

## Overview

It would require a well-polished crystal ball to predict what awaits Sheridan as a quaint family community, a rural hub that agriculture counts on, a small town that symbolizes what is so good about Indiana and defines its essential character. But the goals town leadership sets in motion each year can help us focus on what needs to be accomplished to preserve and grow. We know that drainage remains at the top of the list along with economic development. And we need to keep Sheridan presentable and in high profile. That produces a better business environment, industrial leads and jobs. As well, we need to create an interface plan to link opportunities emerging in southern areas of our region and produces successful commercial concepts locally. That's a lot of work ahead of us—work that belongs to all of us, including you.

Planning dominated 2013. Locals came out in big numbers to be a part of it. Forums were the best use of leadership time--all critical to construct plans that are born in public consensus. That takes time. And funding from grants, gifts and investors. We began 2013 with a solid vision that anchored and evolved into the Comprehensive Master Plan. Unlike other initiatives, that plan won't be sitting in a box on a shelf in town storage. It is an active plan that sets priorities. It was built with your input—your hopes and desires. People always showed up in greater numbers than we ever thought they would...they told us “we care” about our town and “we want it to be more vibrant.” So that Comp Plan sets reasonable goals even though funding is elusive and sometimes beyond reach. Therein lies the problem. A town must have an updated Comp Plan in order to compete for grants. And a council in a community that insists on becoming more sustainable needs a game book to manage toward a better future. It frames our work in spite of the difficult, day-to-day challenges. Goals laid out demand our time and attention—an extra effort. And yes, those plans can be changed: the plan is a living document and responds to unexpected opportunities. We've laid groundwork so we can expect the unexpected. But we know our future will be built in careful collaboration.

Not all decisions made in 2013 were easy judgment calls. Changes were made in street operations and public safety. Some we made because there were no other alternatives at the moment and other situations remain to be resolved over time. The Town of Sheridan suffered again from incredible revenue cuts due to Indiana's tax caps...almost a \$500,000 shortfall AFTER a \$250,000 shortfall in 2012. This level of cutting had never been experienced in the past. We hired a CPA firm—Coonrod & Associates—a financial partner to help us manage the unstable circumstance. We needed to reframe expenditures, identify potentially miscalculated revenues and apply for income we had never received. They reviewed budgets and expectations and set us on a course to have a five-year budget outlook. We now try to calculate schedules for equipment purchases and find ways to anticipate and reverse the trends. Keep in mind, we are in good company with the hardships as other communities have suffered greatly by state policies that are insensitive to real costs of municipal operations. Many residents were shocked—even angry-- at the fall-out of tax cap policies, and we have been told timelessly that they do not want to lose their community.

As we slide into 2014, we are not aimless. We have new ideas and initiatives that inspire decision makers and attract investors. But a threat remains: The meager funding, the budget slashing suffered over the last two years, threatens to kill off some Indiana towns who are just trying, like us, to manage deficits and difficulties in daily operations. We celebrate our special partnership with Hamilton County and emerging collaborations that will bring ideas and investments. But keep in mind, in this economy, a conventional approach doesn't work as well—if at all. We need to innovate, maintain great connectivity in our working relationships and have profile for Sheridan across other government systems, including our fellow municipalities.

Without ample funding, Sheridan is still haunted by the shortfalls that that can stop us in our tracks: lack of grant matching funds. We have been so fortunate to have the goodwill from residents and former residents who have stepped up to provide some of those match monies in 2013. We have our highly specialized CPA services to plot usage of TIF funds and bird-dog at the state level to counsel us about new regulations and finance—to help us find ways to meet challenges or file appeals for new fund considerations.

Bottom line: The public has told us what it wants. We have tried to make improvements and find new resources to get it done. And people have let us know that they want their community to move forward. Even if the work is difficult and time-consuming. In 2014, we'll be doing our best to step up to the plate.

### **Setting Vision Into Action Plans: 2014 Focus**

- 1) **Drainage:** After several years of evaluation and overview, engineers know that a large area that triggers Sheridan's flooding resides on property under Hamilton County governance. The county is planning to move forward with a big investment in a solution that permanently manages drainage and considers elements that can develop amenities that have economic impact. Sheridan's broken drainage ditches will need improvements sequentially, but at this moment, until the county improvements are made, there is no place for the water to go.
- 2) Economic development is in every meeting we conduct and it is the key to Sheridan's renewal and future. We are being resourceful to catch opportunities as commerce waves to the north and compliments (not duplicates) the success that is already generated in Westfield attractions and by the new U.S. 31 interchanges. The landscape is already transforming...the distance is the same but the time it takes to travel those miles is dramatically reduced. Development consultants are already venturing into our community to study new commercial opportunities. One tool to help the community is to look at annexation needs and carefully plan. A lot has changed in 20 years since the last annexation work was done. It's time to examine the opportunities and protections.
- 3) Cleaning up Sheridan and enforcing ordinances that are intended to make Sheridan "presentable" is important. And doing everything we can to facilitate positive economic development is critical. That means new enterprise and annexation to protect lands and extended areas that should become a part of the community for governance.

- Work was finished on the shovel-ready designation for a 60-acre tract, Countryside Industrial Park, and owners will be working in 2014 with brokers and tenants who will bring new or expanding business to Sheridan—and JOBS! Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann officially designated that property as "silver" shovel ready--the first shovel-ready tract in Hamilton County. That means the land is prepared in advance and red tape has been removed.
- You can't spend time planning without planting some seeds for good things to happen along the way. We've already started re-engaging citizens in critical and fundamental ways...we are certainly appreciative of those who are volunteering and welcome more to help. We have even more special committees that need to be formed and led—from youth initiatives/programs to linkages into county-wide efforts. An effort to create design standards is aimed to address guidelines that deal with siting issues, landscaping and frontages. Most communities have these tools. We must have an idea how we want Sheridan to look, appreciate our gateways, and insist on a great first impression.
- HAND, Hamilton County Area Neighborhood Development, has become a partner with Sheridan and will work with neighborhoods and housing, Main Street improvements and the Monon Trail expansion. Work this summer will focus on neighborhood clean ups/fix ups.
- A three-year EPA-based collaboration grant enables Sheridan to work with Noblesville and soil engineers to assess brownfields—lands that have been damaged and can be reclaimed for economic enterprise.
- Ball State University appointed a school of business class to study the Sheridan Community Center to find solutions and enhancements improving operations and usage. Thank you, Ball State! A steering committee will need to be assembled to guide decisions about the Community Center, equipment, usages, rates, etc. This committee will review the input and begin work to explore marketing of the spaces and long-term use and programs.
- Communication is key for a town that is moving forward. Thanks to JBS United, Sheridan's website is ever-busy. The new site was launched in spring 2012 and by 2014, we logged almost 10,000 visits. We have to invest time in the website to keep the latest information posted.

We outreach to leadership in every city and town and have made great allies who willingly jump in to help when needed. We participate in the Hamilton County Alliance at the board level and with county planners who meet quarterly. We support each other. We are active and exchange ideas so we are pulling in a common direction.

### **Outlook 2014**

There is so much work to be done. So many early morning meetings and late night work sessions will continue. We expect our partnerships to expand and welcome volunteers to join us in the effort to move Sheridan forward. But that journey will be one-step-at-a-time. A key requirement will be patience with the process, reframe our problems and go to the drawing board to recast them into new roads for success. One state leader shared recently: we must do the right thing...it is amazing how funds will flow to better solutions and new ideas.