to the community.
- Weaknesses: Communities should either improve upon these, or recognize that they are not core competencies, focusing instead on their unique strengths.
- Opportunities: These should become action items as quickly as possible.
- Threats: Efforts should be taken to minimize exposure to these instead of attempting to change them.

Turbo-SWOT

Maximize Exposure ⬇

Minimize Exposure ⬇

Fast = Gut Reaction = Most Important

Internal: We Control These ➡

| Strengths | Weaknesses |

External: We Do Not Control These ➡
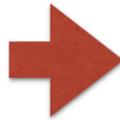
| Opportunities | Threats |

Tipton County's overall strategy for future growth and development can be guided by applying these approaches to each category of the SWOT, beginning with the most important ideas in each category. Using the dots exercise, participants were given the opportunity to collectively "vote" for the issues that they felt were most important in the county. This enabled facilitators to prioritize these issues based on participant feedback by counting the number of dots next to each identified issue and then combining these tallies across each of the four sessions. The following table illustrates the top idea or issue in each of the SWOT categories by community, based on the number of dots.

COMMUNITY	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
KEMPTON	People take care of each other	Housing availability vs. need	Internet	U.S. 31 access
WINDFALL	Location proximity	Deteriorating housing	Geographic location	Declining population
SHARPSVILLE	High values/character	(Tie) Lack of childcare + Adversity to change	Improvement in schools	U.S 31 by-passing Tipton
TIPTON	Amenities (Pool, Park, Library, etc.)	Not enough housing	Recreational expansion	U.S. 31 access

It should be clear right away that all four communities had different priorities when it came to the "positives," i.e., those ideas in the strengths and opportunities categories. Kempton saw a spirit of taking

care of one another as a strength, while internet development was an opportunity. Windfall sees their central location as being both a local strength and an opportunity for future development. Sharpsville believes in their local values and character as strengths, while improving schools is an important objective. Finally, Tipton sees its local amenities as an important strength, but seeks more development of recreational opportunities. There was far greater consistency, however, around weaknesses and threats. Three out of four communities listed a lack of sufficient housing as a major weakness, while access to U.S. Highway 31 was a major threat. The only exceptions to this were Sharpsville, who noted a lack of child care and an aversion to change as weaknesses, and Windfall, who saw population decline as their greatest threat. This mix of diversity and consistency shows that there is greater consensus around Tipton County's major challenges, but many potential paths forward in terms of making Tipton County a better place.

Dots were then combined across communities to examine the highest overall priorities in the county, whether they be strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats. These combined totals can be found in the table below:

Top Overall Turbo SWOT Responses (Votes)	
U.S. 31 access	79
Housing (lack of availability/options)	65
Broadband (lack high-speed internet)	40
Geographic location (positive)	39
Reluctant to change	28
Restaurants/dining options (lacking)	21
Low pay for public servants (teachers, police, fire)	19
Recreational amenities (trails, etc.)	18
Lack of childcare	14

While housing was a major theme in the future-oriented postcards, this issue drops to number two when examining local issues using the Turbo-SWOT. Access to U.S. Highway 31, while mentioned very little in the postcards exercise, became the top issue in the SWOT. Following these two critical issues were broadband development, leveraging the county's central geographic location, overcoming reluctance to change, enhancing dining options, paying public servants (including teachers, police officers, and fire fighters) more money, improving recreational amenities, and expanding child care locally. However, many of the themes that received fewer dots actually expressed common ideas. Using thematic coding (i.e., systematically combining related ideas), the revised top priorities are as follows:

Revised Thematic Turbo SWOT Responses (Votes)	
High demand for quality of life development (amenities/recreation/etc.)	124
Housing related issues (demand/supply, blight/rehab)	82
U.S. 31 Access	79
Location/proximity to population centers	68
Sense of community pride (values)	61
Concerns about quality of education and early childhood development (including child care)	41

Two elements had a high frequency, but also a high concentration in one location. Community malaise (defined by participants as a lack of leadership, no vision, etc.) had a high concentration of 19 dots in Sharpsville (40 dots overall in the county), where one participant went to great lengths to emphasize this point, possibly skewing results. The need for better broadband was a major theme in Kempton, who gave this issue 21 dots out of 37 across the entire county.

