



Town of  
**Wakarusa**  
Growing Our Future  
2030 Comprehensive Plan





APPROVED BY THE:

ELKHART COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION - XX, 2021

ELKHART COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS - XX, 2021

TOWN OF WAKARUSA TOWN COUNCIL - XX, 2021

PREPARED FOR:

**TOWN OF WAKARUSA**

PREPARED BY:



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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<b>Carl Gilbert</b>	Ward 1
<b>Phil Klotz</b>	Ward 3
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<b>Rocco Rigsby</b>	VP At Large

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<b>Christopher Knight</b>	Senior Pastor, Wakarusa Missionary Church
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<b>Rocco Rigsby</b>	Town Council Member, Town of Wakarusa
<b>Sharla Weldy</b>	Business Owner, New To You

# TOWN COUNCIL APPROVAL

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE GUIDING VISION

**“Wakarusa: Grown from the tradition of neighbors helping neighbors; will intentionally grow for the next generation while maintaining a strong sense of community and small town charm.”**

When considering the next decade for Wakarusa, the Steering Committee wanted to remain true to the core values that have defined and guided Wakarusa in the past. These core values, along with the vision statement, are the guiding vision and principles for this Plan.

## OUR CORE VALUES ARE:

Quality Hometown Living  
Strong Sense of Place  
Parks, Festivals, and Trails  
Access to Public Services  
Local Business Community

## THE CHALLENGE

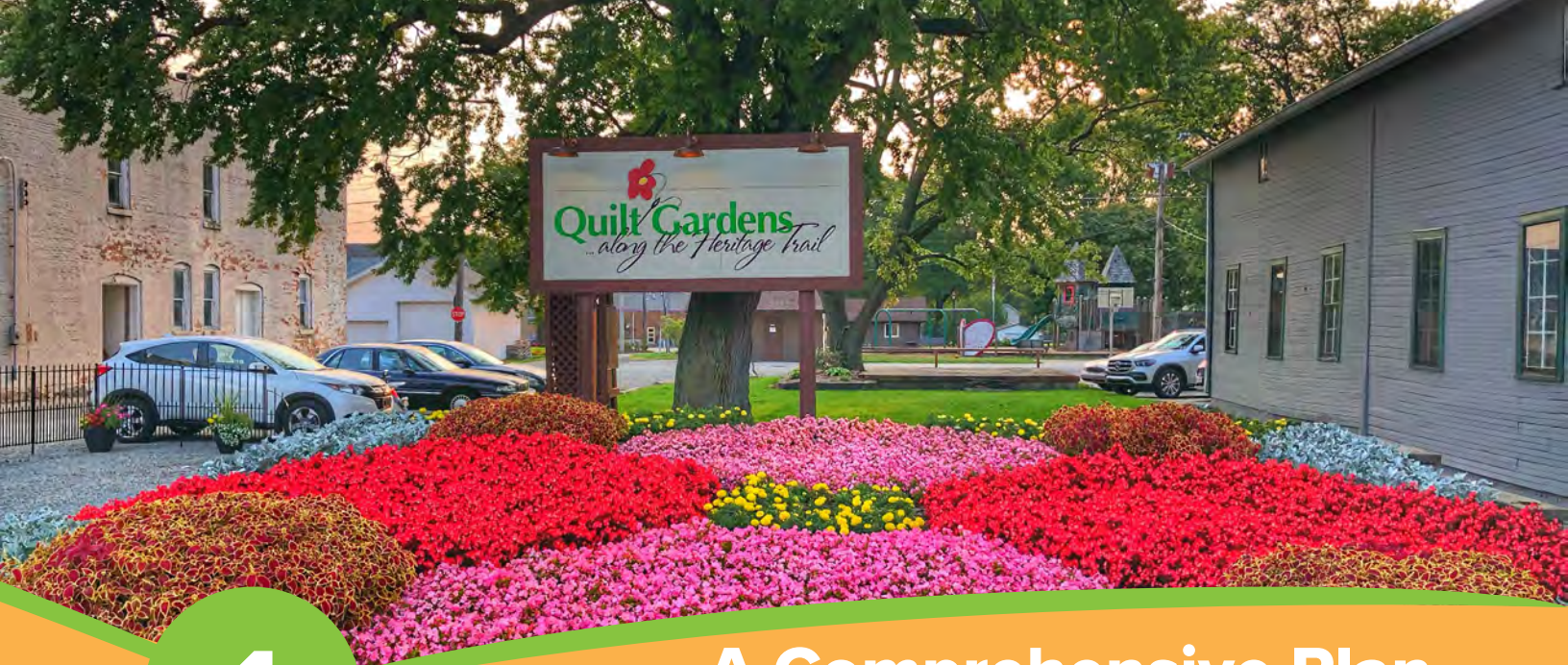
The planning process began with a simple goal: to update the development standards for the town of Wakarusa. However, as the Steering Committee gathered to think strategically together, the question of “Why?” emerged as a central focus. Why did Wakarusa need standards of development? Why did Wakarusa need to go through this planning process? The answer became clear early on. Wakarusa is positioned to attract residents, businesses, and development in the coming decade, as it has been in the past. To ensure this next phase of community growth remains true to the core values of Wakarusa, the town needs to be intentional in its planning efforts. This Plan is the product of those conversations and born out of the need to be intentional in Growing Our Future.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

In the early months of this Plan, data points were gathered regarding all aspects of life in Wakarusa ranging from per capita income to median age and from construction permits to local festivals. As the Steering Committee began to make sense of these data points, they revealed great news for the town of Wakarusa. The future looked bright, even before this planning process began. Housing was being built, the population was growing and getting younger, and the town’s quality of life was consistently high ranked. This Plan ensures this opportunity is directed in the right direction and is guided by the core values of Wakarusa.

## THE FUTURE

As the Steering Committee’s conversations continued, the vision of an intentional Wakarusa emerged in the form of actionable steps. This intentional future will not arrive overnight. Rather, it will take the efforts and dedication of the residents of Wakarusa to implement the action plan to ensure this future arrives. Growing Our Future is more than a slogan for this Plan, but a mindset that residents must embody. It is only when the people and leaders of Wakarusa intentionally use this Plan and its core values that the future proposed here will become a reality. This Plan provides only a roadmap. The exciting work of Growing Our Future is just beginning.



# 1

## A Comprehensive Plan to Grow Wakarusa's Future

Wakarusa prides itself on being a quintessential small town with a unique ambiance in every season. This small town feel is coupled with a wide diversity of events and attractions including the annual Christmas Tree in the “smack-dab” middle of Town Square, the Quilt Garden Tour, The Maple Syrup Festival, and the annual Pumpkin Tree in the fall. Wakarusa, or “Waky” as the locals say, boasts a wide range of businesses from local downtown merchants like Cook’s Pizza and nationally recognized manufacturing companies like Thor Industries. As a community, they have a strong sense of belonging, pride, and commitment to excellence in education. The planning process is meant to build upon these strengths.

Wakarusa is a growing and quaint community that offers many quality places and amenities that businesses and residents are looking for in a community. Wakarusa has several community assets such as its small town feel, strategic location, and growing population and economy. The intent of this planning process is to first capture Wakarusa’s historic and current changes in its demographics and housing to provide the framework for identifying Wakarusa’s needs for its current and future residents. Second, to identify the current opportunities and challenges within the town that limit its growth. Lastly, to create an action plan for the town to use to amplify the existing services and increase the programs, services, or activities for the benefit of all residents.

As a community, we are committed to ensure our hometown maintains its small town charm and welcoming spirit while supporting future opportunities to attract all types of people and businesses to call Waky home. We value our Quality Hometown Living, Strong Sense of Place, Parks, Festivals and Trails, and will continue to provide high quality Access to Public Services and supporting a strong Local Business Community.



This Plan and our input into it will help ensure our core values are front and center while Growing Wakarusa's Future.

## NEED FOR THE PLAN

This comprehensive plan was born out of the need and vision of local community leaders to help inspire and guide how to grow Wakarusa's future together. The Plan will assist town and county officials in the revising process for the town's development standard. Past development standards were seen as complicated and difficult to enforce by the Technical Review Board. By engaging in this comprehensive planning process, the town now has a clear vision for its future and development standards that will help achieve that future.

However, this comprehensive plan does more than fix the difficulties of past regulations. It sets a clear set of core values shared by town residents and a list of strategies to help support those core values as the town continues to grow in the coming years. The Plan was developed by the vision and input from its community leaders and residents. The process was driven and organized by a volunteer group of Town officials and staff, business owners, local residents, and community organizations that made up the Steering Committee. This Plan will serve as the roadmap for all partners in growing Wakarusa's future in the coming years.

## PLANNING PROCESS

Beginning in December of 2020, the Town of Wakarusa kicked off the planning process by organizing a Steering Committee to serve as the lead representative body overseeing the development of the plan. The planning team held monthly Steering Committee meetings to go through the five-step planning process (shown on the next two pages) and report on the progress of the plan development.

The planning process was designed to engage residents of the Wakarusa community in developing a vision for the Town's future, identify the core values of the Town, identify major opportunities and challenges, and formulate action strategies to guide land development, and establish programs and services. Additionally, the process was built on the foundation of community involvement through multiple facets that sought input from key stakeholders including Town officials and staff, residents, employers, and their employees, the school corporation, and other community organizations.



# THE FIVE-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

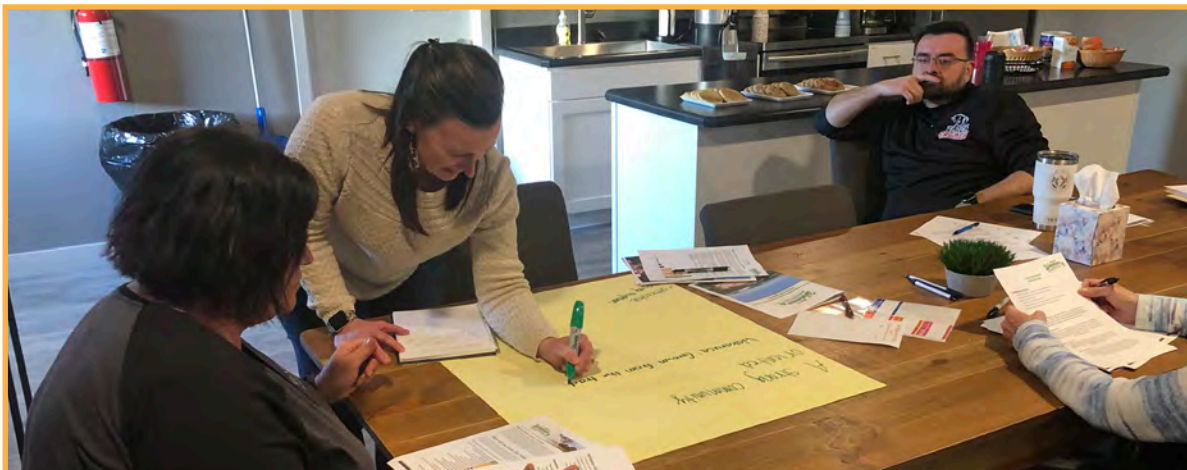
## 1

### Establish the community vision and core values –

This was the major first step the Town undertook for the development of this Plan. It involved several vision-building activities with the Steering Committee and community engagement activities with residents and other stakeholders. The establishment of Wakarusa’s vision was a culmination of activities to identify what residents like and dislike about living in Wakarusa and the key aspects they valued most about Wakarusa.

