



# Henry County

East Central Indiana Arts & Culture Plan  
Community Input Session | April 1, 2025  
Memorial Park, Smith Auditorium, New Castle

## Overview

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On April 1, thirty **residents from across Henry 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

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### 1. Arts & Culture as Quality of Place Driver

The transformation of Henry County includes improved venues, public art, expanded arts festivals, and a greater emphasis on integrating arts into everyday spaces (e.g., trails, gateways, and tourism).

### 2. Youth Engagement & Retention

Addressing brain drain by providing arts-related opportunities for youth and young adults, embedding them in planning and leadership roles, and offering spaces and events that reflect their interests.

### 3. Marketing, Promotion & Destination Development

A centralized and strategic approach to marketing Henry County as an arts and culture destination, with strong branding, global outreach, and well-promoted activities.

### 4. Diversity in Arts, Culture & Business

Supporting minority-owned businesses, culinary and cultural festivals, and diverse music and performance opportunities that reflect the interests of different generational and cultural communities.

### 5. Collaboration & Infrastructure for Growth

Strengthening partnerships (e.g., Ball State, Ball Foundations), creating a nonprofit network, offering technical training for creative businesses, and ensuring physical and financial accessibility to the arts.

## Public Input

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

## 1. Who and what is distinctively Henry County?

### Discussion

- **Music:** number of opportunities and level of talent
- **Basketball:** The Fieldhouse “world’s largest high school gym”
- **Events:** Myriad throughout (e.g., Oktoberfest)
- **Inclusive Cultural Opportunities:** Juneteenth, Pride, International, Climate, and Peace festivals
- **Community Engagement:**
  - Attendance over neighboring counties
  - Support, especially of youth
- **Iconic Art:** Robert Indiana (have 2)
- **Agri-Artisan Opportunities:**
  - 4-H Chapter one of Indiana’s strongest (draw)
  - FFA Chapter
  - Business: goat cheese, sheep to yarn
- **Great Museums** throughout county including Milltown (could do a Museum trail)
- **Trails:** Outstanding outdoor options
- **Rose City:** “American Beauty Rose” best-selling cultivar in 1920s

## 2. Think BIG - Where can we go by 2035?

### Discussion

- **Well-Known Venues**
  - Arts Pavilion redone
  - Expo Center completed
  - Performance/concert opportunities
- Physically and financially **accessible** opportunities
- **More opportunities for artists to share their work**
  - Emerging and youth artists involved
  - Conner Prairie model
  - Competitions, festivals, talent shows, etc.
- **Lightkeepers expand** into their own building, staff
- There’s a significant decrease in brain drain
- **Henry County is a destination**
- Activities and opportunities are **well promoted**
- **Centralized way of marketing** and promotion
- People are **proud advocates** of their community
- **Gateways** message art-friendly
- **Arts are on the same level as sports**
- **Strong variety** of music opportunities reflecting tastes and interests of generational communities
- **Quality** classical music and ballet **opportunities** available locally

### Post-it Input

- **Youth Involvement**
  - Things for youth and young adults to do that are safe, welcoming, and reflect their interests
  - Opportunities to embed youth, young adults (part of committees, planning, have input, etc.)
- **Amenities**
  - Regular large venues have beer (fieldhouse)
  - Great hotels
  - Trails maintained
  - CW a go to for local, shop small destination
  - Railroad overpass by Hudson’s is repainted and sculptures added to welcome people
- **Events & Programs**
  - Festivals/concerns/music
  - Museum “Crawls” or connected tours
  - Children’s Art Festival
  - Fringe Festival like Edinburg, Scotland
  - Film festival
  - Arts make and take event at local parks
- Food festivals; culinary arts
- Restaurant downtown with two kitchens where cooks compete against each other.
- **Basketball Identity Reinforced**
  - Public Art: water tower painted as a basketball
  - Architecture: building in shape of a basketball
- **Minority Owned Businesses**
  - Cultural restaurants celebrate traditions
- **Celebration & Capacity Supports**
  - Bundy Governors Arts Awards
  - There’s a nonprofit network
  - Technical training for [creative] businesses
  - Less siloed arts, more incorporated (e.g., trails have art displays, stops to hear local music)
  - Leverage Ball State / Ball Foundation partnerships for funding and expertise
  - Advertise well ahead, think globally not locally

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

#### *Discussion: Momentum*

- **Activity**
  - Events and festivals
  - Seeds given out at festival
  - Oktoberfest from Main Street to Arts Park with food, music, etc.
- **New & Newly Renovated**
  - New Castle Music Collective (newly formed)
  - Castle Theatre (renovated/opened)
  - Honey Creek Trail (part missing) Expo Center
- **Fast Approaching**
  - 250 Celebration: July 4, 2026, Torch Run through all 13 townships of Henry County

#### *Discussion: Opportunity*

- **Financial Supports**
  - Hospital support - funding for the arts
  - Food & beverage tax
- **Other**
  - Underground Railroad
  - Leadership network: advanced planning, cross-promote

### 4. Tell us About Your:

Favorite Things and Events the Bring the Henry County Community Together,  
Missed Opportunities and Capacity Needs...

#### *Post-it Input*

- **Events/Activities**
  - Oktoberfest
  - Mooreland Fair (2)
  - Sulphur Spring Days
  - Mooreland Fair
  - BeeHive Body Co make & take classes
  - Local Farmer's Markets in New Castle, Middletown, Knightstown
  - Cruise-ins
  - Christmas Walk
  - Summer music concert series
  - Trails/Festivals
  - Town festivals/parades
  - Greenways - art on the trails
  - Food truck Fridays
  - Concert season for Bundy Auditorium
  - Middletown
    - Fall Fun Festival
    - Lions club fair
    - Town parade
    - Farmer's Pike Festival
- **Places**
  - Mt Lawn Speedway
  - Rose City Trail
  - Mud Bog
  - Wineries
  - Buyer Opera
  - Saddle Club
  - Museums
  - Bendy Auditorium
  - Historical society
  - Many parks, city/state
- **Other**
  - Vocational School (graphic design)
  - 1000's of free trees given out each earth day
  - Sculptures, trail tales in Memorial Park
  - "Raintree Rocks" painted for others to find
  - Craftsmanship used to manufacture J French Pianos and Hoosier Cabinets
- **Needs**
  - Venues to take our music business students to so that they can observe and intern

## 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>.