Chapter Three

Context
Totaling 467 sq. miles, St. Joseph County is in the north-central part of Indiana. Surrounded by three counties (LaPorte, Marshall, and Elkhart), St. Joseph County lies on the Michigan state line and is located 96 miles from Chicago and 140 miles from Indianapolis. Within its borders are the cities of South Bend and Mishawaka and seven towns. St. Joseph County has 13 townships: Centre, Clay, German, Greene, Harris, Liberty, Lincoln, Madison, Olive, Penn, Portage, Union, and Warren.
As part of the inventory and analysis phase of the master plan, review of existing planning documents was conducted. Summaries of the findings from these documents are as follows:

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN: 2014-2018
Information from the 2014-2018 master plan was updated to reflect the current conditions of St. Joseph County Parks, communities, demographics, etc.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN
The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a four-year, short-range plan that provides information regarding the transportation projects that are federally funded in the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) region. The TIP includes projects for all modes of surface transportation including highways and streets, active transportation, and public transportation. Projects listed are developed in cooperation with state and local agencies.

The plan offers 25 potential bike/multi-use path improvement projects that will benefit several communities. Adding/improving these paths will help to bring a variety of visitors who may not visit the parks by vehicular transportation.

MICHIANA ON THE MOVE: 2040 TRANSPORTATION PLAN
Michiana on the Move is a long-range plan that identifies regionally significant transportation needs and issues in the region. It is a fiscally constrained document that includes a demographic analysis of the community as well as an examination of travel patterns and trends. The planning process includes an analysis of alternatives to meet projected future demands and to provide a safe and efficient transportation system that meets mobility while not creating adverse impacts to the environment.

The 2040 Transportation Plan addresses the following:
• Policies, strategies, and projects for the future
• Projected demand for transportation services over 20 years
• Regional land use, development, housing, and employment forecasts
• Cost estimates and reasonably available financial sources

According to the study, over a 24-hour period, 16.83% of people traveled for recreational purposes and destinations.

SHIRLEY HEINZE LAND TRUST REGIONAL CONSERVATION PLAN
The Regional Conservation Plan identifies land in northwest St. Joseph County contiguous to County Parks prioritized for acquisition for greenspace and recreation. The plan was developed in cooperation with MACOG, St. Joseph County Parks, IDNR, and other conservation organizations.

HISTORY, FEATURES, POPULATION, AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

HISTORY
Before any white European explorer had stepped foot upon the soil of the Old Northwest, the St. Joseph Valley was occupied by Native Americans. Several tribes and early native peoples located around the St. Joseph River. One of the earliest groups to occupy what would later become northern Indiana and southern Michigan was the Miami tribe. Later, the Potawatomi would move into the St. Joseph River Valley region, utilizing the rich food and natural resources along the river. The Potawatomi would occupy this region of Indiana and Michigan until the majority were forcibly removed in the 1840s.

The first white footprint placed in the soil of northern Indiana was that of Father James Marquette, who traveled up the Kankakee River and across the portage to the St. Joseph River in May of 1675.

One major reason the South Bend area grew in population was its location along the St. Joseph River. To get to the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes, the South Bend portage was the shortest overland route from the St. Joseph River to the Kankakee River. The Kankakee River flowed into the Illinois River and then into the Mississippi. This was the route used for centuries, first by Native Americans, and then the French explorers and traders.

In addition to the portage, there were several other Native American trails that crisscrossed throughout the Michiana (Michigan and Indiana) area. The Fort Wayne Trail led from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Chicago, Illinois. Another popular trail was the Great Sauk Trail that started in Detroit, Michigan, went through Chicago, and then split into two trails in Missouri, later becoming known as the Santa Fe Trail and the Oregon Trail.

After the Native tribes, the first permanent residents of South Bend were the fur traders who settled in the area because of the rich wildlife that congregated along, and in, the St. Joseph River. The first successful trader to occupy the St. Joseph River Valley was William Burnett. Mr. Burnett, from a prominent New Jersey family, was attracted to this area because of the possibility of great wealth participating in the fur trade.

St. Joseph County is now the fifth largest county in the state of Indiana by population. The county includes a comfortable mix of rural cultural heritage and urban amenities. St. Joseph County is also the regional center for higher education with more than eight colleges and universities including the University of Notre Dame, Indiana University South Bend, Bethel College, and Saint Mary’s College.

MAN-MADE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES
Founded in 1842, the University of Notre Dame is a private, non-profit Catholic-founded research university that has about 8,600 students enrolled. The university is one of the largest employers in the county, and according to a 2018 study, its economic impact on the region is $2.46 billion annually.