Community engagement was evident throughout the planning process and served as the foundation for the development of this Plan. This ensured the plan was truly developed by those who call Wakarusa home. First was distributing a public input survey. We received input from 244 residents that shared their vision on how they would like to see Wakarusa grow its future with new amenities as well as aspects the Town should address they thought is limiting Wakarusa from growing. An overview of the outcomes from engagement efforts is highlighted on pages 14 and 15.

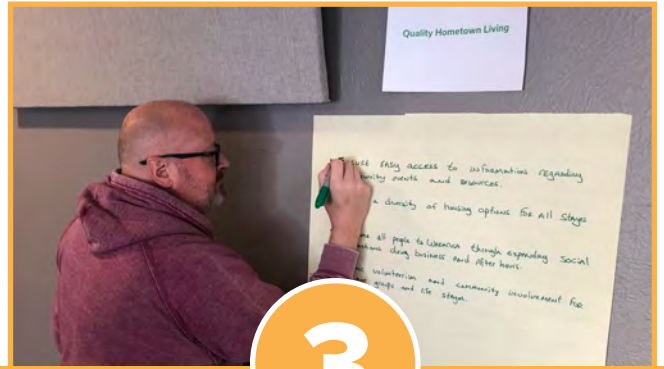
Knowing what residents and stakeholders would like to see in Wakarusa by 2030 guided the Steering Committee to frame those ideas into themes that served as the basis for the creation of the five core values and ultimately the vision for Wakarusa, outlined on page 13. These five core values serve as the basis that articulates the characteristics, aspirations, and social attributes the community desires.





2

**Define the major opportunities and challenges** – The planning team gathered the supporting facts and data to serve as the community profile, outlined starting on page 16. Information was collected using U.S. Census data, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Government Finance Tool, and interviews with Town staff and Boards, organization leaders, and community facility directors. A summary of these findings guided the Steering Committee to map out what Wakarusa is doing well, are there opportunities the Town could leverage or enhance, and the major challenges hindering the Town from growing its future.



3

**Define the goals and strategies**

– This step involved a series of Steering Committee Meetings and Focus Group Workshops. First the Steering Committee brainstormed what they would like to see accomplished that addresses the major opportunities and challenges. Then Focus Group Workshops were convened with key stakeholders to refine those action strategies, identify a timeframe for implementation, the supporting partners, and the top priorities the Town should first consider implementing to see transformational growth in the community. The next step was to create a future development concept map and future development infrastructure map. The future development concept map is intended to guide development decisions over the next 10 years and help inform the Town when revising its current development standards. The future development infrastructure map highlights improvements to the Town’s infrastructure system.

4

**Prepare plan document** – Description to be completed following the final public engagement.

5

**Adopt final plan** – The final phase of the plan development is the formal adoption process. This involves seeking approval by the Elkhart County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners to amend the County’s Comprehensive Plan to incorporate this Plan to guide future development in Wakarusa with final approval by the Town of Wakarusa Town Council.



# PROJECT TIMELINE

Milestones

Months

Phases

Discover Report

Envision Report

Draft Plan

Adopt Plan

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

Community Engagement

**DISCOVER**

who you are

**ENVISION**

where you can go

**PLAN**

how you can do it

**IMPLEMENT**

what you can be



# OUR VISION & CORE VALUES...

*Wakarusa: Grown from the tradition of neighbors helping neighbors; will intentionally grow for the next generation while maintaining a strong sense of community and small town charm.*

## 1 Quality Hometown Living

Residents take pride in Wakarusa's quaint, small town, welcoming atmosphere where neighbors lend a hand to help each other out. Residents value the attractiveness and peacefulness of having an affordable, family-friendly place to raise their children and support a quality community school system. The simple rural lifestyle adds to the character and culture of Wakarusa.

## 2 Strong Sense of Place

Residents desire creating quality places to live, work, and play and connect with their families, friends, and neighbors. By building attractive and inviting places to connect and meet new people, residents can feel right at home and foster a sense of pride to get involved and give back to their community.

## 4 Access to Public Services

Residents aspire to have safe streets, where residents can get around with ease whether its driving, walking, or biking. The Town is committed to offer dependable, high quality utilities and infrastructure systems to support growth opportunities, its current and future users, with an enhanced quality of life. Accessible public services includes maintaining as a safe community with high quality public safety services to efficiently and adequately serve those who live and work in Wakarusa.

## 3 Parks, Festivals, and Trails

Residents value investing its resources to create attractive parks, trails, and community events that highlight our culture and heritage. Residents value maintaining these resources while enhancing the experience to be enjoyed for all ages. Offering attractive parks and diversity of events will magnify the attractiveness of what Wakarusa has to offer.

## 5 Local Business Community

Residents value good jobs and diverse opportunities for entrepreneurship, quality local businesses, and access to higher paying jobs. This includes encouraging unique businesses to locate downtown to make it a vibrant destination for residents and visitors and building attractive employment centers with diversity in job opportunities.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



1<sup>ST</sup> SURVEY

244 RESPONSES



2<sup>ND</sup> SURVEY

140 RESPONSES



WAKY CHATS

6 SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS



FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOPS

19 PARTICIPANTS



**PARTICIPANTS  
AT THE  
MAPLE SYRUP  
FESTIVAL**



# 2

## A Community Profile of Wakarusa Today

### WAKARUSA TODAY

Wakarusa is a quaint small town nestled in the beauty of Elkhart County's rural scenic landscapes. It is a welcoming community grown from long-standing families and new incomers who have fallen in love with Wakarusa's warm hospitality, its rural scenic beauty, and spirituality to make it their home. As a community, we have a strong sense of belonging, pride in our community, family values, and a commitment to see each other succeed in life. Whether you're a business owner, a distant employee, a homeowner, or a young child learning to navigate life, we strive to help and strengthen one another to grow and flourish in life. We are a community made up of growers and sustainers, we are Wakarusa!

However, we must not just relish our standing history; we need to look ahead, plan for tomorrow, and prepare to grow and thrive. Through a detailed look at our community today, we can define our successes and deficiencies to prepare us to grow our future. Our Plan is meant to lay the foundation to help us know where we are at and provide the framework through our vision and core values to guide where we want to go. Wakarusa's community profile is organized by our core values, highlighting our assets, opportunities, and challenges.





# QUALITY HOMETOWN LIVING

Quality hometown living represents Wakarusa's attractive community features that sustain their residents' and take pride maintaining. Residents are drawn to Wakarusa because of its deep roots as a welcoming, safe, family-friendly community to all persons. Wakarusa's spirit and pride are expressed through its family values of working together as a "community of one," setting aside oneself's motives to build up their brother or sister to see each other grow and thrive. These attractive features include its many neighborhoods, faith-based institutions, the public library, and Wa-Nee Community Schools. But the heart of what makes these features attractive is the people who call Wakarusa home. The passion and welcoming spirit of its residents will be the cornerstone of growing Wakarusa's future.



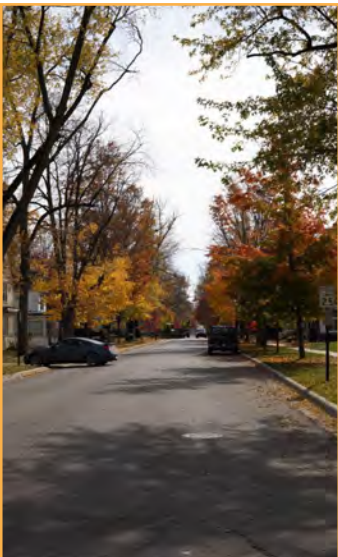
## ASSETS



- The number of churches provides a variety of denominations that brings in many people
- Small town/hometown feel
- Safe, clean, and quiet community
- Forming relationships with neighbors
- Faith-based and/or social organizations
- Quality schools and Public Library
- Community involvement



## OPPORTUNITIES



- Future housing off Orchard Park Drive area
- Trailer park improvement next to the schools
- Growth through housing and subdivisions
- An abundance of affordable and quality housing
- Educational attainment of a bachelor's degree is higher than the state average but lower than the national average
- Wakarusa experienced about a 10 percent growth in the total population since 2000
- Townhouse style houses
- The people who live and work here and spend their whole day in Wakarusa
- Increase community (social) events for all ages
- More community gathering places
- Multiple opportunities to get around Wakarusa



## CHALLENGES

- The general size of the community limits us on things we can do
- Lack of diversity/entrenched homogeny
- Lack of diversity in community leadership roles and committees
- Need to better educate on how to bring lasting changes to the community
- Lack of opportunities for young people
- Wakarusa’s population may grow to have 243 new people by 2030, and would likely need to consider adding approximately 82 new housing units to support the increase in population
- Wakarusa remains less diverse than Elkhart County in race and ethnicity of the population
- 29 percent of Wakarusa residents are under the age of 19, while 28 percent are above the age of 55
- 4.5 percent of residents under 18 lived in poverty in 2000, which grew to 9.5 percent of residents under 18 living in poverty in 2019
- New housing construction in the past 9 years was below 1 percent compared to 6 percent from 2000 - 2010
- Residents are willing to leave if their spouse/partner/family live elsewhere
- Limited housing options for elderly
- Limited affordable housing (retirement) options
- Have “something” to do for all ages
- Limited nightlife establishments or entertainment options





## STRONG SENSE OF PLACE



Wakarusa understands the value and desire from its community to sustain its rural small town character by not sacrificing the natural beauty of its rural farmlands and open spaces as it served as a foundational “sense of place” element that defines Wakarusa. However, in order to grow deeper roots that sustain Wakarusa’s future, it needs to plan to create additional strong “sense of places.” This includes having inviting and desirable places for its residents to live in, to earn a living, and to have fun, enjoy life, and build lasting memories with their families and friends. Wakarusa’s downtown is a longstanding asset that residents have supported for many years by shopping and dining locally, but desire their downtown to be a more vibrant destination place with additional retail establishments in effort to not have to drive far to regional communities. This was a common drawback identified by residents during community engagement activities. In addition to the downtown, Wakarusa has several prominent entryways into its Town limits like SR 19, Waterford Street, and Elkhart Street that the Town could capitalize to offer a diversity in development types to create additional destination places. Having strong sense of places will provide attractive hang-out places for locals to build memories and relish past ones, and will be drawing features to attract new residents and businesses to call Wakarusa home.



