

Partnership Parke County Newsletter

Want to know about some of the exciting developments in Parke County and be a part of the positive conversations taking place? Continue reading our newsletter and visit our website at www.partnershipparkecounty.com.

Housing Project Construction

Check out the progress on the 3 bedrooms, 2 bath townhome project on South Market Street in Rockville! These units are owned by New Hope Services and managed by Herron Property Management. Eligibility is income based and applicants must pass a background check.

To Inquire:

- Call 765-828-1072 for information



Old National Bank Building

It has been tough to see this vacant building sitting at the corner of Highway 36 and Market Street but we are feeling optimistic. We have taken an active role in helping promote the location and taken several tours of people through the building. Among the people touring have been those with ideas on leasing the space, as well as developers. There are a few more tours to schedule and we are keeping the conversation lively.

Contact us for a tour of the building, if you, or if you know a party, are interested.

What is Coming Next?

County-wide Housing Needs Assessment

A study was made possible through our partnership with the Parke County Redevelopment Commission and the Town of Rockville.

The Housing Needs Assessment kicked off in December 2021 with Purdue Community Development as our partner. Data is being collected, invite-only focus groups were held in January, and housing surveys wrapped up at the end of January. Expect a reveal in late March/early April 2022 at our Housing Summit. Plan to attend and learn how you can help make a difference.

There is still time to complete the survey. The website will be open until midnight (Eastern Time) on Sunday, February 6, 2022.

Click on the link below or scan (take a picture of) the QR code with your phone to go to the survey.

<https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com>



Complex Recovery Story

November 15, 2021

Complex Recovery

Wabash Valley Power Alliance aids Parke County to rehab shuttered state hospital campus for new life

Parke County, Ind., native Cyndi Todd fondly remembers playing in her great-aunt and uncle's home on the grounds of the former Indiana State Sanatorium. The hospital complex that first opened in 1907 to treat tuberculosis patients was built as a self-contained campus, with houses and apartments for the doctors, nurses and employees - including Todd's great-uncle, who was a groundskeeper.

Todd did a double take in 2015 when she noticed the hospital property on a list of locations owing back taxes. The amount owed to the rural west-central Indiana county was growing larger than the weeds overrunning the site that last operated as a nursing home before shutting its doors in 2012.

“Property taxes need to be paid in order for us to be able to fund other types of projects,” Todd said. “That’s why it caught my eye.”

The then-newly-minted economic developer committed to resuscitating the complex. Her trek would take longer than a half-decade and receive aid from unlikely places – including the local electric cooperative and its wholesale power provider.

Positive Charge

Shortly after starting her role as the executive director of Partnership Parke County, Todd met with Brian Anderson, director of economic development and public relations for Wabash Valley Power Alliance (WVPA), the wholesale power provider for Parke County REMC. The REMC provides power to the former sanatorium site.

Todd and Anderson discussed the challenges posed by the former Indiana State Sanatorium. WVPA paid for a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, which provides an initial site analysis to determine potential risks to people or the environment.

Some assessment findings were expected: asbestos in pipe insulation required remediation, and old coal ash near the power plant also required clean-up. Yet the situation was worsened by vandals who broke into the vacant buildings and stripped out metals. They tore apart the insulation containing asbestos that covered copper pipes, scattering asbestos particles into the air.

The project lingered for a few years as Todd worked on less arduous projects. Anderson, who worked on numerous historical restoration projects as an economic developer in Lansing, Mich., suggested the Indiana Brownfields Program might help. The program is part of the Indiana Finance Authority and works with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and additional state agencies to rehab brownfields, which are former industrial or commercial sites that are at risk of having environmental contamination.

“You don’t always know where these projects are going to end up,” Anderson said. “Part of the story with this is just how long it takes for projects like this to come together, because it was definitely a slow boat.”

Stately Manner

In 2019, Todd contacted the Indiana Brownfields Program, and received support. The initial Environmental Phase 1 Assessment had expired, so the Indiana Brownfields Program funded a new one as well as a Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment, a more in-depth review that includes geologists taking soil and groundwater samples to test for contaminants.

Todd also worked with the Parke County government to get a tax deed on the campus buildings, and the Indiana Brownfields Program paid for remediation work to start. Nearly a decade after it closed, the former Indiana State Sanatorium was getting a new lease on life.

The property’s history was well-known, and the clean-up gained attention. Gregg Larson, a civil engineer who owns an Illinois farm about an hour west of Parke County, was searching for a historical building to rehab when he learned about the site.

