



# Blackford County

Community Input Session | November 14, 2024

# Welcome

Who we are and  
why we're here



**Sara A. Peterson**  
Sara Peterson Consulting  
strategy, governance, and effectiveness



**Paige Sharp**  
Sharp Visionarts  
community arts development consulting

# Agenda



## **Welcome & Explore!**

We'll answer your questions about the project, who's involved, and what it hopes to do. Then we'll take you on a quick tour of strategies used across the state to awaken everyone's imaginations.

- **Introductions & Overview**
- **Cultivating Community through Arts & Culture**

## **Assets & Opportunities for a Vibrant County**

We'll share your county's cultural assets and opportunities that we see. You might be surprised! Next, you'll work with others in your community to develop a countywide vision for the future.

- **Our County**
- **Beginning to Envision What Could Be**

## **Next Steps**

Tonight is the beginning...

## **Thank You!**

Now go enjoy a beautiful fall evening!

**Tell us why  
YOU are here**

Your name  
&  
who you  
represent

# Cultivating Community

Through  
Arts & Culture



# Why arts & culture matter

- Contributes to **quality of life**
- Improves Hoosiers' **health and wellbeing**
- Generates **economic benefits**
- Improves student learning outcomes**  
and career readiness
- Creativity is a skill **sought-after by employers**



# Celebrating Heritage



Columbus Star Quilters



**Gathering of Great Lakes Nations**  
National Center for Great Lakes Native American Culture,  
Portland



# Civic Pride



Rushville



Dunkirk



eedco

Moon Sugar  
HONEY HILL

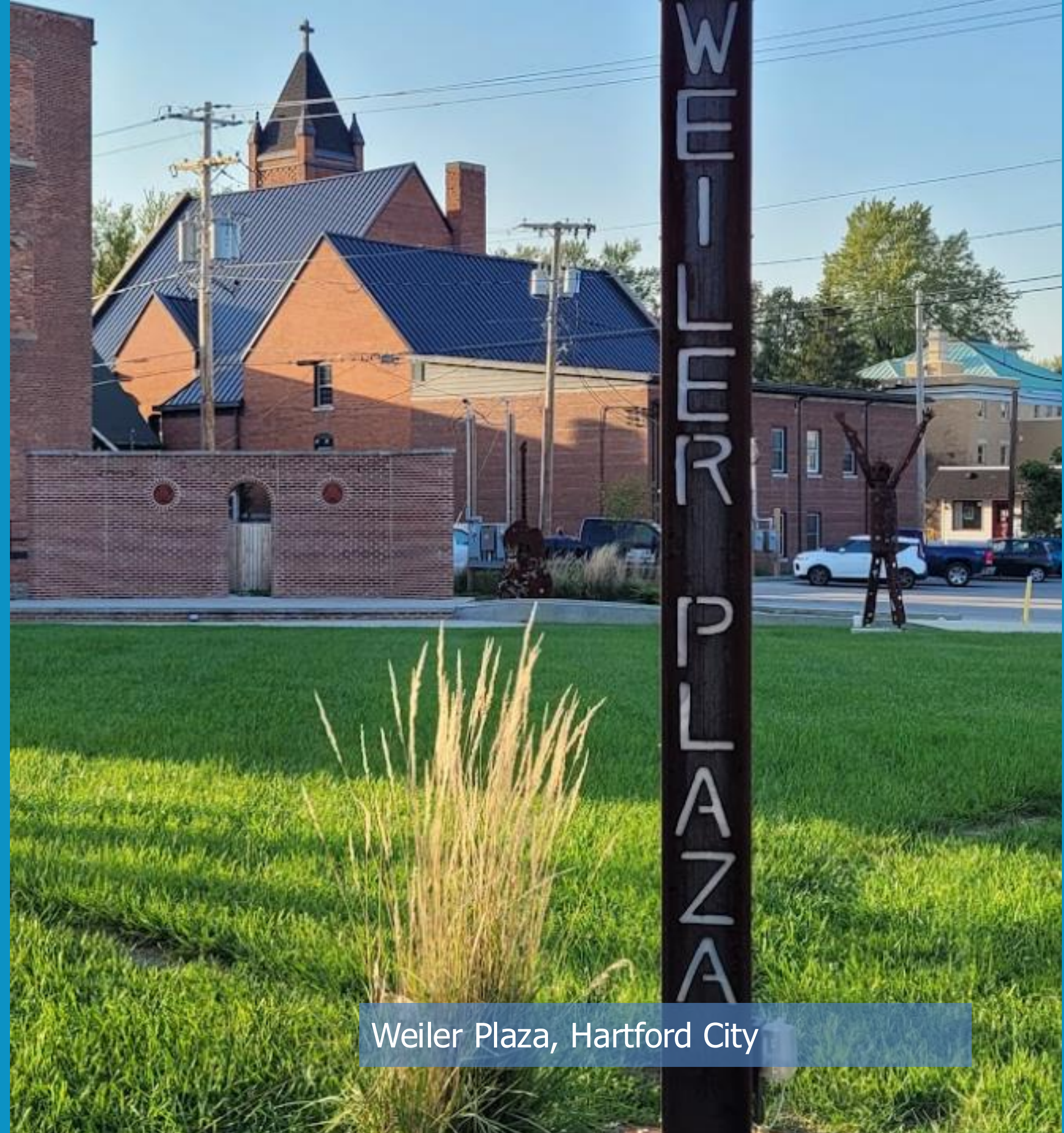
Est. 1874

Est. 1895

Dunkirk Glass Days, Dunkirk

# Revitalizing Places

through “placemaking”