### ASSETS

- High quality streetscapes
- Clean and well-kept properties, downtown image, and streets
- Downtown flowers in the spring and summer time, followed by mums with decorated lamp posts in the fall
- Neighborhood beautification
- Developing this comprehensive plan
- Strong sense of community
- Downtown in general



## OPPORTUNITIES

- More youth and adult events (volunteer)
- Enhance the SR 19 gateway to be more appealing and include elements that catch people's eye and draw them into town
- More art opportunities to draw visitors
- A positive community outlook
- The people who live and work here and spend their whole day in Wakarusa
- We want an attractive entrance into town
- Wakarusa to be a destination
- More restaurants and shops downtown
- Additional new downtown dining with sit-down destination style dining establishments
- Residents being invested in these improvements
- Capitalize on the Heritage Trail through town by adding tourist stops



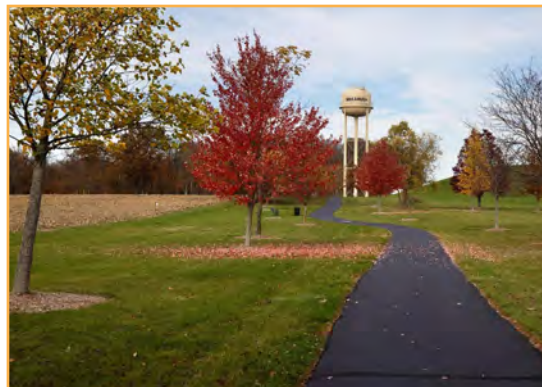
## CHALLENGES

- SR 19 is an eyesore – doesn't represent the beauty of Wakarusa
- Good old boys' feelings in the town
- Traditions and folks are set in their ways
- Money, leaders, and lack of vision
- Being intentional as a community
- Lack of communications between community stakeholders
- Lack of intentional dreamers that follow through on activities
- The community needs to receive fresh ideas frequently with a new set of eyes or perspectives to avoid getting into a "rut"
- Vibrant downtown/ "Main Street"
- Limited downtown retail businesses
- Not all neighborhoods have sidewalks
- Increase the percentage of citizens to "take more ownership" and pride
- Enhanced communication



## PARKS, FESTIVALS, AND TRAILS

Contributing to Wakarusa’s charm and appeal is the quality of life assets in its parks and many community festivals and events. These assets are contributors to the retention of its residents and businesses, tourism draw, and attraction for new residents and new businesses. Wakarusa is home to two community parks; one is located in downtown at the corner of Walnut Street and Harrison Street and the other is Memorial Park next to the elementary school off Washington Street. The downtown park features amenities catering to different young age groups such as a multi-level wooden playground structure, a smaller playground set for younger children, playhouses, tire swings, a basketball court, a pavilion, and a town cabin available to rent for parties and receptions. The crown jewel of Wakarusa’s parks is Memorial Park. It is the largest community park that features a splash pad, Suzie’s Gardens, a disc golf course, trail loop, and a sledding hill that locals can enjoy through the changing seasons. Memorial Park is also the dedicated place for tree plantings contributing to the Town being designated as a Tree City. While the Town’s only multi-use trail exists in Memorial Park, the Town desires to create a multi-use trail network through town connecting to its major destinations, downtown, schools, neighborhoods, and employment centers. However, a trail opportunity the Town can capitalize on is the Elkhart County Heritage Trail that runs through its downtown. The Heritage Trail accentuates the county’s rural landscapes, scenic back roads, and lively communities, voted as “America’s Most Scenic Drives” by USA Today Reader’s Choice and LIFE magazines. This can provide an opportunity for the Town to attract tourism-based businesses and artisans to sell their artworks and increase economic development activities in downtown. Another downtown asset, located on the Heritage Trail, is being home to one of Elkhart County’s Quilt Gardens, adding to the tourism draw to Wakarusa’s downtown. The Town also features numerous events throughout the year for locals to enjoy and connect with their families and friends. The most popular of Wakarusa’s community events is the annual Maple Syrup Festival held in April.





## ASSETS



- Memorial Park: splash pad, sledding hill, ball diamonds, disc golf, and existing trails
- Downtown Park
- Baseball program
- Quilt Garden draws visitors
- Maple Syrup Festival
- Parks and outdoor recreation options
- Park playground equipment
- Wakarusa Historical Museum off Railroad Street
- Elementary school playground
- Scenic rural landscape and trees



## OPPORTUNITIES



- Utilizing the downtown pavilion that will be coming soon
- Community events/festivals
- To have nature walks or hiking trails
- Develop a bike trail network in Wakarusa
- Exercise/fitness classes
- Potential bike path to Nappanee or Goshen connecting to the Pumpkinvine Trail – east side of Wakarusa from SR 19
- Youth recreation options
- Space for folks to gather or host group activities
- Music/concerts
- Organized activities
- Movies in the Park
- Inclusion of pickleball courts





## CHALLENGES

- Lack of a community trail network and other bike amenities
- Seeking recreation or entertainment elsewhere
- Park cleanliness and regulation
- Limited variety in education programs and facilities for parks and recreation



## ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

Access to public services represents the backbone structure that supports the movement and livability of Wakarusa's residents. This includes a connected and accessible street network, provision of high quality utility infrastructure systems, and its public safety services including Police, Fire, and EMS. Wakarusa has one major arterial corridor, SR 19, serving Wakarusa's major employers in the movement of their goods and services with convenient access to regional major transportation routes such as US 20 and the I-80/I-90 Tollroad to the north in Elkhart County and US 6 and US 30 to the south in Elkhart and Kosciusko Counties. Access from SR 19 can provide an opportunity for the Town to provide future tourism opportunities to complement its quality of life amenities of its parks and community festivals and social events by creating quality places in downtown, on SR 19, and Waterford Street. Wakarusa manages and operates its public services that include water and wastewater utility services for its businesses and residents to have quality drinking water and sanitary sewers, and maintenance of its local streets and sidewalks. This is an opportunity for the Town to establish public-private partnerships

to work with prospective developers to provide public infrastructure systems to help offset the costs to develop while ensuring public services adequately serve Wakarusa's new and current residents and businesses. While the infrastructure systems are aging, there is available capacity to support future development and maximize the usage of its current systems. The Town also provides public safety services to the community enhancing the appeal of being a safe, family-friendly community and providing quality services to Wakarusa's employers and residents.





## ASSETS

- Top-notch schools in the community
- Plenty of water/wastewater capacity
- Public safety services (Fire, Police, EMS)
- Utility and public services (Water, Sewer, Trash, Streets)
- Healthcare Providers and Programs
- Town recycling center and compost area



## OPPORTUNITIES

- Convenient access to SR 19
- Enhance the Public Library's technology services for online renewal, reservations, etc.



## CHALLENGES

- Taxes from TIF
- SR 19's heavy traffic use
- Lack of high-speed internet service
- Continue to offer a Town recycling center and compost area
- Need a fitness center
- Losing the downtown Beacon Clinic will limit access to healthcare providers
- Adult ongoing education







## LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Wakarusa is a welcoming community to live and work in and has many assets and opportunities to appeal to residents and employers. Wakarusa's downtown is a long-standing asset that showcases some of Wakarusa's popular local businesses including the Wakarusa Dime



Store and Cook's Pizza as well as other popular tourist attractions like the Heritage Trail and its Quilt Garden. The popular Maple Syrup Festival and other social events are held in downtown that provides an opportunity for tourists to support the local downtown businesses. Downtown is also home to other thriving businesses that provide diversity in the needs and services of residents to support on a daily basis. However, there are limited opportunities in retail businesses that residents would desire for their ideal downtown experience. This includes a limited diversity in quality sit-down restaurants, coffee shops, and boutique stores. Though it is an asset, the Town desires to continue to build on its uniqueness and create a thriving and vibrant downtown that offers one of a kind experiences with diversity in housing options and local retail businesses in a mixed-used village setting, and quality of life amenities and gathering spaces to enhance residents' entertainment value.

Another opportunity for the Town to capitalize on is its location in Elkhart County, the RV capital of the world. Nearly one in three jobs in Elkhart County are in the RV manufacturing industry with some of these major RV industries have branches in Wakarusa. These include Thor Industries and Forest River. As a leading industry sector for this region, it gives an opportunity for residents to have access to higher paying jobs. Although this is a leading industry for Elkhart County, there is a need to diversify the



local job market to attract more jobs in advanced manufacturing, technology, robotics, and professional services as the nation shifts to support these industries to maintain its global competitiveness. This is an opportunity for the Town to partner with the Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation to attract jobs in these high-growing industries. This would help balance the regional and local job market to not be reliant solely on the positive gains of the RV industry to withstand future economic hardships. To support these diversification efforts, Elkhart County

is planning to construct an 80-mile dark fiber optic infrastructure system connecting its communities with a proposed route to serve Wakarusa down SR 19. Provision of this infrastructure would help attract technology-based jobs with opportunities for businesses to locate in downtown aiding to the mixed-use urban setting the Town envisions. Additionally, the Town could create incubator spaces to attract entrepreneurs and help them with business start-ups. This will expand job opportunities and enhance the skills of the workforce.



## ASSETS



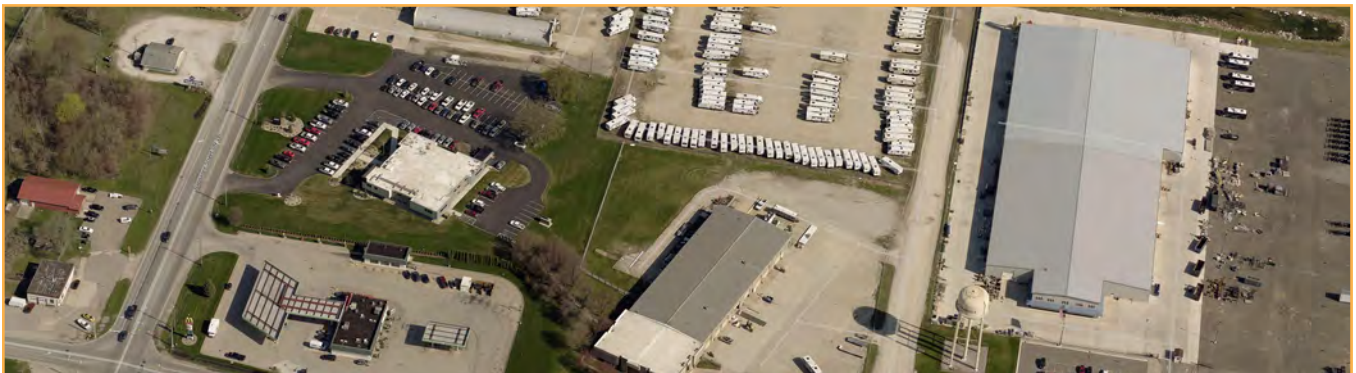
- Popular downtown business such as the Wakarusa Dime Store and Cooks Pizza
- Downtown in general
- Successful local businesses in downtown such as New to You, Wakarusa Pro Hardware Store, and Larimer Furniture, and along Waterford Street such as Richmond Feeds



