EAST CENTRAL Indiana REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Wayne County

East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan

Community Input Session | April 24, 2025

Stanley Hall, Earlham College, Richmond

Overview

On April 24, forty-one residents from across Wayne County – representing arts, culture, government, business, health, education, and local media – envisioned a vibrant arts and culture future for their county in which:

- Everything decided has been successfully implemented.
- Arts & Culture in their county have been transformed with:
  - Resident engagement across creative discipline, geography, and demographics;
  - Art and culture amenities that are accessible to the entire community; and
  - A critical mass of authentic, yet bold, and sustainable assets.
- They have transformed the county in return – elevating quality of place across cities and towns.

The following ideas and insights emerged.

The Highlight Reel

1. **Vibrant, Walkable Downtowns**
   Downtowns are revitalized, clean, and walkable with preserved historic architecture, thriving businesses, public art, and eliminated blight to create attractive and active community hubs.
2. **Increased Public Engagement Across All Ages**
   A strong culture of public participation emerges through a centralized event platform, youth involvement in planning, better feedback loops, and inclusive opportunities for residents of all ages.
3. **Strong Arts Infrastructure and Artist Support**
   An arts council is established to align and strengthen the arts ecosystem, supported by vibrant studio centers, collaborative spaces, affordable studios, artist support networks, and grants for emerging creators.
4. **Cross-Sector Collaboration and Capacity Building**
   Arts, culture, education, and community organizations work together to pool resources, eliminate duplication, support leadership, and ensure sustainable growth through coordinated, bottom-up development.
5. **Regional Destination for Arts, Culture, and Heritage**
   Wayne County becomes a regional arts and tourism hub with restored historic districts like the Starr District, expanded trails and wayfinding, dynamic museum experiences, a thriving creative economy, and strong arts education that ties past, present, and future together.

Public Input

The following are notes from discussion and individual inputs, edited lightly for space and categorization.

1. Who and what is distinctively Wayne County?

Discussion

- Characteristics
  - Think Regionally
  - Diversity
    - Growing Amish Community
    - Amigos Latino Center efforts
- Initiatives
  - Black Legacy Project of Wayne County
  - Wayne County Cultural Atlas
  - Wayne County Inventory Resource Council
- Arts at IU East – 3 galleries including outdoor sculpture park (2-year rotation)
- Reid Center Tiffany Windows
- Art Forms / Clusters
  - Jazz
  - Coverlet Weavers
  - Local Authors
- Important Historic Artists
  - Overbeck Sisters / Pottery
  - Richmond Group
- Significant People from Wayne County
  - C Francis Jenkins inventor of projector
  - Simone Lee (Earlham)
  - Jeff Hamilton, Harold & Deacon Jones - Music
- Industrial History - 14 car manufacturers
- Firsts/Only in US
  - Oldest High School Orchestra in the Country
  - 2nd Oldest Library
  - 1st Nuclear submarine hulls made in Cambridge City
- Key Assets
  - 120-year-old Depot
  - Levi & Catherine Coffin House (Historic Site)
  - Museums
    - Gaar House Museum & Rose Garden
    - Joseph Moore Museum
    - Model T Museum
    - Richmond Art Museum – only museum in the US connected with a high school
  - Trails: Madonnas, Antiques, Heritage, Music
  - Parks: Veterans Park, offer outdoor art
  - Farmers Market
  - Educational Institutions (5)
- Natural / Environmental Features
  - Fossils and blue slate
  - 2 Indian mounds
  - 2 Environmental centers
  - Whitewater Canal
- Unique/Unusual
  - Mummy's
  - Giant Beaver

2. Think BIG – Where can we go by 2035?

Discussion

- Maintain Momentum
- Visible Change
  - Architectural History Preserved
  - Clean, Revitalized, Downtowns (+1)
    - Blight eliminated
    - Window murals in vacant storefronts
  - Beautified / ART-ified Gateways
  - A community Place to Create with teaching studios (youth to adult), affordable studio rentals and/or Makers Space, safe
- Increased Public Engagement
  - Event Platform for public to easily access information ("there's nothing to do")
  - Youth in planning (helps retain talent) (+1)
  - 20-45 age-range actively engaged
- Walkable / Bikeable / Connected
  - Richmond – connect west side (Earlham) to east side through a vibrant downtown (5th – 10th St along Main St)
  - Wayfinding throughout the county connecting arts and cultural organizations
- Measurable Impact
  - Decreased Brain Drain
- Bottom-Up Growth
  - Connect with kids
  - Accessible (affordable) events/activities
  - Open/Inclusive
  - Support for youth artists

- Greater Cross-collaboration
  - Storage needs to be addressed
- Strong Arts Education in Schools
  - Collaborate with local institutions