“Since banks wouldn’t give a mortgage on it, it really depressed the price,” said Larson, who was seeking an old historic property to refurbish. “We probably paid less for the site with everything you see on it than we would have if it would have been empty land.”

(Para)Normal Visitors

Shortly after Larson bought the property, people started contacting him about visiting. The site was a magnet attracting ghost hunters. The site’s century-old history as a tuberculosis hospital, nursing home and mental hospital created intrigue. Previous patients and residents left personal items in several of the buildings, which significantly ups the ghoul factor for some enthusiasts, Larson said.

“I get to talk to ghost hunters every night,” said Larson, who’s had several months with more than 20 overnight stays booked by paranormal investigators. “I don’t believe in ghosts, and that makes me more fascinating to them. They can’t believe it, because basically everybody who owns a haunted place like crazy believes it.”

He’s also welcomed others to the property: several county SWAT teams, and even the military have conducted training out on the site. A group of reenactors as medieval Vikings spent the weekend on the site, and over the summer several thousand people visited for an ATV race.

Larson has started working with Parke County REMC on electricity needs to prepare for the buildings to host large-scale events, including weddings, receptions, and other gatherings. The complex’s entire electrical layout needs to be redone to account for the site’s new plans.

“It is a great accomplishment,” said Jeremy Montgomery, an energy advisor at Parke County REMC and county native who has worked with Larson on energy planning. “I love seeing things old made new again, and buildings that are underutilized back to serving a purpose.”

Energy Flow

One of Larson’s first major site renovations is possibly the most visible: a 12,000-square-foot dairy barn designed by Purdue University in 1914 that sits along U.S. 36. Larson is renovating it to be an event space; he even hopes for vendors to be able to sell items there during the annual Parke County Covered Bridge Festival.

“I love it,” Larson said of rehabbing the historical buildings. “It’s like the world’s biggest Lego set.”

The sanatorium rehabilitation highlights the beneficial role that government can have in economic development, Todd said. Parke County was a conduit for the site transformation without spending any money.

In September, Parke County signed over the tax deed to Larson. The environmental clean-up of the coal ash behind the power plant is expected to finish in 2022, Larson said. In October, the Parke County Council re-zoned the historical dairy barn location so that it can host public events.

“I had seen when it was a gorgeous campus, and I always held that in the back of my mind, that the beauty could come back if someone cared for it,” Todd said. “And that’s what’s happening now with Gregg’s commitment.”

Early Care & Education Strategic Plan

Transform Consulting has been brought in to help Partnership Parke County better understand the current landscape of early care and education, identify helpful resources, and prepare a strategic plan to begin improving the system. We have engaged a coalition of professionals working in the early care and education fields, such as school corporations, business leaders, health care, and county leadership organizations to work on this plan.

Surveys and observations are a part of this process and will wrap up by the end of February 2022.

Funding partners for the planning are the Parke County Community Foundation and Scott Pet Products.

Plan to join us in June 2022 to review the plan and learn how you can make a difference.

Broadband



Are you living in an area that does not have broadband internet service?

The Indiana Connectivity Program aims to connect residents and businesses that lack access to broadband internet service with service providers and assist in the expense of extending broadband to those locations.

Residential and business locations that are unserved or underserved (access to actual speeds less than 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload) can apply for consideration by entering their information into the Next Level Connections portal to initiate their interest in receiving broadband internet service.

Internet Service Providers will have the opportunity to review these locations and submit bids to the state on the cost of providing service to these locations. The Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) will evaluate these bids and make awards to the providers whose bid presents the lowest cost to the state for extension of the service.

To register, <https://www.in.gov/ocra/broadband/icp/> or you may call 833-639-8522.

Follow the Indiana Next Level Connections grant announcements to learn if more grant funding will be invested in Parke County.

The Purpose of Partnership Parke County

The purpose of Partnership Parke County, Incorporated is to enable Parke County, Indiana to improve their quality of life and provide direction for economic growth. As a non-profit organization, we have performed vigorous investigation of other successful like counties, multiple discussions with Parke County, Indiana's incorporated towns, residents, and local organizations to identify needs, and in-depth discussions with our local county government.

Our Programs, Services & Responsibilities

Partnership Parke promotes programs and activities once performed by Parke County Redevelopment Commission in the pursuance of economic growth and development by implementing those activities and programs for private individuals, businesses, local municipalities, and community groups.

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