Weiler Plaza, Hartford City



South Madison Community Foundation –  
Pendleton Crosswalks



Putnam County Mural Festival, Greencastle

# Revitalizing Places

through creative businesses and activities



Redkey Blacksmiths, Redkey



Peru Visual Arts Festival

**Quantifiable  
Impact**

Quality of Life &  
Place





## Population Retention & Attraction

Quality of Life matters in people's decision to move or stay

## Health & Wellbeing

Art making reduces stress and has shown to bring positive mental health outcomes folks struggling with mental health issues and addiction.

Creative aging programs (sustained group arts engagement) for older adults reduces falls, visits to Dr. office and feelings of isolation.

## Arts & Youth

a substantial increase in arts educational experiences for youth reduces discipline issues, improves writing scores, increases empathy, academic engagement, and college aspirations.

Ongoing access means they're 2x likely to graduate college and 5x less likely to drop out.

### Sources

*Americans for the Arts  
Kisida and Bowen, 2019  
American Art Therapy Association  
Drexel University*

# Blackford County

Rich in history and community pride

# By the numbers

**96% White** with a slightly growing racially diverse population

**12K Population** is declining but rural areas stabilizing

**Aging Population:** 48% is age 45+

\$54,825 Median Household **Income - 84<sup>th</sup>** in the state

**17% Poverty Rate Higher** than region and state (2020)

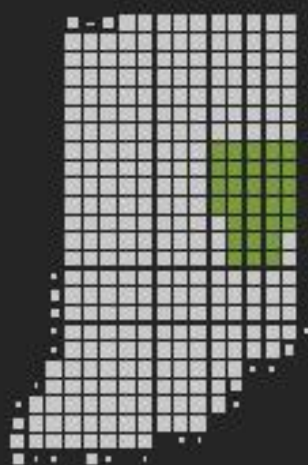
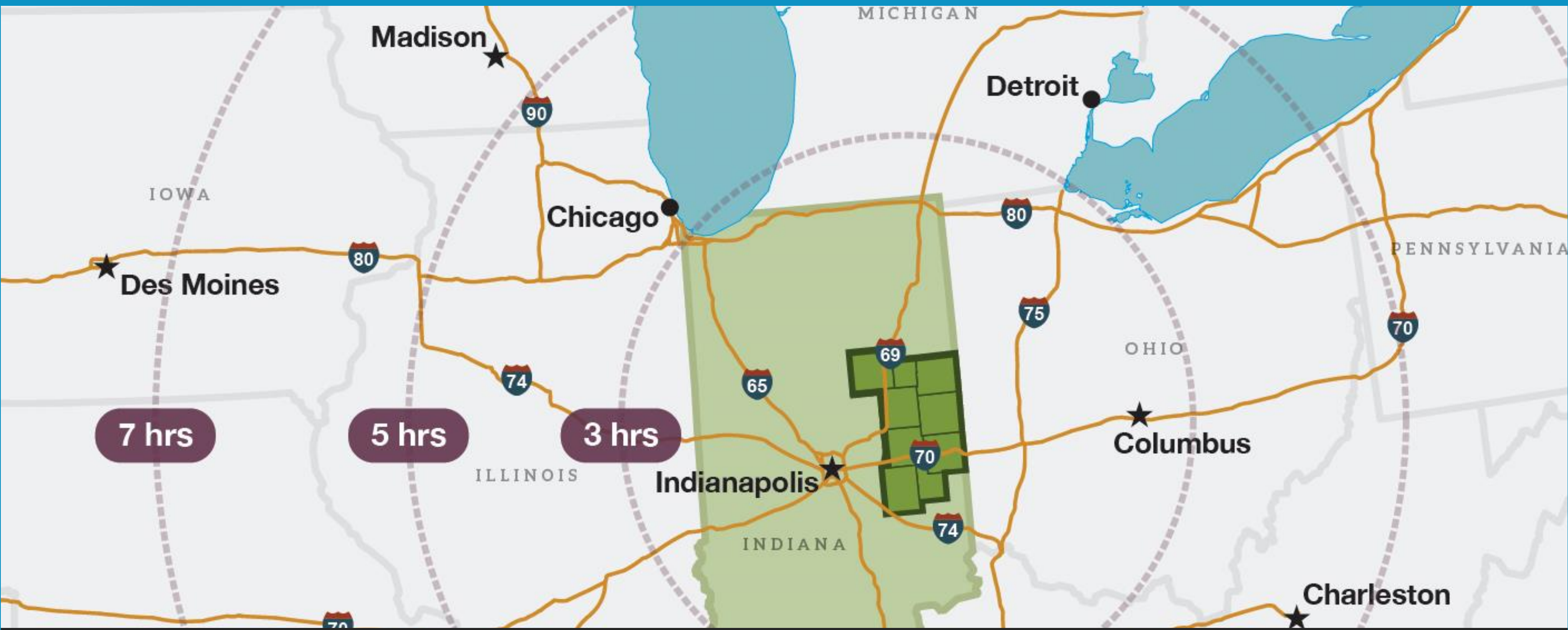
Industry is 28% **Manufacturing** followed by 10% Retail