Post-it Input

- **Mindset & Meaning –** Everyone in their sectors are well meaning, but I think it's clear that communications across assets is lackluster at best. An arts council or coalition which helps align groups, filters out duplication of services and strengthens existing institutions is important.
- **More Opportunities –** community celebrations and things to do built on existing momentum (meltdown, murals)
- **Support –** structural design support for key organizations facilitating growth in arts and culture
- **Inclusive** – Ability to include people who are not "key players" in conversations and planning; including people who are not "artists" expanding opportunities to grow – particularly children – and continue to scaffold learning.
  - Better feedback loops between city and arts/culture organizations and individuals
  - Freedom of movement between residents and campuses, inviting locals into higher ed assets
  - Support to prevent burnout for primary supporters of arts and culture
  - A better/less draining way to get community input
  - Understanding how to step out of scarcity mindset, stop competing with other nonprofits, etc.
  - Cohesive understanding of how to involve students in comprehensive projects that work on a real "problem" an arts/nonprofit faces
- **Active, Vibrant Studio Arts Centers** with access to creation for everyone and anyone interested in exploring
- **Fostering Young, Independent Artists** in meaningful ways
  - Grants for supplies time to create bodies of work, places to display new work, access to a network of supportive patrons, mentors, and institutions
- **Thriving Downtown** with an arts center with artists' studios and **Vibrant Downtown Life**
  - Create a walkable, active downtown with businesses, places to eat, and bars.
  - Promote art, street performances, murals, and community events.
  - Improve marketing and collaboration to get people moving.
  - Invest in young artists and musicians to pave the way for the future
  - Celebrate Richmond's history while embracing change
  - We also need an arts council!
- **2035**
  - Full audiences in all performing arts venues
  - Endowments (fully funded) for the major arts groups
  - Full restaurants on weeknights and weekends
  - Vibrant nightlife – perhaps a gay club?
  - Every storefront downtown full of business
  - Public transit that runs to outer (rural) areas 24 hours/day
- **Transformations**
  - **Restore/Preserve**. Bring to light run-down historic houses that are not on the roster, increase tourism
  - **Starr District** is restored to its former glory with:
    - Wayne Co. Hist. Museum a destination for residents/tourists, vibrant exhibits interpret local heritage
    - The building across the street a state-of-the-art children's museum
- **Arts & Culture Hack –** Based loosely on museum hack, but that gives alternative tours to arts/museum spaces for 20-somethings – rotating through organizations so it is not too much of a burden on any one organization.
- **Engage** people of differing ages, races, sex who can attend events together (festivals/parades)
  - People come back and retire here
  - Need to engage retired people with the community and younger people
- **Arts and Creativity Celebrated**
  - Visualize – demonstrate how youth and leaders in creativity succeed and succeeded
  - Provide Examples – arts, artists, trades, skills, vision, education

- Use History – to redevelop momentum and build the future
- Celebrate – women in art, children, all disciplines of creators – all myriad participants in the arts

- **Overbeck Arts & Education Facility/Museum.** Currently in the works in Cambridge City where the Overbeck Museum and home are located. Collections and building have been secured.

3. Momentum & Opportunity: What can we build from?

Discussion: Momentum

- $100M toward Revitalization (Richmond)
- Parks Plan, Other Efforts
- GIVT VIII funding performance spaces and countywide opportunities from arts organizations

Discussion: Opportunity

- Develop and implement strategies to drive greater participation from tourists

4. Tell us About Your:

Favorite Things and Events the Bring the Wayne County Community Together, Missed Opportunities and Capacity Needs…

Post-it Input

- **Vibe**. Young, vibrant, creative, safe, sustainable, kooky – new stuff too, not just historic
- History…
  - Horse history
  - Civil war general Solomon Meredith – Gettysburg
  - Women's Suffrage Movement – first meeting in Dublin
- Fitness – trails, National Road, parks, reservoir, river
- Unique to Wayne County adds:
  - Countywide high school art exhibition (5 public and 1 parochial systems)
  - Notable Negro League baseball teams (culture)
    - Richmond Giants 1918-1918
    - Richmond Lincoln Giants 1940
  - Original Overbeck House and kiln still standing in use.
- Civil Rights Program I am working on for January 2026
  - People that grow up in Wayne County to share their story of civil rights, discrimination, and segregation
- Wayne County Cultural Atlas
  - Our Town Grant (NEA), 2014-16
  - Established infrastructure plan for a cultural trail that would exist as both a paper map and web presence (website, social media, app) with markers at various locations around the county
  - I have been holding on to the files in case any leadership would want to develop it further.

About

This work is part of IEDC's READI Arts Initiative and conducted on behalf of the East Central Indiana Regional Partnership. For more information, see https://www.transformingcommunities.art.