

**COLUMBIA CITY/WHITLEY COUNTY
JOINT PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT**



**ANNUAL REPORT
2019**

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

This is the Annual Report of the:

Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department
220 West Van Buren Street, Suite 204
Columbia City, IN 46725
(260) 248-3112

www.whitleygov.com

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Cover image:

Construction of the South Whitley Community Library addition, December, South Whitley

Photos by Department staff unless noted

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The year of 2019 for the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department was fairly similar to the past two years, as one can conclude when reviewing this report. Generally, there were fewer major permits than in previous years and more of the smaller ones. Still, there were some notable projects in 2019—among which were Van Buren Flats, Ravenwood Section II, and Mach Medical—that kept the Department busy with planning review and permit issuance.

Early 2019 was unusual though, as more new homes were permitted in January and February than in March and April, and those months were also very slow relative to 2018. This slump prompted me to raise concern about the potential for a slipping housing market for the rest of the year. Fortunately, this concern about reduced growth was negated with the coming of summer. However, the underlying causes of concern still remain though, and should be examined in 2020 to better understand the changing single-family housing market.



Development of streets in Ravenwood Section II, August, Columbia City.

Barring any sort of significant occurrence at the regional or national level that could impact our local affairs, it seems likely that 2020 will be comparable to 2019 given the similar conditions to start the year and the number of pending projects planned.

One thing that will remain constant in 2020 is that this Department will continue to strive to make our communities great, and greater.

-Nathan Bilger, AICP, Executive Director

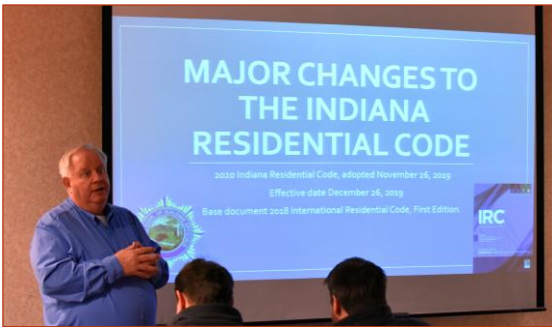
DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

STAFF

Executive Director <i>Oversees department operations, administration, and planning activities for all jurisdictions</i>	Nathan Bilger, AICP
Chief Building Inspector <i>Conducts building and code inspections, plan reviews, and unsafe building determinations</i>	Craig W. Wagner, CBI
Planner II/Office Manager <i>Senior planner, is staff for three jurisdictions and administers office functions</i>	Amanda Thompson
Planner I <i>Junior planner, staffs one jurisdiction and redevelopment commissions</i>	Jennifer Shinabery <i>ending May 18</i> Mark Cullnane <i>starting July 1</i>
Planning & Permit Technician <i>Processes permits and administrative procedures</i>	Michelle Sturtevant
Building Inspector (part-time) <i>Performs building inspections as needed</i>	Daniel Bishop

The Joint Planning and Building Department’s six-member staff fills the positions shown above. Collectively, the staff has several decades of experience in land use, community development, and construction practice.

Continuing education, training, and certifications are essential for maintaining the currency of the Department with new and upcoming trends and changes. Notably, Craig Wagner is a Certified Building Inspector and has a statewide reputation teaching building code classes. In 2019, he was a leading force in the creation and adoption of an entirely updated statewide residential building code. Nathan Bilger is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and serves on the Indiana planning association’s legislative committee. The other staff members participate in training throughout the year.



Craig Wagner leads a training session on the new residential building code, December.

HISTORY AND PURPOSE

Columbia City established its first Plan Commission in 1947 and adopted its first zoning code and master plan in 1955. Whitley County created its first Plan Commission in 1965, with the first Comprehensive Plan being approved in 1969, and a zoning ordinance following in 1972. To benefit from not employing its own planning staff, the Town of Churubusco contracted with the County for planning services in the late 1960s.

In 1987, the Joint Planning and Building Department was created, combining the staff and offices of the Columbia City and Whitley County Plan Commissions, but still retaining separate Commissions, plans, and

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

ordinances. In 2002, the Joint Department contracted with South Whitley for administration of their codes, thus making the Department the authority for planning and building throughout all of Whitley County.

More recently, the Joint Department has begun providing staff to the Whitley County and South Whitley Redevelopment Commissions, starting in 2017 and 2018, respectively. Taking on this responsibility means that the Department may be involved in the development process from a business's initial inquiries and concept design to the grand opening of their finished building.