**Education Attainment** similar to surrounding counties

Harford City · Montpelier  
Shamrock Lakes · Dunkirk



BRC Rubbers and Plastics,  
Hartford City



EAST CENTRAL  
**Indiana**  
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

**Drive Times**



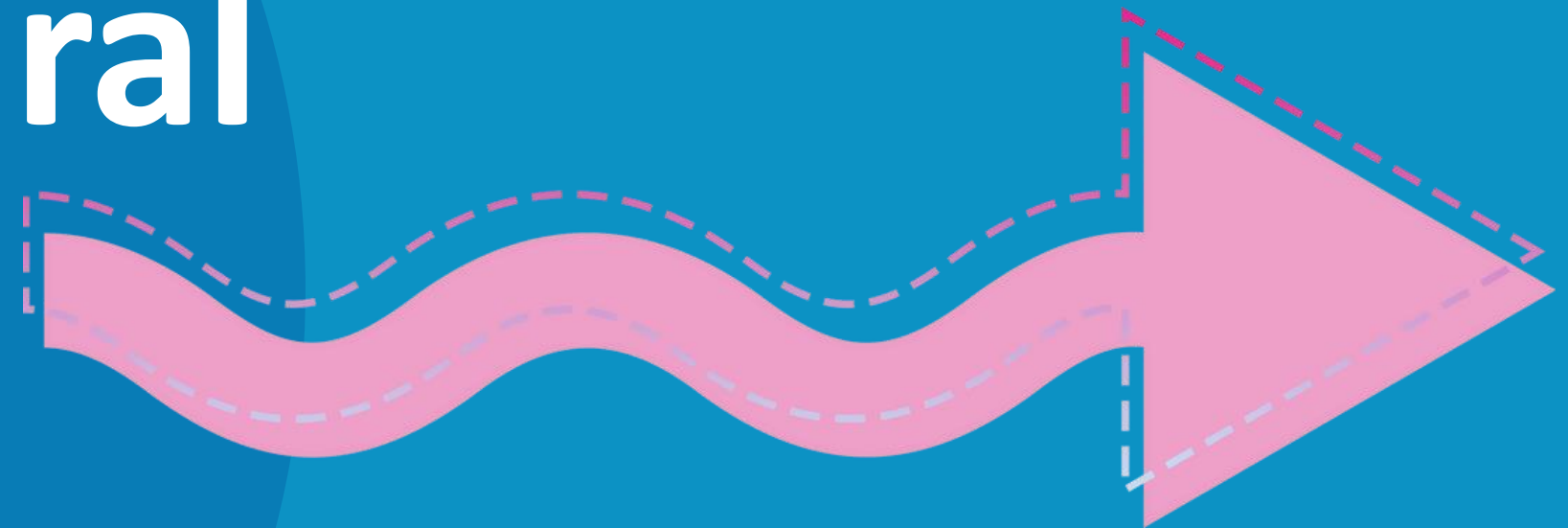
# History

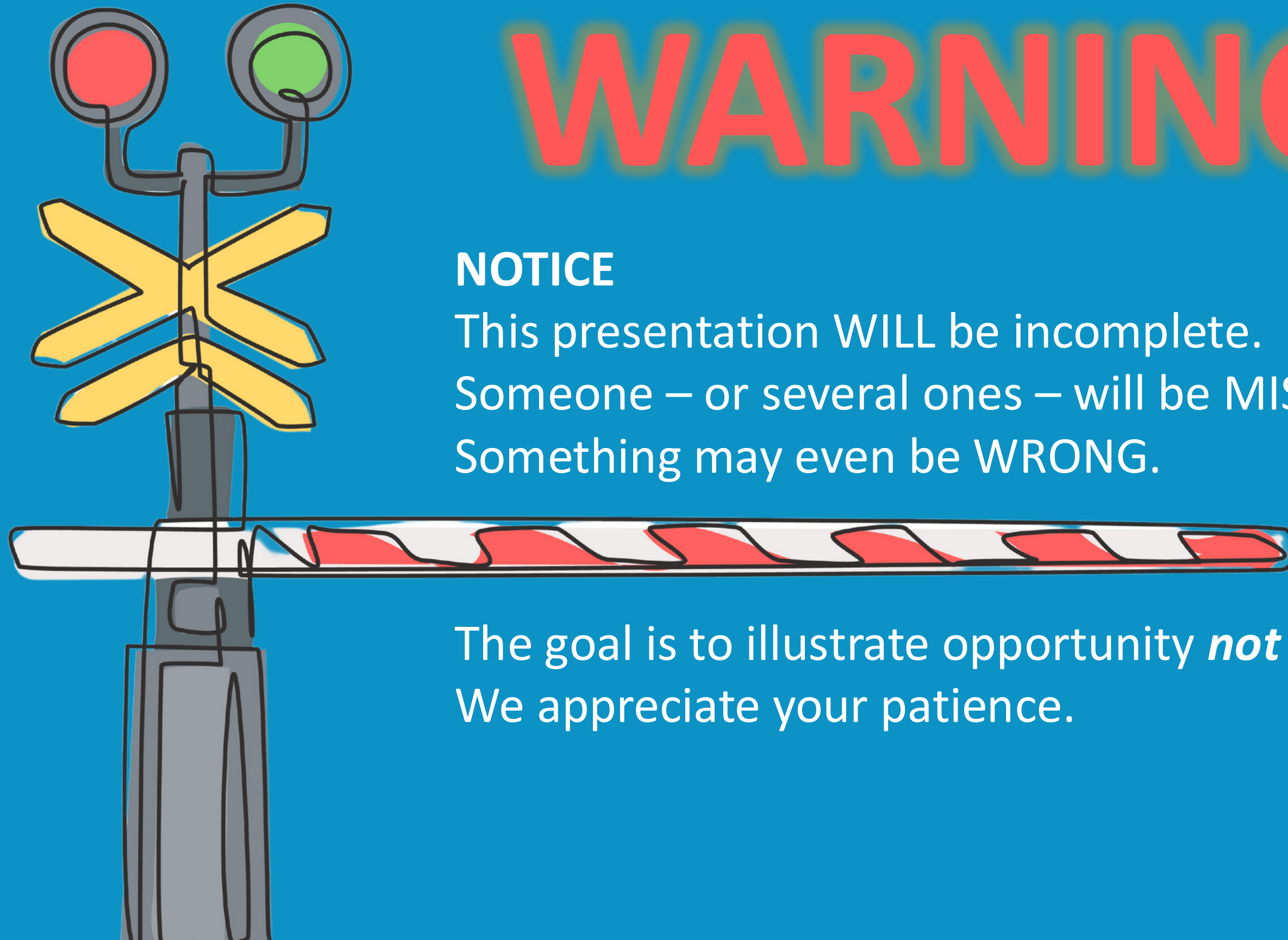
## Blackford County is

The Miami & Delaware  
Railroads  
Natural Gas, and  
Glass

- 1836 Montpelier settled by Vermonters
- 1838 County created
- 1839 Hartford City named
- 1849 First railroad authorized
- 1867 Railroad finally realized
- 1876 Gas discovered in Indiana
- 1903 Horse track in Montpelier  
Indiana Glass Co., Dunkirk
- 1907 Carnegie Library
- 1923 Overhead Door
- 1933 Dillinger at Montpelier Nat. Bank
- 1941 Last train
- 1945 First Montpelier Jamboree
- 1950 3M
- 1973 Shamrock Lakes incorporated

# Arts & Cultural Assets





# WARNING!

## NOTICE

This presentation WILL be incomplete.  
Someone – or several ones – will be MISSING.  
Something may even be WRONG.

The goal is to illustrate opportunity *not* to inventory.  
We appreciate your patience.