## OPPORTUNITIES



- Lots of interest in having a coffee shop
- 123 S. Elkhart Street building – revamping the underutilized property
- Thriving and diversity in downtown businesses
- Unique, high quality businesses
- More restaurants and shops downtown
- No empty stores or buildings
- Social media promotion
- Better promotion and marking of public parking
- Later hour businesses
- Higher quality family dining
- Additional new downtown dining with sit-down destination style dining establishments
- Variety of dining, shopping, and entertainment establishments
- Food trucks
- Have the Chamber leverage its influence to attract and maintain businesses





## CHALLENGES

- Limited downtown retail businesses
- Need for additional parking in downtown
- 123 S. Elkhart Street building in downtown
- The Industrial Drive area is perceived as junky and unappealing
- Potential environmental concern at Waterford Street and SR 19
- Raymond's building off SR 19
- The Beacon medical facility in downtown leaving
- Industrial park vibe/feeling
- Small population means a small consumer base to support new and existing businesses
- Traffic/population standards by chain restaurants
- Lack of committed investors to back development/new businesses
- There is a limited diversity of job opportunities outside of the manufacturing industries in the area
- The average Wakarusa commute time is 22 minutes which likely indicates that residents are leaving the town to access jobs or daily services elsewhere in the region
- Limited downtown retail businesses
- Develop dining establishments and a coffee shop
- Develop after-hour places for conversations and gathering places
- Weekend vibrancy
- Fitness opportunities





# 3

## Growing Wakarusa's Future

### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Wakarusa's plans to grow its future by creating vibrant places, diverse housing options, enhancing its parks, and supporting its local businesses while retaining its small town charm and rural scenic character.

Wakarusa's vision statement speaks of who the community is and would like to become, and as a community is committed to making this vision a reality. The framework for realizing Wakarusa's vision is illustrated in the Future Development Concept Map that displays where Wakarusa would like to see new development and/or reinvestment, as well as the desired types of development. This is reinforced by the character areas and the transformative priority action strategies. The goal for having the Future Development Concept Map is to be used as a guide for the Town and Elkhart County planners to use to communicate

Wakarusa's vision of the desired development types and their locations to prospective developers to ensure their proposed site plans articulate and achieve the vision.

The Future Development Concept Map was developed collaboratively by the Steering Committee, focus group members, and Wakarusa's residents. This was done through a culmination of efforts throughout the planning process including multiple public input surveys, monthly Steering Committee meetings, and Focus Group Workshops. The first public input survey helped the Steering Committee get an idea of what residents really love and dislike about their

*Wakarusa: Grown from the tradition of neighbors helping neighbors; will intentionally grow for the next generation while maintaining a strong sense of community and small town charm.*

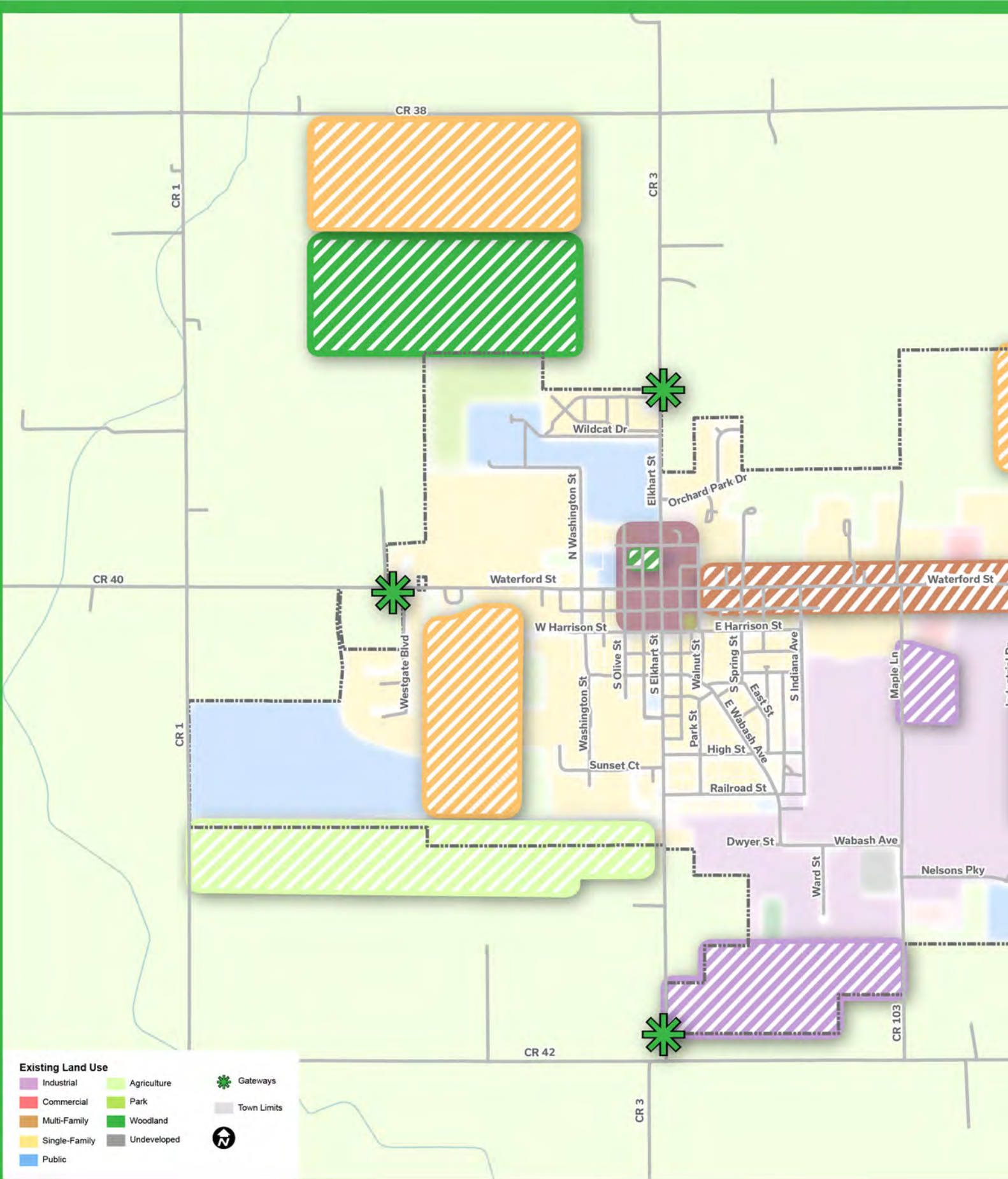
community and challenging areas to address to grow Wakarusa's future. The second public input survey helped the Steering Committee to know of the desired development types the community would like to see added in Wakarusa and where it should be developed. The Focus Group Workshops helped shape the action strategies to support transformational changes to the built environment, supported by the character areas on the map.

The Future Development Concept Map is framed into nine character areas to help the Town and its partners focus on the quality and characteristics of the preferred types of development, provide general guidance for future planning decisions, and support amending Elkhart County's zoning ordinance and the Town's development standards to implement the vision at the parcel level.

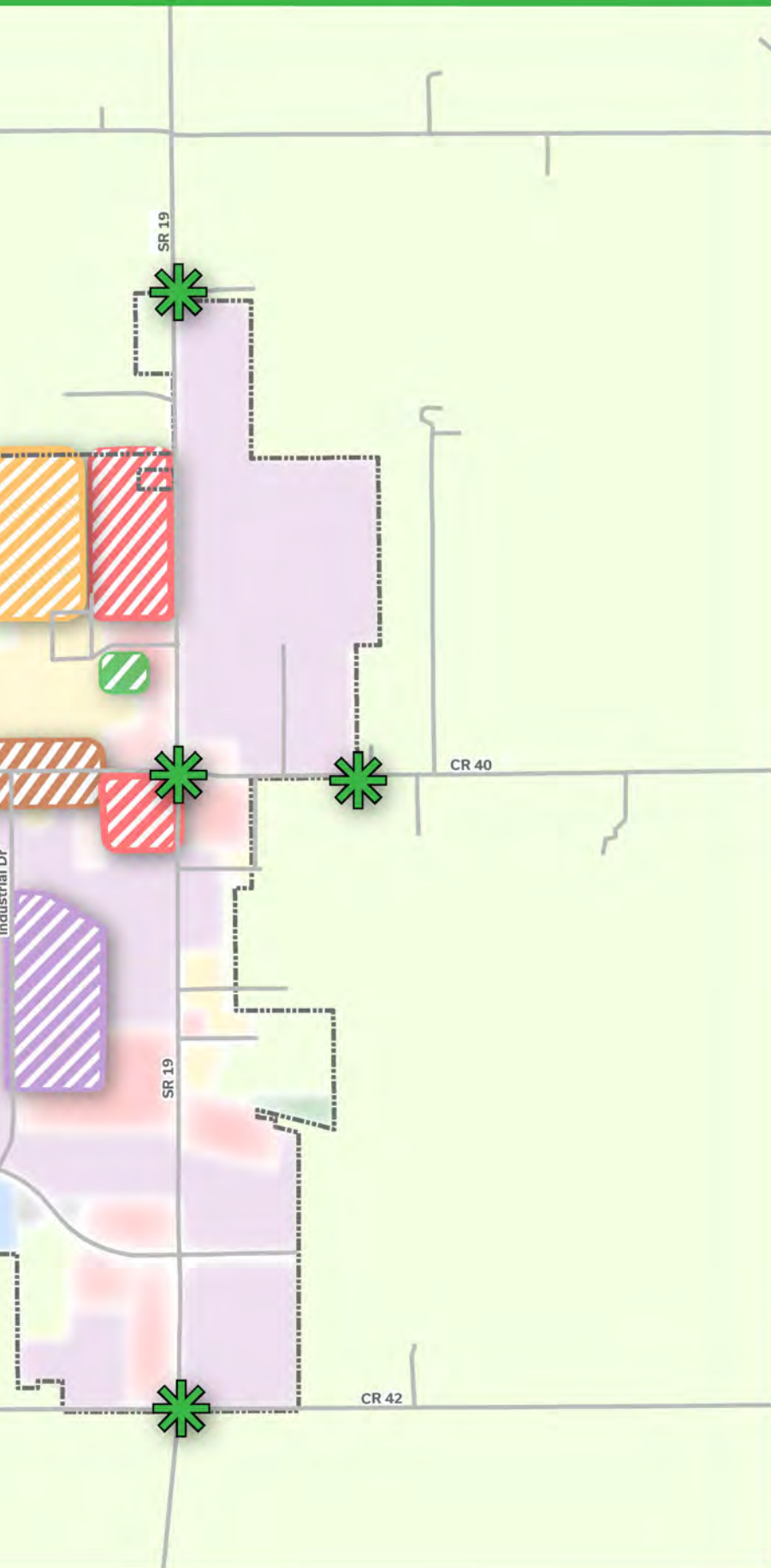
These character areas establish a framework to preserve Wakarusa's small town charm with a rural scenic feel and farmland while encouraging future developments to achieve its core value of a strong sense of place. Descriptions of the nine character areas are defined and illustrated on the subsequent pages following the Future Development Concept Map. These character areas provide strategic direction to attract and retain residents, employers, and visitors by creating places in Wakarusa that instill a sense of place (vibrancy and activity) for residents to enjoy life, shop, and dine.