St. Joseph County is home to many Local and National Historic Districts. The first Local Historic District established was the West North Shore Drive Historic District in 1978. Since then, eight other Local Historic Districts have been established. The many Historic Districts and Sites can be found on the IDNR’s State Historic Database.

Home to one of the most iconic symbols in the region, Bendix Woods County Park holds the record for the world’s longest living advertisement. The half-mile historic sign that reads “Studebaker” was planted in 1938 by the Studebaker Corporation totaling up to 8,000 pine saplings as advertisement for its nearby test track circuit. In 1966, the property was purchased by...
the Bendix Corporation and with it the coveted landmark. Today, the sign includes just over 2,000 trees and is included in the National Register of Historic Places. To help restore and maintain the Studebaker sign, a series of grants were awarded between 2012 and 2015.

The historic Studebaker Clubhouse is located at Bendix Woods County Park. It was built in 1926 and has gone through many changes, from living quarters for Studebaker employees, to army barracks, to a private residence, and now it is a nature center with park offices. It is a designated local landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

COMMUNITY ATTRACTIONS

St. Joseph County’s urban center is the City of South Bend, which combines with rural attractions and recreation opportunities that help shape the community. The County has become a rich cultural hub of activity with museums, major sports teams, theaters, and recreational opportunities, with close attractions nearby. The following list are some of the top attraction destinations in the County.

- East Race artificial whitewater rafting course
- Four Winds Field - minor league baseball stadium for Chicago Cubs Single-A affiliate
- University of Notre Dame
- St. Joseph River fishing and canoe opportunities
- Close vicinity to Michigan beaches
- Potawatomi Zoo
- Biking, hiking, and walking trails
- Ice skating facilities
- Nature preserves, bogs, ornamental gardens
- Municipal and private golf courses
- Studebaker Museum
- The History Museum

TRANSPORTATION

Located in the center of the “Crossroads of America”, St. Joseph County provides access to five major United States cities within a five-hour drive. The Indiana Toll Road traverses the County east-west, and a main arterial route (US 31) travels through the County connecting Michigan and Indianapolis. St. Joseph County also includes a regional airport, bus line systems, and a major rail line to Chicago.

Major Highways
- Indiana Toll Road - 80/90
- US Hwy 31
- US Hwy 20
- US Hwy 6
- Hwy 933
- Hwy 331

Air
- South Bend International Airport

Railway
- Amtrak South Shore (Chicago - South Bend)
  “The County is renewing its rail system’s 20-year strategic plan to reduce railway travel time to Chicago from South Bend to 90 minutes.”
  - South Bend Tribune

Railway - Passenger
- Canadian National
- Norfolk Southern

Railway - Freight
- CSX
- Bus Lines
- Greyhound
- Transpo (Intra-City)

According to MACOG, in 2016, the most common method of travel for workers in St. Joseph County was driving alone (82.4%) and 1.8% of the population used public transportation. The public transit system is undergoing systems planning to find ways to improve efficiency and reach more people. Through better routes, shorter travel times, and improved accessibility, it is anticipated that use of public transportation can grow in St. Joseph County for both local trips and visit to Chicago and perhaps other communities in the future.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES

From 2015 to 2016, employment in St. Joseph County declined by 1.77%, from 123,580 employees to 121,388 employees. According to South Bend Regional Economic Development, the top 10 major employers in St. Joseph County are:

1. University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame)
2. Beacon Health System (South Bend)
3. South Bend Community School Corporation (South Bend)
4. St. Joseph Regional Medical Center (Mishawaka)
5. Indiana University South Bend (South Bend)
6. City of South Bend (South Bend)
7. AM General LLC (Mishawaka)
8. Honeywell Aerospace (South Bend)
9. Press Ganey (South Bend)
10. Liberty Mutual (Mishawaka)

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Employment

According to the Indiana Public Data Utility, the unemployment rate in St. Joseph County has continued to drop from 2014 to 2018. In October 2014, the unemployment rate was 5.8% and in October 2018, it was 3.8%, which was higher than the state unemployment rate (3.6%) at the time, ranking 23rd in Indiana counties overall. The estimated median household income in 2016 was $48,358, which is about 8% lower than the median income for the State of Indiana.

Poverty Levels

According to census data, 16.3% of the population in St. Joseph County (41,875 out of 256,660 people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 14%. The County’s largest demographic living in poverty is females ages 25-34, followed by females ages 35-44, and then males ages 6-11.

Economic Development

In economic development, quality of place and workforce development are two important issues in attracting businesses and retaining talent. Both rely on long-term planning in order to have optimal growth and success in the County.
Recently, St. Joseph County Department of Economic Development devised a list of action plans for the future growth in incorporated and unincorporated areas throughout St. Joseph County. Many of those big-ticket items were completed recently and help enhance the quality of life in the region, bolstering the appeal of St. Joseph County.