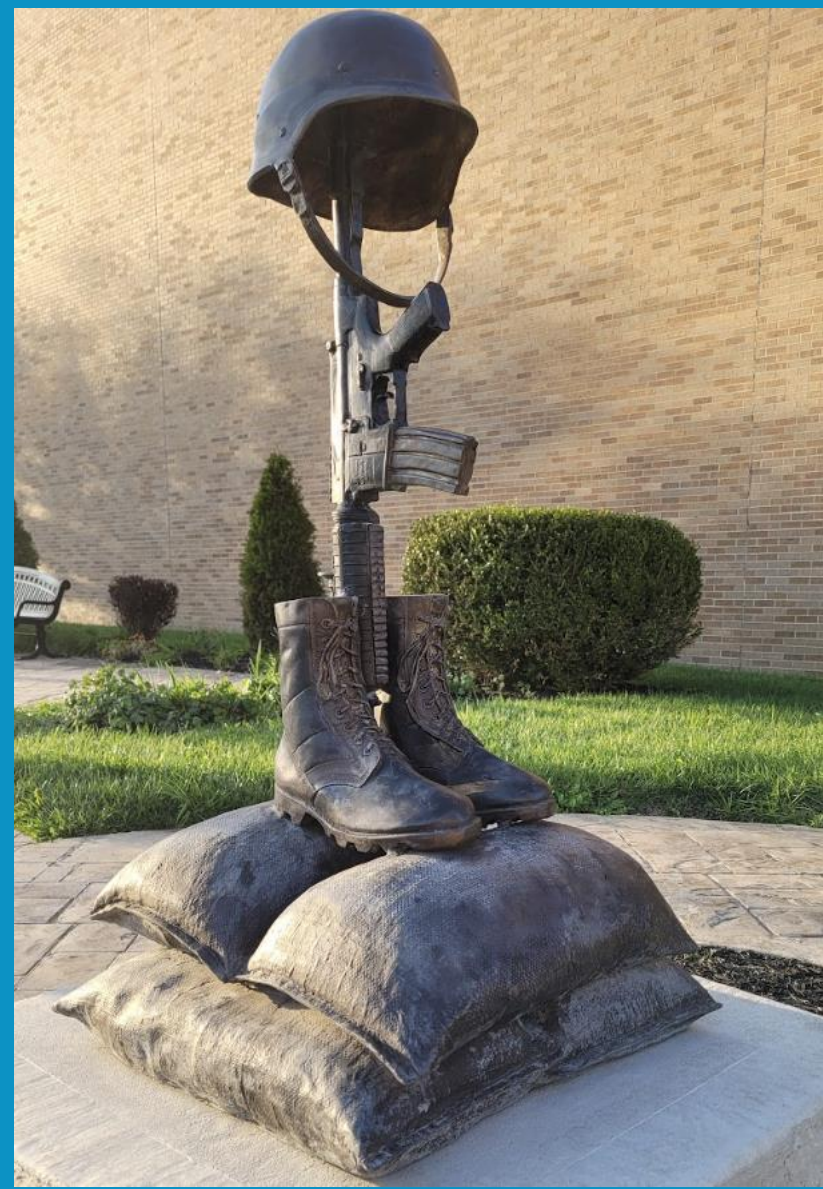
The Management

# Public Art

Celebrate Local Artists & History

Engage Community, Attract Talent

**Imagined Businesses Mural**, *Multiple Blocks Downtown*  
**Bison-Tennial Bison Sculpture**, *Blackford High School Students*  
**Fallen Soldier Sculpture**, *Veterans Garden*  
**The Spirit of the American Doughboy**, *Viquesney (1920)*  
**Gingerbread Men Sculpture**, *in front of Indian*  
**Miami Indian Sculpture (1960)  
**Soldier Statue**, *W.A. Hoover, American Legion (1945)***





# Festivals & Fairs



Celebrate History, Engage Community &  
Attract Visitors

Holiday Bazaar

Santa's Depot Craft Show

Hometown Christmas Show (4H)

Hartford City Civil War Days

Heritage Days of Hartford City

Cornuelle Veterans Tree Lighting Festival

Rendezvous on the Reserve

Arts in the Parks, Hartford City

Arts in the Parks, Montpelier

Fourth Fridays at the Fairgrounds

# Arts & Culture Organizations

The anchors we expect  
when we think about this work  
but are unique to Blackford

## Council

Hartford City Art Council

Indiana Blacksmithing Assoc.

## Arts Nonprofits

Blackford County Art Center

Mississinewa Valley Band

## Libraries

Montpelier Harrison Township Public Library

Hartford City Public Library

Civil War Reenactment Club

## Historic

County Historical Society

# Community Culture

The ones we don't always think of first when we think about this work

Our partners, community arts providers, and links to larger strategy

## Centers

Montpelier Civic Center

Blackford County Economic Development

## Civic

Montpelier Improvement Corp.

Blackford Development Corp.

Montpelier Chamber of Commerce

## Funders

Blackford Co. Community Foundation

## Helpers

Purdue Extension Blackford County

## Schools

Blackford County Schools

## Volunteers

Rotary

# Local Businesses

Most call this small business

Artists, "Creative" owned, and serving

We call it creative industry

## Makerspace

Main Street Micro Studios

MJ Creations

ADM Custom Creations

Sincerely Naiya

Whitesell Gallery

Mont's Wood Shed

Bad Penny Designs

DLS Jewelry Designs

Sister Pâtisserie

## Art, Craft, Jewelry & More

## Bakeries & Coffee

JJ's Divine Creations

Common Grounds Coffee Shop

Hagios

## Film & Photography

Don Rogers Photography

Naiya Dudleston Photography

Granny's Bloomers Flowers & Gifts

## Florists

Northside Greenhouse

## Music

Thrifty Sounds Thrift & Record Shop

Hunt Guitars LLC

## Wellness

Alternative Wellness Spa

# Community Connections

... all tied to art and culture

... to quality of life and of place



## Clubs & Groups

Montpelier History Club

Blackford Co. Radio Club

Blue Felt Jazz Band

Bruin Pride Marching Band

Depot Bar & Grill

## Gathering – movies, music...

Tyler & Nick's Lounge

Weiler Plaza

## Kids

Blackford County 4-H

## More...

Visit Blackford County  
Tourism Bureau

# Places & Spaces

... to see and engage in art

... to appreciate community and nature

... to draw in visitors



Dunkirk City Park

Hartford City Wilderness Park

Veterans Garden & War Memorial

Baldwin Park (Airplane Park)