Current responsibilities of the office, which has planning/zoning/building jurisdiction over the City of Columbia City, unincorporated County, and the Towns of Churubusco, Larwill, and South Whitley, are:

- review all rezoning, special exception, variance, and subdivision applications that are filed - prepare staff reports, attend board and commission meetings to provide advice and recommendations
- prepare amendments to codes and ordinances to maintain compliance with state law, to expedite review of development proposals, and to improve the quality of life in the county
- review and issue building permits, schedule and complete inspections, prepare violation notices, complete re-inspections
- conduct unsafe building inspections, file orders, and enforce through the courts
- review development plan applications for all new commercial and industrial projects
- provide administrative support to the Whitley County and South Whitley Redevelopment Commissions
- assist Whitley County Economic Development on economic development activities
- administer the floodplain management program for the County and municipalities
- maintain files of all building permits, petitions, meeting minutes, and other Department records
- assist citizens, developers, attorneys, realtors on planning/zoning/building/development matters

JOINT ADVISORY BOARD

In creating the Joint Planning and Building Department in 1987, a Joint Budgetary Board was established to oversee the Department's budget and its activities. Since that time, the Board was renamed the Joint Advisory Board, but it continues as the managing body for the Department.

The Board is made of seven members representing Columbia City and Whitley County. In 2019, the members were:

George Schrupf, Chair	County Commissioner
Ryan Daniel, Vice chair	Mayor
Chad Banks	County Council
Don Langeloh	City Plan Commission
Nicole Penrod	City Council
Kim Wheeler	County Council
John Woodmansee	County Plan Commission

The Board must meet at least twice per year to review the annual report and to review the proposed budget. In 2019, the Board met on February 5 and June 4.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2019

In addition to the accomplishments of the Commissions and Boards listed elsewhere herein, some of the notable achievements of the Department in the year included:

- Worked with several petitioners throughout the year in their County rezoning requests to the Agricultural Production and Rural Residential zoning districts
- Met with the County Plan Commission to research and develop concepts for zoning code updates regarding residential development in the unincorporated areas
- Evaluated the status of Comprehensive Plans with the County and Churubusco Plan Commissions
- Held Development Plan and Technical Review meetings for commercial projects and residential subdivisions in Columbia City and the County
- Drafted a zoning ordinance amendment for Churubusco that permits certain industrial uses as special exceptions in commercial districts
- Aided the County Redevelopment Commission and Columbia City in the construction of a major sewer line project
- Wrote an Economic Development Plan for a new Tax Increment Finance District in and around the Town of Larwill
- Implemented new notification requirements for County public hearings, including on-site signage
- Conducted a training session on the operations, principles, and ethics of the Board of Zoning Appeals, attended by members of each jurisdiction
- Craig Wagner served as North-at-large Director, Bylaws Committee Chairman, and member of the code and scholarship committees for the Indiana Association of Building Officials (IABO)
- Craig served on the Indiana Fire Prevention and Building Safety Residential Code Committee, wrote the fiscal impact statement for the 2020 Indiana Residential Code, and assisted in preparing the code for final adoption (effective date December 26, 2019).
- Staff members attended three planning and professional development conferences/seminars in Wabash and Fort Wayne
- Hosted nine Northeastern IABO meetings; topics included accessibility rules, unsafe buildings, HVAC, foundations, walls and wall bracing, and the 2020 Residential Code
- Worked as part of the Permitting Excellence Coalition to develop comparative permitting scenarios as part of an initiative to show the efficiency and value of the region for development
- Advertised, evaluated, interviewed candidates, and hired Mark Cullnane as Planner I



On-site notification sign placed for a County Plan Commission rezoning hearing, February, Smith Twp.

DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

ON-GOING PROJECTS

Additionally, some projects, either by their scale or longevity, are on-going efforts that span multiple years. Currently, these include:

- Actively participated in the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and the Permitting Excellence Coalition, an on-going endeavor since 2013
- Assistance in implementation and tracking of Comprehensive Plan recommendations and goals for each jurisdiction
- Assisting in downtown improvement, historic preservation, and revitalization efforts for each municipality
- Continuing training of staff in current codes, best practices, and new trends and technologies
- Close coordination with county and municipal departments and utilities on proposed projects and plans
- Collaboration with other departments in the Parcel Committee to collectively review proposed property changes throughout the County for code compliance and acceptability
- Writing documentation of standard operating procedures for department processes and updating public application and information forms
- Implementation of a property information program to provide real estate agents, property buyers, and existing land owners information about zoning, land uses, covenants, and related data
- Annual review of procedures, fees, and business operations
- Cooperation with the Whitley County Economic Development Corporation in business attraction and retention
- Participating in U.S. 30 planning efforts with Columbia City, County, and INDOT officials



The Department, City, County, and Economic Development Corp. were recognized in February for their sixth year in the Permitting Excellence Coalition. From left: Jon Myers, EDC President; Nathan Bilger, Dept. Executive Director; Mayor Ryan Daniel; John Sampson, NIRP President



In October, INDOT held a public input session at Coesse School on a proposed Median U-Turn at CR 500E. Here, Larry Weiss, a member of the local U.S. 30 committee, speaks as INDOT's Rickie Clark looks on.

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT STATISTICS

Building permits issued	693	New single-family homes constructed	115
Inspections completed	3,064	New commercial buildings	9
Building department vehicle mileage	34,591	Demolition permits issued	11
Unsafe building violation notices	10	Unsafe building orders issued	4
Improvement location permits issued	553	Mobile home renewals	3
Pond permits issued	6	Code violation notices	7
Plan Commission applications	39	BZA applications	46
Planning meetings held	47	Redevelopment Commission meetings	28
Total fees collected	\$ 166,840.05	Total operating expenses	\$ 270,942.66

POPULATION

The population for Whitley County was estimated by the U.S. Census as 34,074 as of July 1, 2018, the most recent estimate available, representing a growth of 2.3% above the 2010 Census count. The county population grew 0.9% from 2017 to 2018, with each municipality also seeing continued growth over the year. These population estimates correlate with the increases in permitting mentioned in recent annual reports.

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

	Census		Population Estimates							Change
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2010-18
Whitley Co.	33,292	33,354	33,332	33,280	33,439	33,444	33,484	33,756	34,074	2.3%
Columbia City	8,750	8,837	8,834	8,813	8,851	8,879	8,887	9,044	9,155	4.6%
Churubusco	1,796	1,806	1,803	1,793	1,795	1,801	1,817	1,823	1,863	3.7%
South Whitley	1,751	1,775	1,770	1,765	1,760	1,752	1,747	1,750	1,759	0.5%
Larwill*	283	282	283	282	284	283	284	284	287	1.4%

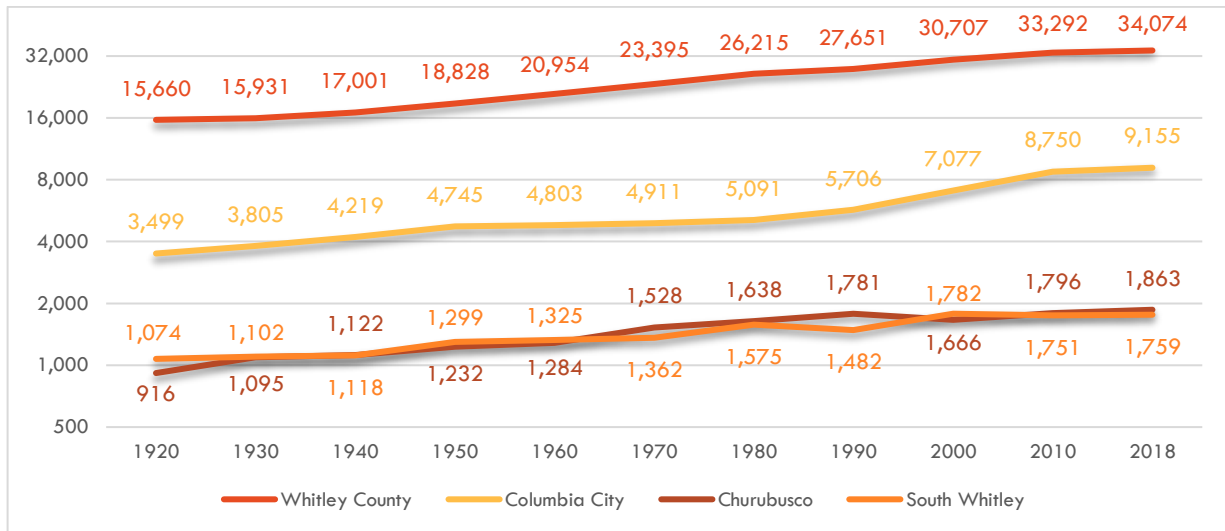
*Larwill is an incorporated town and so is included here for reference. Because the Town lacks its own Plan Commission, it is contained in County figures elsewhere in this report.