## The Future Development Character Areas include:

- **Downtown District**
- **Employment Centers**
- **Shopping Center Commercial**
- **Neighborhood Commercial**
- **Mixed Residential**
- **Rural Residential**
- **Parks & Recreation**
- **Rural Management**
- **Gateways**



# FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT MAP



## Development Preferences

### Rural Residential



### Mixed Residential



### Neighborhood-scale Commercial Setting



### Shopping Center Commercial Setting



### Downtown District



### Employment Center



### Parks & Recreation





# OVERVIEW OF CHARACTER AREAS

## DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

The setting and character of Wakarusa’s downtown is envisioned as a vibrant destination to live, work, play, shop, and dine. The downtown will remain how it is along Elkhart Street and Waterford Street but overtime may explore opportunities to increase housing choices to have townhomes or live-work units, additional retail establishments, and local

professional services. The future setting could support a mixed-use village setting that offer unique places to gather with friends and families to share stories, build memories, and relish the moments that shaped our lives. Buildings can include a mixture of neighborhood-scale retail establishments and diverse homes making it easier for residents to be within close proximity to walk to their daily needs. Building facades are also encouraged to be attractive features to enhance the view as individuals walk by. The character of the street is encouraged to be lined with trees to enhance the appeal of the street, with ample street lighting and places to sit and gather.



## SHOPPING CENTER COMMERCIAL

The shopping center commercial character area reflects the Town’s desire to add new regional-scale commercial retail and service-based businesses. This would support the day-to-day retail (shopping) and service needs of Wakarusa’s residents, visitors, and employees. The Town visions this character area be located on the SR 19 corridor to complement the existing uses and character. The building scale is desired to be single to two-story buildings with a style that reflects the current setting at the Business Center off Kemar Street and SR 19 to retain the Town’s small town charm. New development proposals are encouraged to have small-scale site designs with connections to adjoining properties

internally with limited driveway access onto major roads like SR 19 to minimize traffic congestion and maintain a proper flow of traffic. Surface parking lots are encouraged to be placed in the rear of the building with business front facades face SR 19. Minimal frontage parking enhances the appeal of the corridor and makes a more comfortable walking experience. Sidewalks are encouraged to provide pedestrian access and







connections between new developments and existing developments. Developers are encouraged to prepare site designs with attractive landscape materials and a diversity of selections in plant species to enhance the appeal and reduce major impacts from invading pests. Examples of desirable uses could include professional offices, general retail stores, restaurants, and service repair businesses to name a few.

## NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

The neighborhood commercial character area is envisioned as a vibrant living and working setting that is inviting and walkable with a low-scale development pattern. The Town’s future vision is to add the neighborhood-scale commercial along corridors such as Waterford Street and Elkhart Street to provide a harmonious transition



between major activity centers or areas with an allowed higher density pattern with multiple tenants in a building such as what could be allowed in downtown and the shopping center commercial character area along SR 19. This character area reflects the desire to preserve Wakarusa’s small town character that is the current setting while enhancing the activity level to create vibrant walkable corridors to attract all types of families and individuals. The types of uses that could be allowed in this character area are a mixture

of single-family residential homes and local commercial businesses. Single-family homes should provide diversity in style and affordability that could include detached-style homes or attached-style homes like townhomes. Townhomes would be appropriate in spaces as you approach the downtown or SR 19 with detached-style homes in between. New local commercial businesses could include retail boutique stores, higher-quality sit-down dining establishments with outdoor seating, coffee shops, as well as professional service offices to support the daily needs of residents in the adjacent neighborhoods. Flexibility in this character could also support live-work uses where businesses could be allowed to operate out

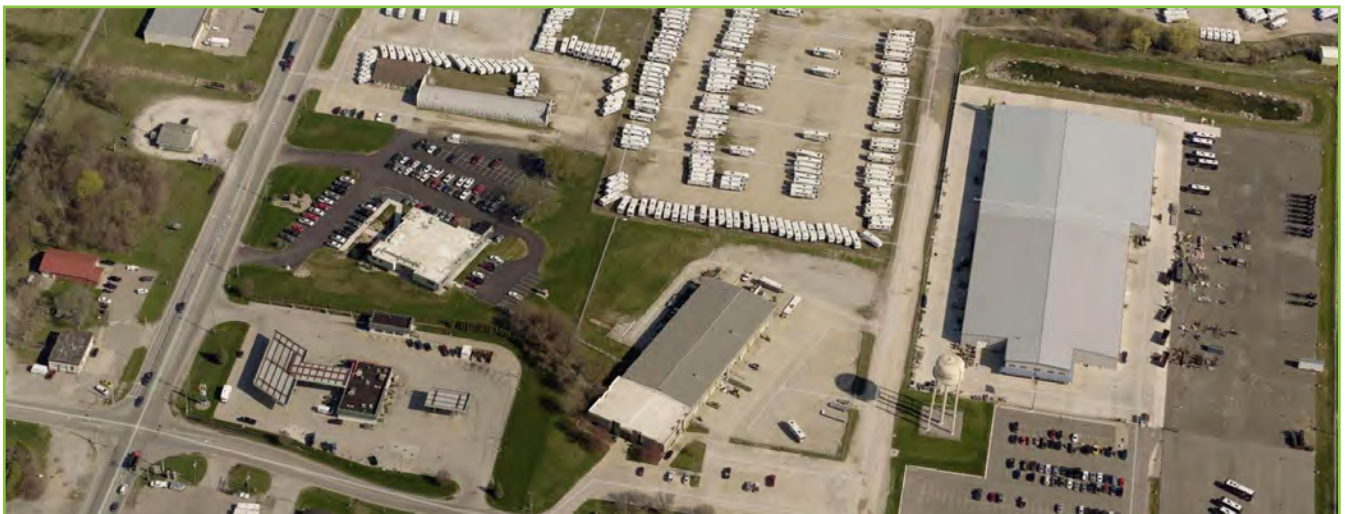


of the home. The building scale is encouraged to be one to two-story buildings owned by a single user that retains the existing character of the small town charm. The character of new buildings should reflect place-making components with buildings oriented towards the street, built-up or close to the sidewalk, and surface parking lots for businesses are encouraged to be located in the rear of the buildings to allow interaction and pedestrian-scale activity at the front of the buildings, with tree-lined

streets and landscaping. This style of development with smaller-scale buildings upfront and landscaping along the street will provide an inviting and comfortable feel for pedestrians to walk alongside and interact with their neighbors. Additionally, the street design in this character could have traffic-calming elements such as on-street parking (where feasible), bike lanes, street furniture, and landscaping. These elements will help reduce vehicle speeds to enhance the safety of pedestrians and motorists.

## EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

The employment center character area represents where the Town would like to accommodate major employers wanting to do business in Wakarusa. This includes supporting existing businesses to help expand their operations and grow their building footprints, add new manufacturing centers, and training facilities. The employment center character area is envisioned to expand the existing employment centers off Maple Lane, Industrial Drive, Nelsons Parkway, and SR 19 that includes major businesses like Thor Industries, Keystone RV, Forest River RV, Prime Time Manufacturing, and Horizon Transport. Employers can capitalize on these locations with convenient access to SR 19 and then to regional major state routes such as US 20 and I-80/I-90 Tollroad to the north, and US 6 and US 30 to the south. New employment uses could include large-scale manufacturing facilities, fabrication assemblies, light industrial centers, flex space buildings, and corporate offices. New commercial businesses could also be allowed to be compatible with the regional-scale shopping center commercial uses to support the tourism, retail, and service-based industries. The Town wants to enhance business development to help local businesses and entrepreneurs grow and thrive. Wakarusa's employment centers will support the expansion and upgrading of its existing infrastructure systems to support the growing needs of its businesses and maximize the use of the available capacity. This will also support Elkhart County's plans to construct their dark fiber optic infrastructure down SR 19 to support future economic development to diversify the regional job market to attract new technology-based businesses and advanced manufacturers.



## MIXED RESIDENTIAL

Wakarusa envisions providing a diversity of housing choices and living styles to attract new families and individuals in differing life stages and housing needs. The mixed residential character area reflects the Town's



desire to preserve its rural small town character in terms of housing styles while accommodating diversity in housing choices and price-points to enhance its attractiveness to prospective homeowners. In order to attract new families and individuals, the Town understands the need to accommodate these new residents with multiple housing choices and styles. New residential development is envisioned to be offered in several targeted areas on the fringe of the community to capitalize on the scenic views of its picturesque rural

setting while also minimizing the necessity to develop prime-active farmlands to add new housing.

The first area for new housing development is on the west side of town south of Waterford Street. This area is envisioned to support a mixture of single-family detached homes in smaller lot and larger lot settings to accommodate the different preferences of new residents who are looking for different size yards in a rural residential setting. This development pattern would encourage developers to conserve a percentage of open spaces to complement the character of the adjacent farmlands and larger lot residential homes and minimize the impacts of developing on prime farmlands.

The second area for new housing development is on the east side of town near SR 19, behind Grandma's Pantry. This area is envisioned to offer a denser living environment with a mixture of townhomes or apartments and smaller lot single-family detached homes. This could provide an alternative residential setting than on the west side of town with single-family detached homes spread out in a rural setting to an "urban" mixed-use setting to allow more living units to be constructed vertically as a means to preserve the surrounding farmlands and open spaces around Wakarusa. This may include constructing buildings with residential units located above ground-floor retail, restaurants, or professional office spaces or build single-family attached homes in the form of townhomes. Creating a residential setting such as this off SR 19 would complement the



envisioned character of the shopping center commercial character area to create residential homes with walking distance to commercial businesses that could cater to residents' shopping, dining, and entertainment needs. Planning for this type of development would help minimize the future impacts to the traffic volumes on SR 19 by creating developments that support biking and walking versus driving for short-distance trips.

## RURAL RESIDENTIAL

Complementing the need for new housing to support prospective families and individuals with the mixed residential character area is the rural



residential character area. This character area reflects the Town’s desire to add new housing while preserving its rural small town character that is in context with the surrounding farmlands and large lot residential homes. The Town envisions this character area to be located in two areas, outside Wakarusa’s town limits. The first area would be planned on the southwest side of town between CR 1 and CR 3. The second area would be planned off CR 38.