Overall, when combining key themes, a high demand for quality of life development rises to the top of the list. This can generally refer to amenities like restaurants, shopping, trails and outdoor recreation, and overall improvements to the county's downtown areas. This is highly consistent with the vision expressed in the future-oriented postcards. Housing related issues, including new housing development, redevelopment, and addressing local housing blight, was the second most common theme. U.S. Highway 31 access fell to third most important, nearly tied with housing, while leveraging the central location of the county as an opportunity was fourth. The strength, sense of community pride, was fifth most important, while concerns about quality of education and early childhood development was still a common answer at sixth. Sharpsville has substantive concerns about local leadership that should be addressed, and Kempton is keen to get better broadband in their area, specifically.

Proposed Vision Statement

The vision statement is intended as a general set of goals and guiding principles, broadly agreed upon by the community, to help guide action in the future. It is a "litmus test" for future decision making, as all major county decisions should contribute in some way to furthering local progress according to the vision statement. It also represents those categories of things that are the highest priorities for local citizens. Because it is derived from citizen data, it also broadly represents the views of where the community would like to see the county headed in the coming years. The vision statement is intended to represent the current views of Tipton County residents at this moment across the entire county and to be flexible and adaptable over time.

Flowing from the postcard exercise, facilitators compiled key words and ideas thematically in order to determine the major themes that mattered most to participants. A draft vision statement was presented to the Tipton County Foundation and to the general public for feedback. This feedback was incorporated to improve the quality and relevance of the statement.

Tipton County's vision statement for 2021 and beyond is:

Tipton County is a family-friendly environment filled with caring people, a safe, community-oriented culture, and rural charm, situated right in the middle of everything. Every year in Tipton County, you will find more and more:

• New housing opportunities in a peaceful setting but still close to major commercial centers

• Great schools with even better teachers

• Emerging downtown destinations with new shopping and restaurant options

• Recreational opportunities for the whole family, including pedestrian and bike trails

• Connectivity through improved physical and digital infrastructure

• Family-oriented events and amenities where the focus is on the people that make Tipton County great

• Development that is appropriate for our communities; that preserves not only our historic structures but also considers our historic legacy of agriculture.

Key Goals and Recommendations

Key goals and recommendations are a specific set of ideas that flow logically from the vision statement, and provide some more specific guidance on meaningful steps that Tipton County can take to put the vision into action. These ideas were derived from the Turbo-SWOT analysis and presented to both the Tipton County Foundation and the general public for feedback. This feedback was used to improve the quality and relevance of the goals and recommendations. Like the vision statement, goals are broad and flexible and may change over time, especially as goals reach completion and local priorities move on to a new set of ideas. However, they are specific and concrete enough to guide action in the coming years.

Each major goal is derived from citizen data and stated separately, followed by a list of recommendations that Tipton County can take in the near term to begin to make progress on each goal. While the postcard exercise gave participants an opportunity to think about an ideal future with few constraints, the Turbo-SWOT exercise introduced the reality of participant-identified weaknesses and threats.

o **Goal #1: Promote a strategy for quality of life development including broadband connectivity, amenities development and recreation opportunities.**

The residents of Tipton County have a high demand for recreational opportunities (including trails), small business amenities development such as restaurants and entertainment venues, and cultural opportunities such as festivals and other types of community celebrations. Local leadership can go several different directions, several of which are expressed in the following recommendations:

- <u>Recommendation 1:</u> Utilize community meetings or surveys to determine where there might be a critical mass for early wins in recreation.
- <u>Recommendation 2:</u> Create an inventory of recreational events and amenities, and compare these to local demand.
- <u>Recommendation 3:</u> Develop a business support strategy for entrepreneurs for restaurant/retail development or related businesses.
- <u>Recommendation 4:</u> Employ a broadband consultant to develop a broadband coverage map and feasibility study, exploring different modes of broadband development (i.e., fiber conduit, wireless, etc.).
- <u>Recommendation 5:</u> Hold a listening session to gather ideas on creating multi-generational amenities, especially opportunities for children, youth, and families that stress community involvement and participation by youth and their parents.

o **Goal #2: Promote successful strategies that improve healthy housing options including affordable housing, blight removal and remediation, and infill lots.**

A discussion surrounding housing needs to be held locally. Currently, there is the strong feeling that more, better quality housing needs to be built, as this might attract more population growth: "if you build it they will come." This needs to be thoughtfully explored with feedback from local and regional developers to ensure feasibility and relevance to the current marketplace.