Bicentennial Garden Downtown

Blackford Greenway

Webster Depot Park

Firemans Park

Wildwood Outdoor Escape

Montpelier Motor Speedway

# ... and history



Dunkirk Oddfellows Cemetery

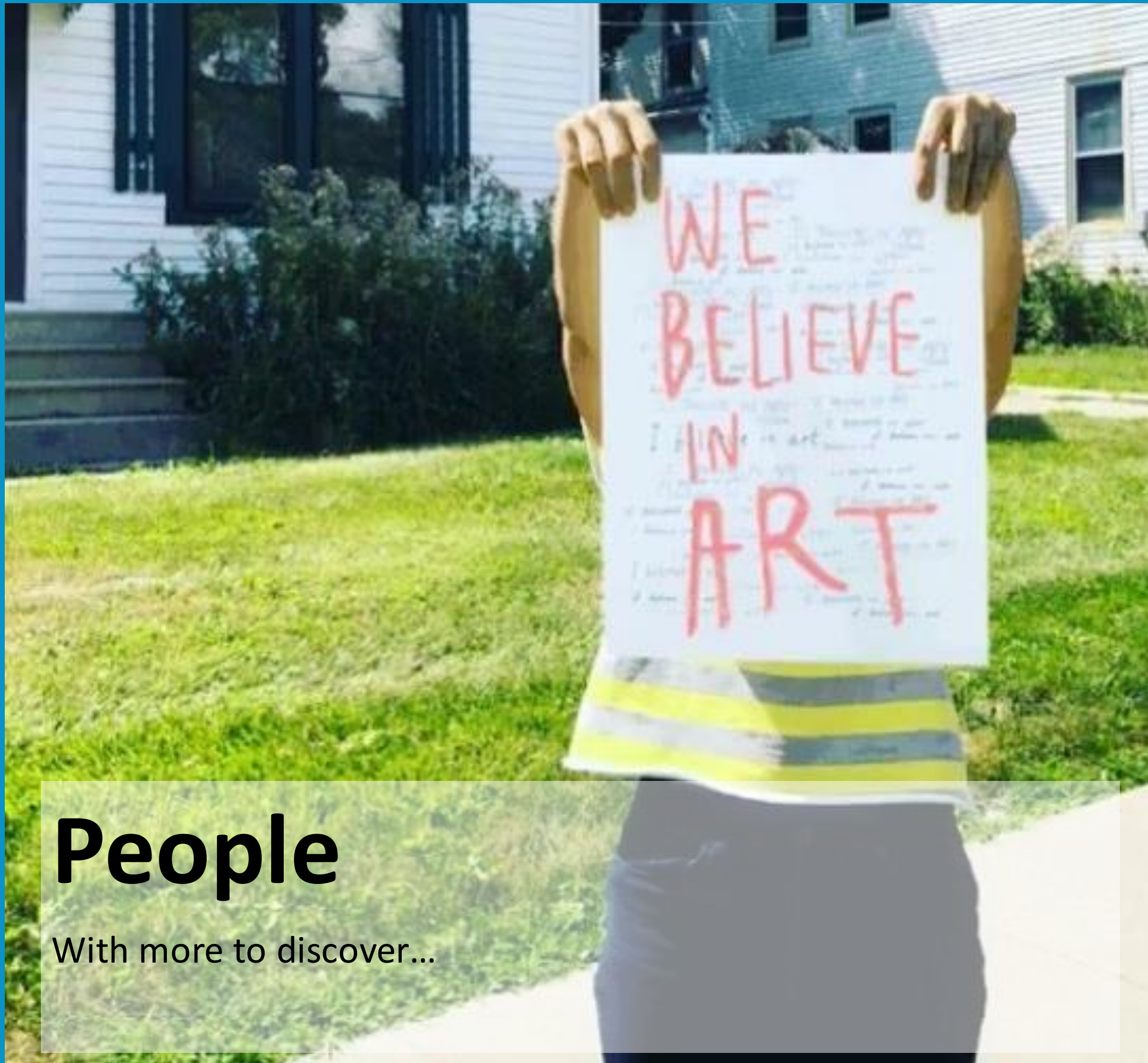
Hartford City Courthouse Square  
Historic District

Blackford County Courthouse

First Presbyterian Church

Sigma Phi Gamma Sorority  
Founders Park

Godfroy Reserve



# People

With more to discover...