## PARKS AND RECREATION

Wakarusa has two parks; Memorial Park and downtown park that the community values and is committed to ensuring these assets and future amenities are maintained at high quality. The Town desires to add a new park space in the mixed residential and shopping center commercial character areas off SR 19 and Kemar Street. The Town also would like to expand Memorial Park north of the town limits to add new recreational amenities enhancing the attractiveness and usage of this community park and be an accessible expansion to serve the potential future housing development off CR 38. The Town would also desire to see developers set aside a percentage of their site plans to add a neighborhood-scale park in new residential developments to serve those new residents and small-scale passive-style park spaces in new commercial developments, where feasible, to provide opportunities for workers to go for walks during their breaks throughout the workday. The Town is creating a 5-year parks master plan to guide investments to enhance its parks and recreational amenities and establish new education or community programs. Additionally, the Town will establish a Parks Board to oversee these initiatives and the implementation of the parks master plan.



## GATEWAYS

Gateways are meant to be inviting and attractive entrances into Wakarusa. These are the prominent entry-ways that should express Wakarusa’s rural small town character, its open and welcoming community spirit, and be spaces that serve as a sense of “arrival” into Wakarusa town limits.

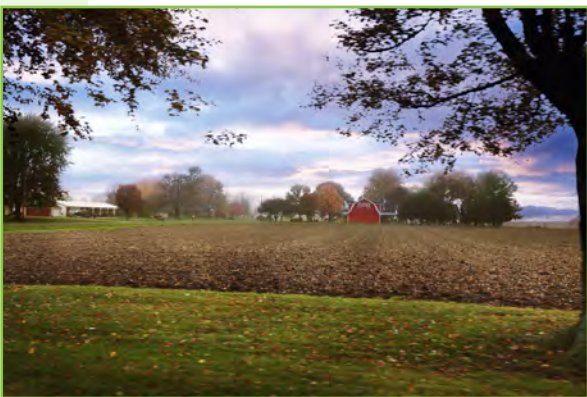
These entry-ways include the corridors of SR 19, Waterford Street/CR 40, and Elkhart Street/CR 3. These entrances are vital to support economic development and attracting prospective new businesses and residents to Wakarusa. For these gateways, the Town desires to build attractive entrances at Waterford Street/CR 40 (west side) and CR 3 from a landscape perspective that expresses Wakarusa’s history of being known as a “growing” community of plants and gardens. The Town desires the other gateways at SR 19 and Waterford Street/CR 40 (east side) to not only include attractive landscape designs but also include attractive buildings and wayfinding signs that express the entry to the shopping center commercial and neighborhood commercial character areas so these entrances are intriguing and inviting destination places. The Town envisions these entry-ways at SR 19 and Waterford Street/CR 40 (east side) to support the integration of residential homes and commercial businesses in a denser mixed-use setting. Street design should accommodate users to have safe and accessible options to walk or bike for their short-distance trips. Site designs should support an attractive and safe pedestrian environment with connections between the sidewalk and front door of the buildings.



## RURAL MANAGEMENT

Surrounding Wakarusa is the rural landscape that its residents have come to love and enjoy about living in Wakarusa. The Town understands it needs to grow to ensure everyday services, jobs, and quality of life amenities are accessible but growth doesn’t necessarily mean expanding its boundary limits. Growth can mean maximizing the capacity of the current utility systems by redeveloping properties of opportunity within the downtown, along SR 19 or Waterford Street, or within the industrial

areas south of Waterford Street and north of Nelsons Parkway. The primary uses in the Rural Management character area should be farmlands to allow crop production and raising livestock and rural large-lot single-family homes. Although isolated rural residential properties exist, all other non-agriculture uses are encouraged to first consider developing in Wakarusa’s downtown, in the employment industrial areas, or in the shopping center commercial areas planned for SR 19. This will help the Town achieve its vision to allow future development while preserving its small town charm, rural open spaces, and farmlands.





## FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIONS

While the future development concept map illustrates the types of developments the Town would like to see built in the future, to support these future developments the Town also plans to improve its utility infrastructure systems and transportation connections. This direction is supported in the Access to Public Services core value to encourage developers to invest in targeted redevelopment areas that are already serviced by the Town's infrastructure systems. This will help the Town and Elkhart County to first consider making land-use decisions that maximize the use of the available space of the Town's current infrastructure systems before expanding municipal boundaries and infrastructure systems to service new development areas. This will support enhancing Wakarusa's downtown and major corridors like Waterford Street, Elkhart Street, and SR 19. The following details outlining the infrastructure improvements and transportation connections are illustrated in the Future Development Infrastructure Map on the subsequent pages.

### INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

While the Town has ample capacity to support new developments the existing utility systems are aging and in need to receive major upgrades to handle the new users. The Town plans to improve its water infrastructure system by upgrading its wells and increase the size of its water mains. The wastewater infrastructure system includes upgrades to its wastewater lift stations off CR 40 on the west side of Town and off SR 19. Additionally, televising the wastewater system in effort to enhance the maintenance plans. Additional infrastructure improvements include Elkhart County's plans to construct an 80-mile dark fiber (high-speed internet) network loop in the county connecting to its communities such as Wakarusa to expand economic development opportunities throughout the county. This effort supports the South Bend-Elkhart regional economic efforts to diversify its industry clusters like manufacturing and transportation sectors to offer an expansion of job opportunities in emerging, high growing, and high paying national industries in technology, advanced manufacturing, robotics, and smart-technology infrastructure. This project will diversify the county's and the region's local economy to be highly competitive and resilient through unforeseeable economic hardships. Elkhart County plans to construct the dark fiber network down SR 19 serving Wakarusa and potentially to Nappanee.

## TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIONS

Serving the desired character areas illustrated in the Future Development Concept Map is the transportation connections. Future improvements to the Town's transportation system seek to enhance the mobility and accessibility between these character areas to have adequate street designs, sidewalks, and biking amenities such as bike lanes and/or trails. Having efficient and accessible transportation connections contributes to Wakarusa's quality of life and appeal to want to live and work in Wakarusa. The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) assigns a road's functional classification based on the level of street accessibility, the character of the road, traffic volumes, and travel speeds. The Town currently has two road functional classifications that include arterial and collector corridors.

While the Town does not have plans to add new roads, the Town does desire to create attractive entrances or gateways at several key locations on these arterial and collector transportation corridors. As previously mentioned in the Gateways character area, the intent is to express Wakarusa's rural small town character and its open and welcoming community spirit to mark a sense of arrival into the Wakarusa community. Therefore the following are the Town's aspirations on what the desired look and feel should be for these arterial and collector transportation corridors.



**Arterial Corridor** - Arterial corridors receive their classification as these types of roads are intended to carry a higher frequency of travelers through communities and connect them to higher capacity regional roadways like the I-80/I-90 Toll Road, US 20, US 6, or US 30. Speed limits can range from 35 mph in urban areas to 55 mph in rural areas. SR 19 is the designated arterial corridor in Wakarusa and serves as one of its gateways. The Town desires for this corridor to have decorative “Welcome to Wakarusa” entry signs with landscaping and lighting that expresses Wakarusa’s character as well as wayfinding signs directing travelers to Wakarusa’s popular destination places. The streetscape of this corridor, while owned by the state, is desired to have appealing and traffic calming features of street trees, planters, sidewalks, decorative lamp posts, and street furniture.

**Collector Corridor** - Collector corridors receive their classification because these roads provide access between higher capacity roadways like arterial roads and local roads. Speed limits can range from 25 mph to 35 mph. Waterford Street (CR 40) and Elkhart Street (CR 3) are the two collector corridors in Wakarusa providing travelers with direct connections to SR 19, US 6, and SR 331. These collector corridors in Wakarusa serve as key links to its community facilities such as its public library, parks, and schools. These collector corridors also serve as the other gateways into Wakarusa. Similar to the designs of the gateways on SR 19, the Town supports these entrances to have decorative “Welcome to Wakarusa” entry signs with landscaping and lighting. The street design is envisioned to retain its current scenic character and calming effect of having street trees and sidewalks. Additionally, the Town desires to provide a trail network along portions of Waterford Street connecting to Memorial Park, downtown, neighborhoods, commercial establishments off SR 19, and to regional trail connections to the Town of Bremen, and the cities of Nappanee and Goshen.
















Other transportation improvements are envisioned for Wakarusa’s local roads. This includes continuing to proactively maintain the local road pavement conditions to extend the useful life of these valuable assets connecting residents from their homes to their destinations. As mentioned in the arterial corridor, the Town would like to partner with INDOT to enhance the streetscape of SR 19 to be more visually appealing as a major gateway into Wakarusa. Another location the Town would like to enhance the streetscape is Industrial Drive. This local road serves Wakarusa’s major employers to have connections to SR 19 but it is not appealing to drive on and is viewed as a hindrance in attracting new residents or businesses. The Town would like to partner with the property owners to help beautify the image of this street by adding street trees and sidewalks. Wakarusa imagines enhancing its quality of life by offering bicycle and pedestrian connections to its key destinations and community assets. This includes filling gaps in the sidewalk network as well as adding bike lanes on suitable streets. The Town would like to see the safety of students accessing the elementary and middle schools be enhanced by adding sidewalks on Wildcat Drive. Additional connections is desired through creating a trail network highlighted on the Future Development Infrastructure Map in the dotted green lines. This new network would link residents to Memorial Park, schools, downtown, and the shopping centers on SR 19 as well as to regional communities such as the Town of Bremen, and the cities of Nappanee and Goshen.





# FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

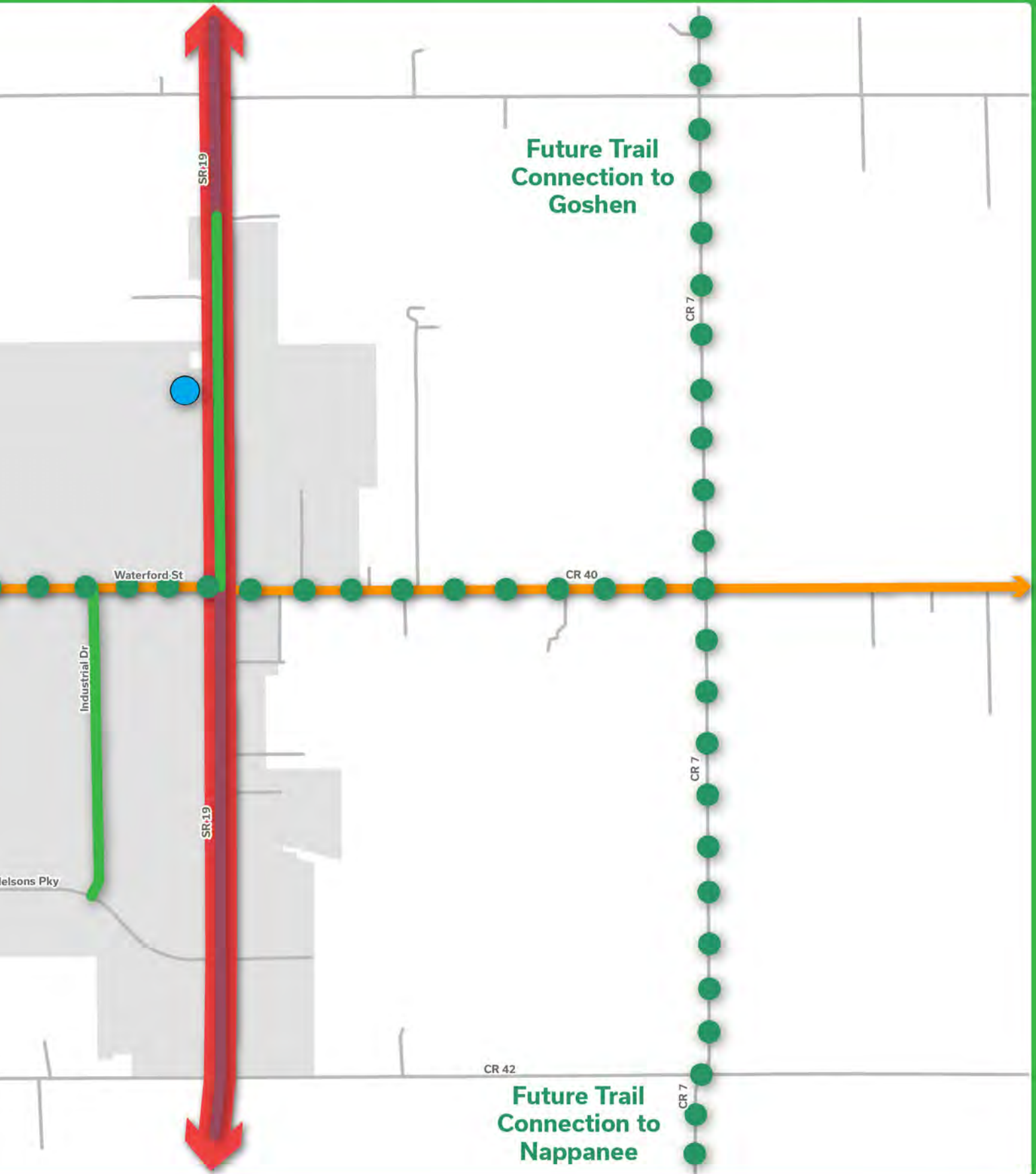
## Proposed Infrastructure Improvements

-  Broadband - Dark Fiber Optic (Elkhart County)
-  Water system improvements
-  Streetscape Enhancements
-  New sidewalk
-  Multi-use Trail
-  Utility Improvements
-  Arterial Road Corridor
-  Collector Road Corridor
-  Local Roads
-  Town Limits
-  Town Parks



**Future Trail  
Connection to  
Bremen**

# DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE MAP





# 4

## Measuring Wakarusa's Success

### PRIORITY ACTION PROGRAM

This section of the plan outlines the steps of how Wakarusa plans to implement its vision to grow its future. The meaning for Grow Wakarusa's Future involves many facets beyond simply growing the town limits or growing its population or number of businesses. To Grow Wakarusa's Future also takes into consideration that the Town desires to be more "forward-thinking" than what's traditionally been done. Yes, the Town desires to grow in size in terms of population or attracting new local businesses or major employers, but the Town also desires to grow in its government relations with its residents to enhance the level of communication or strengthening its neighborhoods to foster deeper relationships to inspire residents to instill a sense of pride and inspire them to want to give back to their community. To Grow Wakarusa's Future also means to retain the welcoming spirit and encourage that all types of residents have living options and lifestyles available to them.

To Grow Wakarusa's Future, implementation will be most successful through the establishment of lasting partnerships between the Town and community leaders, regional organizations, advocacy groups, and most importantly its residents. Additionally, monitoring and tracking the progress of the Plan will aid in seeing measurable results. Part of this planning process involved a series of prioritization activities through a community engagement survey and focus groups workshops to guide the Steering Committee to know the most prudent course of action the Town can see incremental transformational changes to grow Wakarusa's future over the next 10 years. This involved convening Focus Group Workshops by the five core values as these values represent key aspects

of who Wakarusa is and inspires to be. Focus Groups were represented by the Steering Committee and key stakeholders who were perceived as knowledgeable individuals and professionals with expertise in a given core value area. The outcome of the workshops led to the creation of Wakarusa’s action program, complete with the action strategies that address the major opportunities and challenges to grow Wakarusa’s future.



Now that the Town has an action plan, the Steering Committee sought input from the community to know which of these strategies within these core values should be the Town’s top priorities to see transformational changes in the next two years. This was accomplished through an input survey, which 130 residents responded to that shared what they thought should be the top priorities for each of the core values. The following list of action strategies was determined by the community to be Wakarusa’s top priorities, known as the Priority Action Program. The other supporting action strategies for the core values are located in the Appendix.

## PRIORITY ACTION PROGRAM

### QUALITY HOMETOWN LIVING

- Work with downtown partners to have quarterly downtown social events for all ages
- Expand community engagement efforts to enhance the communication of the Town’s vision and for the community to have advance notice of events, programs, and public meetings

### STRONG SENSE OF PLACE

- Develop and adopt street design standards to allow new local streets to include amenities such as street trees, landscaping, curb and gutter, lighting, and adequate parking where feasible
- Design and construct attractive “gateways” or entrances at prominent entry points that welcomes people into Wakarusa with features such as landscaping, benches, public art, informational kiosks, and small parking lots

## **PARKS, FESTIVALS, AND TRAILS**

- Collaborate with Bike Elkhart County and neighboring communities on the potential to create a regional trail that connects to their parks, recreation facilities, and local trails
- Work with industrial property owners and supporting organizations to identify ways to beautify surrounding industrial properties
- Promote the new downtown Doc's Pavilion constructed at Waterford Street and Olive Street coming 2022

## **ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES**

- Continue to offer the Town's composting services and explore the feasibility to continue to offer recycling services
- Promote Elkhart County's dark fiber (high-speed internet service) to major employers, small businesses, internet service providers, and residents and actively encourage users to sign up

## **LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

- Promote mixed-use style development in targeted areas to support vibrant and walkable places by having quality dining, shopping, and other retail establishments
- Evaluate incentives to attract and retain targeted industries as well as businesses that promote tourism, expand entertainment, dining opportunities, or provide shopping options

## EVALUATING OUR ACTION PROGRAM

A key component to the success of Wakarusa’s action plan is to continue the momentum generated from this community-based planning effort to regularly evaluate and monitor the progress of the priority action program. Establishing a method to monitor the progress will help keep key decision-makers such as the Town Council, Elkhart County Planning Department, and its residents stay informed of a project’s progress and milestones, aspects in the project development that are working as well as the aspects that could be improved or modified. Additionally, this will contribute to the Town to review and update the Plan to address the evolving needs of the community and capitalize on resources that come available.

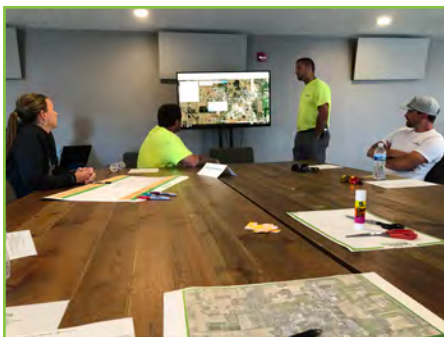
### Focus Group Meetings

The Town and the Steering Committee understood this feat and brainstormed the best method that could work for Wakarusa to ensure the momentum continues without also generating fatigue or a sense of overwhelming to implement these strategies. It was determined to continue to convene the focus groups to be the leaders in implementing these action strategies as they represented Wakarusa’s core values with an even more diverse representation of the community than the Steering Committee. This broader representation can help have a greater impact by having multiple groups working simultaneously to implement the strategies that pertain to their core value rather than relying on a select few town leaders to be the sole implementers of all the strategies. The Steering Committee suggested that focus groups could designate a chair and organize members to get together quarterly throughout the year with a general mission of establishing project milestones and/or deadlines to see a project through to completion. Additional accountability could take the form of preparing a progress report that could describe what’s been accomplished, challenges, and methods to address those challenges.



### Role of the Town of Wakarusa

The intent of this Plan is to serve as the Town’s guiding policy document when making land design development decisions as well as aid the Town with prioritizing capital expenditures with public infrastructure improvements. While it is envisioned for the focus groups to serve as the lead implementers, it is advised that the focus groups regularly update the Town Manager and the Wakarusa Town Council to keep everyone aware of what’s being worked on to inform on the progress of a project’s development, support the Council’s decision with establishing future budget priorities, and even be an opportunity to brainstorm the best way to respond to arising issues with projects or to create future plans addressing the evolving needs of the community.



Community engagement was a vital component through the development of this Plan and it doesn't need to stop there. Another role of the Town is to maintain an open dialogue with its residents encouraging them to get involved to help with the implementation efforts. It would be for the Town's benefit to be at the forefront actively communicating the Town's vision to grow Wakarusa's future with its residents, business leaders, private investors, Town boards or committees, and community organizations to ensure all parties are aware of the direction that Wakarusa is heading. Communication methods are framed with the Quality Hometown Living core value and are identified as a top priority for the group, mentioned in the Priority Action Program, to expand the Town's community engagement efforts for the community to have advance notice of events, programs, and public meetings.

## TOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

### Zoning Ordinance

Collaboration on the progress of the projects doesn't have to end with just the focus groups and the town government. Collaboration should also happen with regional partners such as the Elkhart County Planning Department. The Elkhart County Planning Department is commissioned to provide planning services to the local rural communities in Elkhart County who do not have the technical capacity to manage land use planning or subdividing of land through the administrating of a zoning ordinance.

The purpose of a zoning ordinance is to govern the subdividing of lands, regulate the uses on the land in terms of scale, intensity, and appearance, and implement the land use policies from the comprehensive plan. Administrating a zoning ordinance is the most common tool that a community can use to implement the vision and direction of the comprehensive plan by allowing the types of uses that can be developed in a given area and regulate that the character of the development and provision of services or amenities in the site plan achieve the vision outlined in the Future Development Concept Map. Unlike the comprehensive plan that sets the vision for how the community desires the land should look and operate, the zoning ordinance then implements that vision by governing the development at the parcel level. However, the comprehensive plan and zoning do not always operate harmoniously as they are accompanied by constant changes in the real estate market, differences in community desires, and town leaders.