Another theme is the need to address the blighted housing in communities throughout the county, which can be an important source of new housing.

- Recommendation 6: Work with local and regional developers to create a comprehensive housing strategy that includes areas of existing rehabilitation and prime areas for new housing development that leverage the county's central location for commuters seeking affordable, small-town alternatives to urban housing.

o **Goal #3: Develop a comprehensive transportation strategy that includes access and connectivity including but not limited to U.S. 31, county roads, downtown walkability, and trails.**

An immediate concern is the planning for the U.S. 31 corridor. There currently a concerted organized effort to develop an economic development and land use plan for the corridor, as well as securing at least one additional interchange or two. Local interchanges for Tipton along U.S. 31 were mentioned as being important for business, while also potentially bringing other social and economic changes to the area that must be carefully considered. Equally important is planning for road infrastructure and subsequently water infrastructure to support the development that will result from these activities. While many decisions around U.S. 31's development fall outside the purview of Tipton County, county organizations can be prepared to represent the interests of local citizens, businesses, and economic development.

- Recommendation 7: Catalyze a local action group comprised of citizens, business owners, leaders, and economic development entities to gain a seat at the table with INDOT to address local access concerns.

o **Goal #4: Promote marketing to position Tipton County as a centrally located lifestyle alternative for living, working, recreation, and small business development that focuses on its key cultural strengths of family, character, and community care.**

Participants were acutely aware that Tipton County can take advantage of its location. Advancements can be made on this by making progress on the priorities identified through this process. Another component mentioned in the discussions is the need for a marketing/messaging strategy that promotes the 'discovery' of Tipton County by sharing the county's many events and amenities with the outside world.

- Recommendation 8: Work with a marketing agency to position Tipton County as a centrally-located lifestyle alternative for living, working, recreation, and small business development that focuses on its key cultural strengths of family, character, and community care.
- Recommendation 9: Create a centralized media site for sharing information on local events and keeping citizens informed, while also promoting the county to outside entities.

o **Goal #5: Promote community development of high quality education from early childhood to lifelong learning.**

The quality of schools is a major source of pride for Tipton County and also expected to be a local strength that can attract new residents to the county. Participants mentioned the importance of improving the entire educational ecosystem, from early childhood education through continuing education, workforce development, and practical skill building.

- Recommendation 10: Work with an educational consultant to map the educational ecosystem, including a gap analysis and potential, existing partners (both public and private, large and small) that can address gaps in early childhood education and care through workforce and skills development.
- Recommendation 11: Hold listening sessions for both youth and parents at county high schools to determine educational and child care needs in the county, and improve the relevancy of offerings to the current society and economy.
- Recommendation 12: Advertise and promote the need for affordable, full-day child care with potential opportunities for early childhood education and community-based youth engagement.

o **Other Important Issues**

Two other recurring themes appeared at listening sessions and the member checking sessions that do not fit squarely under the primary five goals identified by citizens but still warrant consideration. Attention must be paid to some of the challenges facing the area, including reluctance to change and transparency around leadership, and maintaining public safety. It should be recognized that reluctance to change is a commonly-cited feature of rural areas, but this can also be viewed as a strength and an opportunity to gain some clarity around leadership styles. Additionally, threats to public safety, including drugs, were noted. While threats originate outside the community, maintaining safety and security across the community presents a unique opportunity for building effective relationships and connecting those who are most threatened with existing resources that can help.

- Recommendation 13: Engage in professional development for local leaders that explores strategies for supporting transparent, transformative efforts at the local level without losing sight of important cultural traditions that are part of the community's brand and appeal.
- Recommendation 14: Host public events with the Sheriff's Department to build familiarity with law enforcement, foster community spirit, and build local relationships that can help to prevent crime proactively through community engagement.

- <u>Recommendation 15:</u> Identify and promote existing public resources for drug awareness and prevention, including resources for those people who are seeking help and rehabilitation.

Moving Forward

This strategic visioning plan is intended to serve as a guide for decision making and taking action around the issues that Tipton County residents care about most. Overall, county entities including the county government, the Tipton County Foundation, and local governments and organizations should refer to this guide to create dialogues with citizens, businesses, and other organizations about taking meaningful steps toward making Tipton County even better. Keeping this plan in plain view, regularly checking in on goals and strategic recommendations, and creating metrics and key performance indicators around each goal will ensure that progress is routinely made on each identified goal. And of course, as community developers, our highest recommendation is to keep dialogue and community interaction alive — both through in-person meetings and online — to continue to guide and refine progress along the way. Community members are your most valuable source of feedback and the greatest barometer of this plan's success. As the county succeeds at implementing this plan, we hope it will not only inspire the community to celebrate their accomplishments but to continue to attract new energy to the process, touching off a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement and community spirit.