Jewelers

Painters

Ceramicists

Musicians

Actors

Fiber artists

Muralists

Designers

Teachers



# Opportunities

embedded in plans



Promote economic growth



Quality of Life

# Blackford County Comprehensive Plan

Adopted 2024 (10 – 20-year plan)

## Goals

**Fostering a superior quality of life for local residents**

Balanced growth of residential, commercial, and industrial development

Preserving agricultural land and industries



# We will be a county that...

<b>Placemaking</b>	<p><b>Improves</b> the <b>lives</b> and prosperity of our residents by providing spaces, programs, and facilities that <b>reinforce our history, culture, and sense of place.</b></p> <p><b>County Brand, Marketing &amp; Promotion   Youth Center Feasibility   Public arts programming</b></p>
<b>Economic Development</b>	<p><b>Supports</b> local business owners and <b>entrepreneurs as they test, create, develop</b> new and expanded services, and products.</p>
<b>Historical &amp; Archaeological</b>	<p><b>Protects local cultural</b> and historical resources <b>while finding innovative</b> ways to advance local development and tourism practices</p> <p><b>Activate Little Lick Creek through public launch point and dedicated blueways route.</b></p>
<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b>	<p>Establishes a park and recreation <b>system</b> that includes high-quality facilities, diverse recreation destinations, and <b>well-connected</b> trail segments</p> <p><b>Master Plan   1<sup>st</sup> Public Park   Update Trails Plan   Coordinate Regionally   Rec Programs for All</b></p>

# Relevant Priorities and Outcomes

## Montpelier

- Baldwin Park Remodel - **Aerospace themed outdoor park / museum** (outdoor educational panels and large-scale outdoor pavilion)
- Build **kayak launch** at **Fireman’s Park**
- Remodel **Horseshoe Park**
- Create **Youth Programs**
- Expand **Wayfinding and Identity**

2023 Montpelier Comprehensive Plan

## Dunkirk

- Glass Capitol Crossing: **Gateway** into Downtown Dunkirk, civic enhancements **boost quality of life** and **support community events**
- Catalyst Projects: **Revitalize historic Main Street** buildings to increase downtown living and business activity.
- **Streetscape: Upgrade** residential streets with sidewalks, curbs, and greenery, and promote Dunkirk as Indiana's Glass Capital.

2019 Downtown Revitalization Plan Update

# The Vision

A welcoming region, backed by community resources, where all are empowered to be their authentic selves, create a life that matters, and forge a path to success.

## Keys Elements

<sup>(1)</sup> Mosaic of Communities <sup>(2)</sup> Innovative Eds/Meds <sup>(3)</sup> Amenities Enable Residents to Thrive

# Investment Strategy

## Quality of Life

Stabilize the region's population and encourage growth through **investments that directly benefit the health and well-being** of residents, **promote tourism**, and **support vibrant downtowns**.

Housing & Infrastructure

Childcare & Support for Families

Education & Opportunity



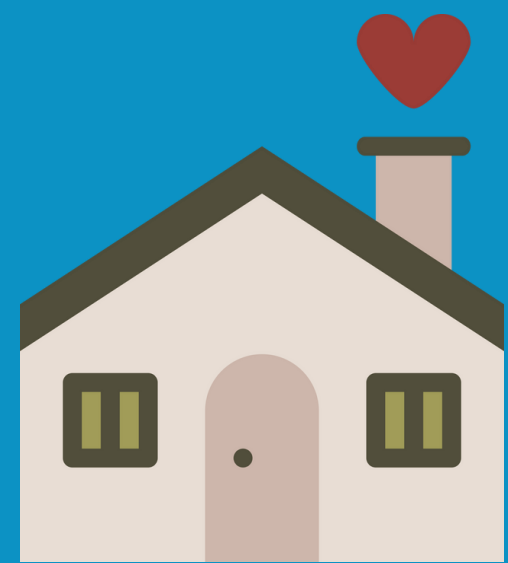
# Finding Our Horizon

dreaming together



# Planning

here to there  
from start to vision



Start



Vision  
Horizon

## Planned Goals

To reach our goals and our horizon

What do we need?

What do we need to do?

What do we need to change?