Wakarusa is unique in that unlike other towns in Elkhart County, Wakarusa does have adopted development standards that serve as an overlay to the Elkhart County's Zoning Standards that the Town and Elkhart County adhere to in reviewing site plans. The Town established a Technical Review Committee with the sole responsibility to review incoming site plan proposals to ensure they comply with the standards and the plans achieve harmonious appearance to the context of the area and





enhance the value of the surrounding properties, and submit a report of recommendations to the Elkhart County Planning Department. However, the challenge became evident that the development standards were designed to be overlay standards only for certain areas of Wakarusa like the SR 19 corridor as a response to control development proposals to ensure they are appealing uses being on a key entryway into Wakarusa. Additional challenges exist in that the standards were written as more architectural review standards and didn't provide guidance on what would be allowable land uses and were adopted in 2009.

These standards should be updated following the adoption of this Plan to establish zoning standards that are consistent with and representative for each of the character areas highlighted in the Future Development Concept Map. The Town Manager, the Strong Sense of Place focus group chair, and the Wakarusa Technical Review Committee should collaborate with Elkhart County Planners to review and amend the Town's development standards to be easier to administer by the Technical Review Committee and represents the vision established in the Future Development Concept Map.

### Capital Improvement Plan

The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is another tool the Town of Wakarusa can use to implement the comprehensive plan. The purpose of the CIP is a municipality's strategic plan that outlines what the municipality will be allocating their general funds towards to plan, budget, and finance the purchasing of equipment and/or construction of capital improvement projects within a five to 10-year period. Eligible projects include constructing large capital infrastructures such as roads or utilities, Town facilities, and parks, equipment, or other fixed assets. All projects should then be reviewed, prioritized, and programmed with cost estimates and funding mechanisms, into the Town's capital budget for each fiscal year. A capital budget is the Town's annual budget that lists projects to be implemented in the current fiscal year. Therefore, the CIP is updated annually to reflect shifting priorities, emerging issues, changes in technology, and alterations from projected revenue. The CIP allows the Town to weigh project costs and benefits, and analyze the fiscal impacts to prioritize the most beneficial public improvement while staying within budget constraints.

It is important to note that projects listed in the CIP are not necessarily guaranteed to be included in the annual capital budget. Therefore, the Town should analyze all of the projects included in the CIP each year during an update. Additionally, the review of the Comprehensive Plan update should correspond with the preparation of the Town's annual capital budget and CIP. This ensures resources are aligned with proposed changes in the upcoming fiscal year.



## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Many of the action strategies in the comprehensive plan can be implemented through administrative decision-making or Town funded programs. However, others may require outside assistance, in which case the Town may need financial assistance through grant resources. Below are the several funding sources which include Town revenue sources that can be used to finance capital improvement projects or implement non-construction projects.

### General Fund

The Town's General Fund accounts for the revenue collected from all Town enacted funding sources including property taxes, utility fees, and any permits. The General Fund pays for personnel and department operations, with a small percentage available for capital improvements. The amount used for capital improvements is set by the Town Council prior to the adoption of the annual capital budget.

### Land Exactions

An Impact fee is one land exaction tool the Town could use to implement public infrastructure and facilities. Impact fees are intended to require developers to pay a fee, prior to acquiring building permits, to help offset the cost impacts from the new development in order for the Town to efficiently serve the community for public safety, utility services, parks, and transportation. These fees are established based on the capital and operation effects of new development. Currently, the Town does not have an impact fee policy but could coordinate with the Elkhart County Planning Department to review and determine the feasibility to enact such a fee.

Fee-in-Lieu's is another land exaction tool to implement public infrastructure and facilities. They operate differently than impact fees in that they are not based on the impacts of development but the requirement for developers to construct public infrastructure or facilities to serve the area. Fees can be used as subject to final site plan approval, and the Town may work with a developer to pay a fee-in-lieu of constructing the public infrastructure or facility so long as the infrastructure or facility is proportionate and reasonably tied to the development area. Example fee-in-lieu's can be applied for constructing bicycle and pedestrian facilities like sidewalks or trails, and parklands.

### Tax Increment Financing

The Elkhart County Plan Commission established a Tax Increment District for the Town of Wakarusa in 2014 known as the State Road 19 Corridor TIF District. The location for the district covers the industrial and commercial businesses along SR 19, Industrial Drive, Maple Lane, and Nelsons Parkway. The Wakarusa Redevelopment Commission oversees the activities and funds of this TIF district. The establishment of this TIF is to help fund water and sewer improvements to adequately serve businesses in the TIF.

### **Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT)**

The Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT), also known as the County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT) is an optional tax available to all counties in Indiana. Revenue is divided among the county, cities, and towns, and must be used for economic development or public infrastructure projects. Elkhart County has an adopted CEDIT. The Town may use its apportionment as a local match for federal and state projects.

### **Wheel Tax (Local Option Highway User Tax)**

The Local Option Highway User Tax is available to all counties. Elkhart County has been collecting a Wheel Tax since 2004. Distributions are made to the cities and towns. The Town may use its apportionment as a local match for federal and state projects.

### **Motor Vehicle Highway Account (MVHA)**

MVHA revenue is an account of the General Fund of the State of Indiana, which, by statute, is credited with the collection of the first six cents of the motor fuel and fuel use taxes, plus the statutory fees for motor vehicle registration and operation. The State collects these highway user taxes and apportions it back to the local municipalities for administration. The MVHA is the principal source of revenue for the overall operation of street and highway departments. MVHAs uses include the purchase of materials, labor costs, and/or equipment purchases required in the maintenance and construction of streets and roads. The Town may use its apportionment as a local match for federal and state projects.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

A public-private partnership (PPP) is a business relationship between a private-sector company and a government agency for the purpose of completing public projects. PPPs can be used to finance, build, and operate capital projects. The Town could collaborate with the Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation to explore opportunities to market vacant properties that have a good potential to be redeveloped or re-purposed for economic development activities like attracting new businesses, create business incubator spaces, and workforce development.

### **Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT)**

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) administers the federal transportation program with several grant programs available for rural communities like Wakarusa can apply for. INDOT administers the rural call for new local projects to assist towns with constructing transportation projects. Projects can include road reconstruction, safety improvements, sidewalk and ADA improvements, and others eligible under the FAST Act. Communities are required to provide a 20 percent match rate with INDOT providing 80 percent. Another eligible program that Wakarusa can apply for is INDOT's Community Crossings Match

Grant Program (CCMG). CCMG was signed into legislation by former Indiana Governor Mike Pence in March 2016. Instituting CCMG has helped local governments systematically inventory their road and bridge assets, assess the pavement conditions for roads and structural integrity for bridges, and prepare asset management plans. These plans are used as a tool to help local governments evaluate their assets conditions and prioritize improvements, and are a requisite to apply for CCMG funds. Local communities with populations less than 10,000 are required to provide a 25 percent match rate with INDOT providing 75 percent. Eligible projects Wakarusa can pursue are road preventative maintenance, road rehabilitation, or road reconstruction. Wakarusa has regularly applied for CCMG since 2016 and has been successful to receive nearly \$1.1 million, improving over five (5) miles of local roadways. Without the financial assistance from CCMG, these improvements would often take longer for local communities to complete.



### **Economic Development Administration (EDA) Public Works & Economic Adjustment Assistance Program**

EDA's Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program provides communities with financial resources to address their various economic development needs. EDA supports investments that improve a community's infrastructure system to expand economic development opportunities, projects that advance innovation and technology, enhance manufacturing that encourages job creation, job retention, and an increase in private investment. Other priorities include supporting projects that advance equity and inclusion, workforce development, and environmentally-sustainable development. This could be an available resource that Wakarusa could pursue to help fund major infrastructure projects that support economic development activities. EDA also has a Local Technical Assistance Program that the Town or the Wakarusa Chamber of Commerce, or the Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation could partner to help conduct a feasibility study to determine the most feasible solution to implement a potential economic development project such as developing an industrial park or a business incubator. The feasibility study will also help provide a better understanding if the local market would support such an economic development activity. The findings from the feasibility study can better prepare an applicant to pursue an EDA construction grant through their normal Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program or even support for another federal program such as through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Program.



### **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Rural Development Program**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Program provides a Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program to rural communities with no more than 20,000 residents to aid in constructing or improving their utility systems or essential community

facilities such as hospitals, health clinics, schools, public safety buildings, community centers, museums, local food systems, and other community-based initiatives. Additionally, USDA has a Rural Business Development Grant Program that provides technical assistance and training for small rural businesses with fewer than 50 workers and less than \$1 million in gross revenue. Technical assistance can include conducting feasibility studies, business plans, property acquisition, start-up loans, workforce development and training, rural business incubators, entrepreneur training, and economic development. This may be an available resource the Wakarusa Chamber of Commerce could pursue to enhance the support to its local businesses.



### **Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) Quick Impact Place-based (QulP) Grant**

QulP is designed to fund small-scale projects that make a quick community enhancement and transformation of underutilized spaces to spark community conversation and creativity. This grant encourages the establishment and strengthening of partnerships between the Town, residents, community groups and organizations, and businesses. Grants requests must be between \$2,500 and \$5,000 and have a local match of either cash, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both.

### **OCRA's Main Street Organization Program**

OCRA's Main Street designation program is designed to help communities revitalize the economy, appearance, and the image of downtown across Indiana. This designation requires an application to OCRA and the formation of a board of directors. This designations opens up potential funding and technical assistance from OCRA and USA Main Street.

### **Indiana Housing Community Development Authority (IHCDA) Programs**

IHCDA seeks to assist communities to create high quality hometowns that are safe, affordable, and quality housing options. IHCDA promotes, finances, and supports a broad range of housing solutions, from temporary shelters to homeownership assistance. IHCDA partners with housing developers, lenders, investors, and nonprofit organizations to use their financing resources to serve low and moderate-income earners.



### **IHCDA Patronicity CreatINg Places Grant**

The CreatINg Places grant is a crowdsource funding mechanism that communities can apply and submit a project campaign that seeks public donations. IHCDA will match the dollars raised for successful campaigns up to \$50,000.

### **United States Fire Administration**

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) offers a number of fire service grants the Wakarusa Fire and EMS Departments could pursue to offset costs for equipment, staffing, and fire prevention measures. One grant program Wakarusa may be eligible for is the Assistance to Firefighters used to purchase equipment, protective gear, and vehicles as well as training initiatives.

### **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) offers several community facilities grants such as Fire Management and Recreational Trails Program. Fire Management grants is a 50/50 match that helps volunteer fire departments purchase vehicles and equipment. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a state match grant to aid local communities in land acquisition and/or developing multi-use trails. The RTP reimburses a local community up to 80 percent of the project expenses upon project approval. This could be a potential resource the Town could pursue to help construct trail projects.

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund**

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is available for local communities that have a state-approved Park and Recreation Board and Five-Year Parks Master Plan. The LWCF is a state match grant that provides 50 percent of the costs for land acquisition and/or development of parks and recreational facilities upon project approval.



Town of  
**Wakarusa**  
Growing Our Future  
2030 Comprehensive Plan