The following are 10 economic development highlights for St. Joseph County (as reported by South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce):

1. **$400M Notre Dame Campus Crossroads project completed**
2. **$45M Mill at Ironworks Plaza breaks ground (Regional City project)**
3. **$48M Roads and Bridges upgrades in region**
4. **Four Winds Field record attendance**
5. **The Ivy at Berlin Place breaks ground**
6. **Studebaker 84 & 112 Building upgrades (Regional Cities project)**
7. **JMS Building renovations completed**
8. **East Bank redevelopment (project at Transpo site and other various projects)**
9. **Sports Complex Study underway by Visit South Bend Mishawaka (VSBM)**
10. **Redevelopment of South Bend and Mishawaka parks (Regional Cities projects)**

The County Department of Economic Development had four major points of focus in 2017:

1. Advancing the New Carlisle area
2. Predevelopment and pre-planning for a project on the State Road 933 Corridor
3. Capital Avenue area investment
4. Study of rail development opportunities in St. Joseph County

Although these four major points were emphasized, the County also put attention on towns and unincorporated areas for smaller projects. The following projects are examples of County efforts towards improving economic growth in these areas:

**Dixie Highway Economic Development Area/ Roseland/SR 933 Corridor**

- Worked with development partners along the SR 933 corridor to look at redevelopment sites for new projects. At present, two new hotels will locate within the section from Cleveland to Darden Road. The project on the west side of the corridor will be connected to the LaSalle Trail.
- Supported County Parks and Public Works to seek funding from the Council to complete Phase II & III of the LaSalle Trail. The funding approved by Council was from the Hotel-Motel Tourism Fund.

**Town of Lakeville**

- Worked with town and County Council for funding to purchase one of three parcels needed for Wetland Park project. Lakeville is working to finalize acquisition of third piece and then will be applying for an Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) grant for project design.
- Worked with the town to examine corridors for trail connection to Potato Creek State Park.

**Town of North Liberty**

- Worked with the town to examine corridors for trail connection to Potato Creek State Park.

**Town of Walkerton**

- Worked with the town to consider rail park development opportunity with E&W Railroad. Rail park would be located west of town.

**County Growth and Development**

St. Joseph County has seen an increase in growth and development in the past five years. As development continues to expand to previously undeveloped areas in the county, protecting significant natural areas is becoming more important. St. Joseph County Parks has been working with Shirley Heinz Land Trust and the Michiana Area Council of Governments to identify natural areas for protection.

The Parks Board is predominantly interested in acquiring large tracts of land over 100 acres with significant natural resources. Acquiring additional property and providing proper maintenance and management would require additional funding and staffing. Because of this, St. Joseph County Parks explores partnerships and other options that could help make property acquisition possible.

**POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

From 2015 to 2017, there has been a 1.8% increase in population with an average of 25% every year in St. Joseph County, resulting in a jump of approximately 2,000 residents. If this trend continues, the County’s could have close to 274,000 residents by 2023, which will require additional attention to the master planning process. With the rise in population, the amount of available open space in the County will decrease. Population projections pose a challenge to the St. Joseph Parks and Recreation Department in maintaining quality in overused parks and the need for future land acquisition to serve the community adequately.

The success of parks is not only based on the amount of visitors they attract each year and the quality of places they provide, but how inclusive park facilities are as well. In preparing a proper and useful Five-Year Master Plan, it is important to consider the ages of participants, as well as socioeconomic status in determining feasibly successful programming.

According to Census.gov, in 2017, the population of St. Joseph County is 72.7% White, 13.6% African American, 8.8% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.5% Asian.

In 2017, the owner-occupied housing rate was 68% with a median home value at $118,600. Median gross rent was $743. The average persons per household was 2.55. 83% of the households owned a computer, and 74% had broadband internet service.

Of residents 25 years and older, 88% graduated high school and 28% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

**COMMUNITY SERVICES**

Services to the public are essential for any community, and having sufficient funds for all community services is a challenge faced every year by the County. As one of these community services, St. Joseph County Parks allocates available funds responsibly and strategically along side other essential community services including public works, the police department, and the fire department.
**NATURAL FEATURES**

**Climate**

The climate of St. Joseph County has an index score of 44 out of 100. A higher score indicates a more comfortable year-round climate, based on a comfort range of 70-80 degrees. The proximity to Lake Michigan increases precipitation rates and causes weather patterns to change rapidly. The temperature range for the county is between -15 degrees and 105 degrees, however, Lake Michigan typically helps keep temperatures more moderate.