<u>Respectfully submitted</u>:

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Appendix — Turbo-SWOT Results for Each Community, Ranked by Number of Participant Dots[1]

Kempton, April 8

Strengths	Weaknesses
9 People take care of each other 6 Small town feel 5 Hospital system 3 U.S. 31 could be quick 2 Library and park (Tipton) 2 Schools getting better 2 Rural living 1 Arts/theater/school arts 1 Collaborative spirit/leadership 1 Cost of living (low) 1 Engaged young people 0 Median income 0 "Feels like" low crime rate	23 Housing availability vs. Need 7 Low wages for public jobs (teachers, etc.) 7 Lack of child care (including before school transportation for kids) 6 Lack of high-speed internet 6 Not 'on the radar' for restaurants/ entertainment 3 High property taxes 3 Lack of code enforcement 2 Utility capacity insufficient, roads, bridges, etc. 1 Lack of businesses 1 Lack of diversity – culture, ethnicity, etc. 1 Duplication of effort 0 Lack of resources to towns outside Tipton especially transportation 0 Meeting times/access 0 Family unit declining 0 Low population density – fewer people paying taxes
Opportunities	**Threats**
21 Internet 14 Geographic proximity 6 Rental homes affordable 4 Park development throughout the county 3 Medical services outreach 2. More festivals/attractions 1 We have space 1 Schools – can attract and retain 1 Digital revolution can lead to development 0 New downtown – Tipton, businesses coming in 0 Become healthier (smoke-free) 0 Industrial Park can grow businesses	19 U.S. 31 project access (losing some tax base) 7 Drugs/ramifications 6 Leadership has small vision 4 Lack of infrastructure for growth 2 Enough amenities/balance? 2 Low salaries for public officials (including teachers) 2 Lack of involvement 1 Abandoned houses 1 No local schools in Tipton County in the future 0 Uncontrolled growth 0 Leadership does not reflect the whole county 0 Unwillingness to change 0 "Brain drain"

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[1] Ideas that were raised in the listening sessions, but that later received no dots, are given a score of 0.

Strengths	Weaknesses
10 Location Proximity 7 Church life 5 Rural setting 3 Low crime rate 3 Room for development 3 Windmills 2 School – brings people together 2 Library 2 Cost of living 1 Sense of community/character of people 1 Local history 1 Fire department 0 Land quality for farming 0 Low property taxes 0 Bayer (major employer in Tipton County)	11 Deteriorating housing 9 Cost of water/utilities 6 No businesses/banks, etc. 5 Code enforcement 4 Community blight 4 Low youth engagement 4 Nothing for kids to do 1 Windmills + property values 1 Lack of awareness of other communities in county 1 Low public involvement 0 Deteriorating infrastructure 0 No doctors 0 Affordable housing 0 Poverty rate
Opportunities	Threats

18 Geographic location
8 Community focus on faith/family
6 Trail Development
6 New businesses coming in (attraction
    strategy)
5 Bring in businesses (active recruitment)
5 Available/affordable housing
3 Pride in ownership
3 Develop new restaurants
2 Reasonable commute
1 More land for building
0 History
0 Land available
0 Raise awareness (needed)
0 Fixing buildings
0 Technological leap-frogging
0 Agricultural reverse brain-drains
	11 Declining population
	8 Drug traffic
	6 Vandalism
	5 Government action from above
	3 U.S. 31 Accessibility
	2 Diminishing services (such as
	    transportation/healthcare)
	1 Nowhere to walk (trails, etc.)
	1 Lack of vision
	1 Lack of jobs
	0 Social media
	0 Windfall will die
	0 Development in surrounding communities
	0 In-fighting within Tipton County
	0 Being able to maintain infrastructure
	0 People pass through community