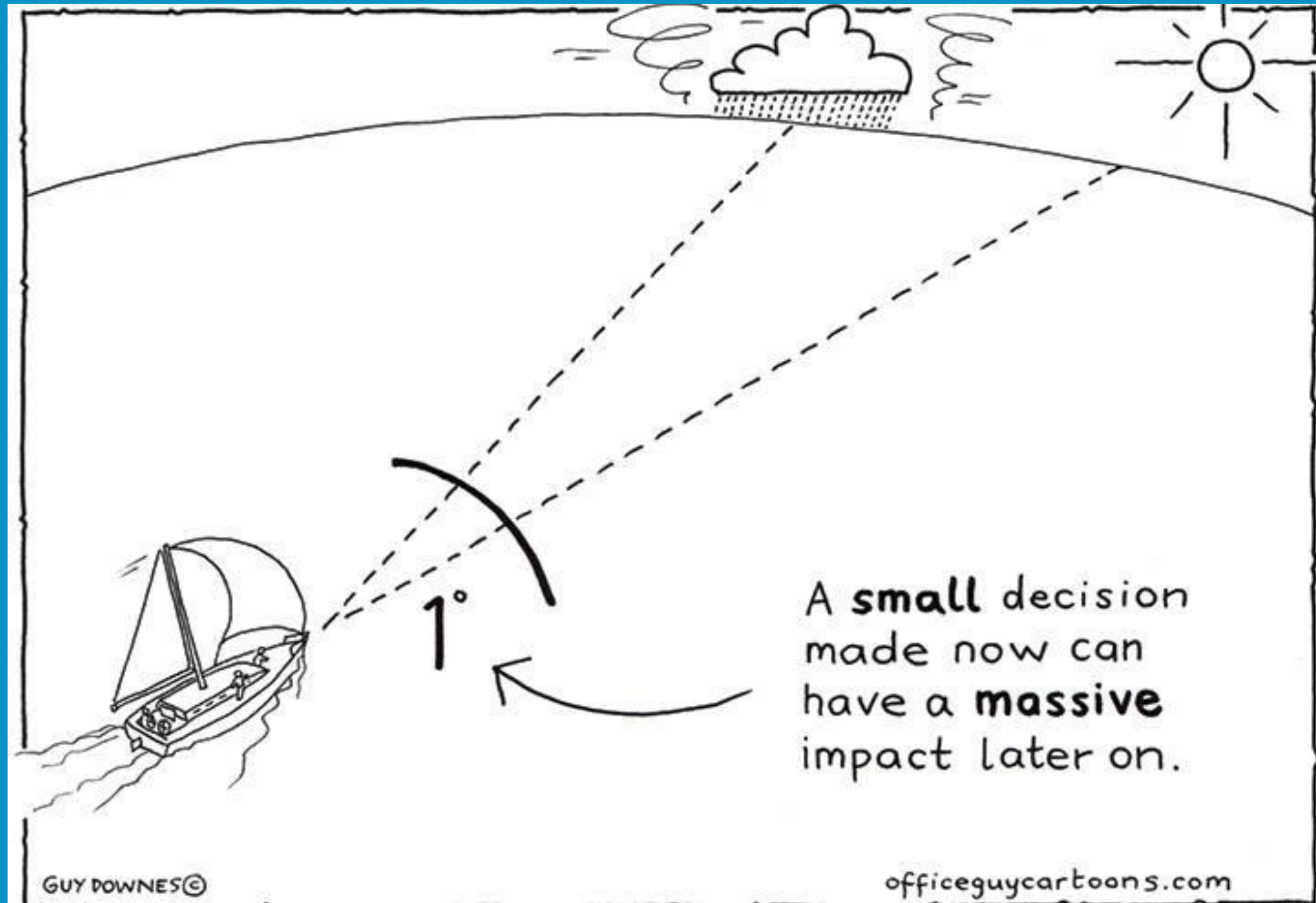
# Think Big!

But within nature...





# Oh, how things change...



## 15 years ago (2009)...

Cpt. Sully lands Miracle on the Hudson  
Slumdog Millionaire won Oscar  
Netbooks were a thing  
iPhones started GPS navigation

## 20 years ago (2004)...

Bush defeated Kerry  
Lord of the Rings won Oscar  
Facebook and skype started  
Flip phones, iPods NOT smart

# Discussion Questions

A little  
daydreaming

Lots of ideas lead  
to revelations

Collect ALL the  
ideas...

## **Envisioning 2035**

Describe a vibrant, vital Blackford County Arts  
Landscape –

*one in which we have all changed, as artists,  
organizations, educators/schools, leaders,  
communities*

# Discussion Questions

A little  
daydreaming

Lots of ideas lead  
to revelations

Collect ALL the  
ideas...

## Envisioning 2035

1. Describe a vibrant, vital Blackford County Arts Landscape
2. When we step back, what themes emerge?
3. What are our priorities (framed as goals and strategies)?

## Facilitating Change

- 4a. What partners or influences might HELP progress?
- 4b. What barriers or influences might HURT progress?

# Next Steps

## Tonight is the beginning...

Other Counties in the Project  
Focus Groups  
Surveys  
Finalizing the Plan  
Making it Happen  
Regional Work



# Thank You



**Sara A. Peterson**

[peter@SaraPetersonConsulting.com](mailto:peter@SaraPetersonConsulting.com)



**Paige Sharp**

[paige@sharpvisionarts.com](mailto:paige@sharpvisionarts.com)

Thank you to the NEA for funding this as a part of the [Our Town Program](#).



THANK  
YOU

Thank you to the community leaders supporting this work.

The Board of Commissioners of Auglaize County

The Board of Commissioners of Blackford County

The Board of Commissioners of Jay County

City of Montpelier

Patrick J. McGowan, Mayor, City of St Marys

John Boggs, Mayor, City of Portland

Travis C. Richards, Executive Director, Jay County Development Corporation

Jeremy W. Gully, Superintendent, Jay School Corporation

Cheri Brown, Director, Purdue Extension Blackford County

The Portland Foundation

St. Marys Community Foundation

Arts Place Corporate Board

**NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT** for the **ARTS**  
arts.gov