On average, St. Joseph County receives 40 inches of rain per year, which is comparable to the national average of 39 inches. The County’s average snow accumulation of 64 inches per year more than doubles the national average of 26 inches.

**Geology and Topography**

Geology and topography is a determining factor for suitability of land use for building, recreation, farming, or different types of development. Understanding the bedrock and soils can determine suitability and design requirements for building foundations. Different soils may favor farming or other use of certain lands.

The geology of St. Joseph County is comprised of glacial till over older layers of bedrock from the Ordovician, Silurian, and Devonian ages. This glacial till varies in thickness from about 50 to 300 feet. The glacial till consists of gravels, sand, and clay that is locally about 200 feet thick. This layer is the chief source of groundwater for the County.

The topography we know today was shaped by the last continental glacier that receded through the area about 15,000 years ago. Material was carried away from the ice front by large streams of melt waters and deposited as stratified material, accounting for the multiple sand and gravel beds in the area.

**Soils**

St. Joseph County predominantly has deep soils over sand and gravel and is coarse and well-drained. These soils are comprised of loamy glacial drift and are coarse with a medium texture. These soils are well-suited for development since they are typically stable and non-cohesive.

The St. Joseph River and other low-lying areas have Gilford, Tawas, and Sebewa soils, which are poorly drained and are typically located in depressions and washout flats near flood plains. The flood plain areas consist of alluvial soils. All of the above soils are not well suited for development and should generally be reserved for storm water storage or passive recreational uses.

**Water Resources**

The St. Joseph River supports several of the area’s leading industries and greatly impacts South Bend, Mishawaka, Osceola, and Notre Dame. In 2016, the University of Notre Dame and South Bend Parks Board reached an agreement for the construction and operation of a hydroelectric generation facility on the city’s dam. With the St. Joseph River as the powering source, the turbine aims to produce a clean, renewable energy source.

In addition to being a vital resource for the region, the St. Joseph River also provides the area with active recreational opportunities such as canoeing, kayaking, rowing, tubing, fishing, and other water sports.

Nearly all of the area’s water supply is derived from wells that have been drilled into the glacial drift covering the area. This water is excellent in both quantity and quality and as a result the water rates in the County are among the lowest in the state.

**Flood Plain and Spring 2018 Flooding**

Floodplains are associated with the two rivers that exist within the County: the St. Joseph River and Kankakee River. St. Joseph River Tributaries: Baugo Creek, Bowman Creek, Eutzler Ditch, Judy Creek, Woodward Ditch

Kankakee River Tributaries: Grapevine Ditch, Niespodziany Ditch, Pine Creek, Yellow Bank Creek, Yellow River

In the spring of 2018, the region received record rainfalls and snow melt that caused flooding to rise above the 100-year flood elevation. Physical damage to the parks included a pedestrian bridge that had pilings settle, log jams at Ferrettie/Baugo Creek County Park, and cleanup from silt and debris deposits. St. Joseph County Parks also suffered lost revenue due to the kayak and paddleboard rentals being delayed more than a month.

**Invasive Species**

Invasive species in the area include honeysuckle, purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, and winged burning bush. Although sometimes viewed as attractive, these non-native plants pose a threat to the established plant life within the Parks system, suppressing native growth in certain habitats and diminishing plant and wildlife diversity. St. Joseph County Parks addresses the issue with educational programs, targeted treatments, management strategies, and volunteer removal efforts. The parks have worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and IDNR on restoration projects as well as control and removal of invasive species.

**Wildlife Management**

Because St. Joseph County Parks’ mission addresses its role in conserving natural resources, wildlife management is an ongoing initiative. In consultation with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the department employs various strategies to control nuisance wildlife when it is deemed the population exceeds the carrying capacity of the habitat or when safety concerns arise.

Deer management strategies are employed at St. Patrick’s County Park and Spicer Lake Nature Preserve where evidence indicated plant diversity was impacted by over-browsing. Due to health concerns related to excrement, Canada geese are controlled at Ferrettie-Baugo Creek and St. Patrick’s County Parks utilizing nest predation permits for adding eggs. Beaver control has been implemented at Spicer Lake Nature Preserve where damage to trails and structures was impacting visitor safety.

The County Parks also manages habitat to support a variety of wildlife whose populations have been threatened or diminished in the region. Areas of turf grass have been converted to naturalized fields and nine acres of constructed prairies are mowed or burned periodically to provide habitat for pollinators and songbirds. A nesting pole at St. Patrick’s County Park accommodates state-endangered osprey. To protect nesting bald eagles, Park programs are curtailed during the active nesting season. An eagle cam linked to the internet allows viewers around the world to view the nesting activity safely. Volunteers monitor success rates in eastern bluebird boxes located in several Parks.