Strengths	Weaknesses
10 High values/character 5 Centrally located and rural setting 4 Low crime rate 4 Hospital 2 Low housing costs 2 Small Schools 2 Good medical 1 Low property taxes 1 Family oriented communities 1 Utility capacity form Tipton county 1 Cost of living 0 Senior Center in Tipton (city) 0 Unique businesses 0 Caring and loyalty of citizens 0 Good place to raise a family	5 Lack of child care 5 Adversity to change 4 Getting across U.S. 31 – east to west 4 Low housing growth 3 Broadband (lack of) 2 Lack of jobs 2 Roads 2 Need better roads 2 Lack of housing 2 U.S. 31 access 1 Aging population 1 Internet 0 Educational system 0 Lack of comprehensive strategy/plan 0 Senior housing 0 Losing population/no growth 0 People moving out
Opportunities	Threats
9 Improvement in schools 7 Bring in new families 4 Growth from North/South of county 4 Vocation trades 3 Geographic location 2 New businesses and restaurants 1 Existing infrastructure for new businesses 1 Marketing Tipton 1 Internet – county-wide 1 Growth from Indy 1 Nice parks/playgrounds 0 Revitalization 0 Physical space 0 Great school system 0 Support local businesses	21 U.S. 31 By-passing Tipton 19 Reluctant to change 8 Elimination of natural resources 4 Lack of housing 3 Health concerns 2 Hurried housing (cheap) 2 Population decline 2 Lack of housing 1 Property taxes 1 Antiquated roads 1 Antiquated school system 1 Lack of support for business growth 0 High cancer rate 0 Use of chemicals on farms 0 Lack of cultural events 0 Safety goes away 0 Transportation for elderly

Strengths		Weaknesses	
7	Amenities – library, park, pool	10	Not enough housing
3	Main Street Association	9	No destination dining
3	Proximity to U.S. 31	7	Lack of walkability
2	Opportunities for youth	6	Broadband infrastructure
2	People are hospitable/close-knit	3	Blight & gateways need to be improved
2	Movie Theater	3	Truck traffic downtown
1	Locally owned businesses	3	Safe & reliable child care before & after school
1	Talented youth	2	Lack of focus on strong Quality of Place
0	Central location	2	Courthouse preservation
0	Strong tied - boomerangs	2	Perception of being inhospitable to newcomers
0	Tipton County Foundation	2	Duplication of effort among organizations
0	Safe	2	Night time activities/fun
0	Physical activity opportunities	2	Out-dated youth sports facilities/amenities
0	Volunteer culture	1	Low-income housing is filled by out-of-towners
0	Farmers' market	1	Need to remove regulations/roadblocks
0	Hospital	1	High barrier to entry into jobs for recent graduates
0	Local control of utilities	1	Lack of homecare services
0	Railroad	0	Healthy eating options lacking
0	Farming	0	Not much marketing
0	Affordable utilities	0	Competitiveness of schools (academically)
0	Engaged community	0	Lack of convenient downtown parking
0	Generosity/Wealth	0	Inability of government to work together
0	Vision for improvement	0	Aging community (residents)
0	Location to Indy & Kokomo	0	People leave Tipton County for jobs (higher-paying) elsewhere

Opportunities		Threats	
13	Recreational expansion	19	U.S. 31 project access (losing some tax base)
9	Re-use of building for local artists	10	Lower pay scale for teachers & public employees
5	City and county working together	6	Only one interchange in/out of the county (safety issue)
5	Location – easy commute to other population centers	5	Lack of code enforcement
4	Family friendly housing with amenities	3	Lack of cultural diversity
4	U.S. 31 freeway project corridor	3	Unwillingness to change/attitudes about growth
3	Better transportation services	2	Fix/repair roads/infrastructure
2	Technology of industries	2	Walkability - safety
2	Growth – space to grow	1	Drugs
2	More healthy lifestyle amenities	1	Lack of internet speed
1	Better transportation services	1	Going broke – fiscal uncertainty
1	Money available	0	Interchange design
1	Arts District – Local artists/artisans	0	State policy on School Choice
0	Create a positive identity	0	Lack of planning
0	Dog parks	0	Drainage – Cicero Ditch needs clean up
0	Ag. leadership	0	Growth Elsewhere
0	Knowledge economy	0	Conflict between city and county
0	Uni Gov	0	Amenities outside of Tipton County
0	Beautification (historic buildings, etc.)	0	Fiscal policy at statehouse
0	Economic development – to invite people in	0	Static growth of young families
0	Vacant buildings	0	Loss of historic structures
		0	Unorganized growth
		0	Competition with larger school districts
		0	Aging population