Over the 2010-18 time period, Allen County had an estimated 5.6% growth, Kosciusko County had 2.6%, and the state as a whole was 3.2%. However, Whitley County has fared as well as, or better than, the other nearby counties: Noble (0.0%), Huntington (-2.4%), and Wabash (-4.9%). Note that due to the methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau to extrapolate the population, estimates in the latter part of each decade can become less precise, particularly for places that have sudden shifts in population, where the variation from actual can be several percentage points.

However, with the 2020 Decennial Census looming, the population rates of change in the 2010s are still lower than in previous decades. For reference, from 1930 to 2010, the County had fairly steady population growth of around 10% per decade. Columbia City had a period of substantial growth from the late 1980s up to 2010, growing by some 50%. The towns of South Whitley and Churubusco have not had any periods of major increases over the past 25 years, although Churubusco has had a surge since 2016 with the completion of the Thresher’s Ridge subdivision.

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

POPULATION GROWTH SINCE 1920



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As stated in previous annual reports, if the trend indicated by the estimates would continue to 2020, Whitley County would see its lowest growth rate since 1930. Even with increasing numbers of houses being constructed over 2016-18, the preceding 5-year period of flat growth may be insurmountable.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

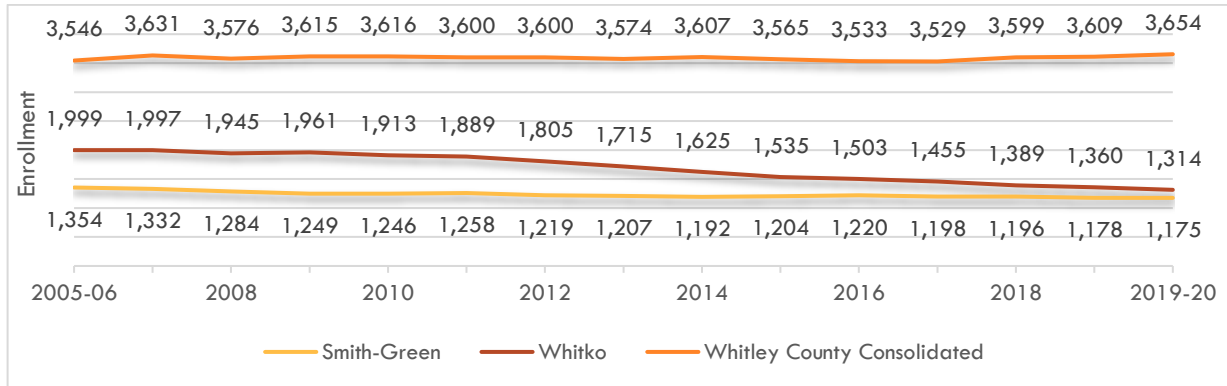
School enrollment is an important factor to consider in planning as it can be another indicator of the long-term vitality of our communities.

For two of the three school corporations of Whitley County, enrollment has been on a downward trend since 2005, with Whitko Community Schools and Smith-Green Community Schools losing enrollment and Whitley County Consolidated Schools on a statistical plateau. Continuing their ongoing decline, enrollments during the 2019-20 school year were at their lowest points at both Whitko and Smith-Green. Whitko's 2019-20 enrollment fell 3.4% from the previous year and has experienced a 34.3% decrease since 2005-06. Smith-Green's enrollment decreased by 0.3% from 2018-19 to 2019-20; it has seen a 13.2% decrease since 2005-06.

However, the two most recent years for WCCS have shifted upward, with the 2019-20 enrollment being a 1.2% increase from the previous year and the highest total enrollment since before 2005. This likely reflects the resurgence of home building in the WCCS district, but it could also reflect transfers of students from other school districts, both in the county and from outside. Transfers of course can benefit one district at the detriment of another; no data on transfers is yet available, so this cannot be shown empirically.

Whitley County's only independent alternative school, TROY Center, has had a continual increase in enrollment each year since 2012 (the first available records), from 13 students to 46 in 2019-20. The success of this school's emphasis on specialized, individual-focused learning and vocational training shows the importance that our community places on diversification of education.

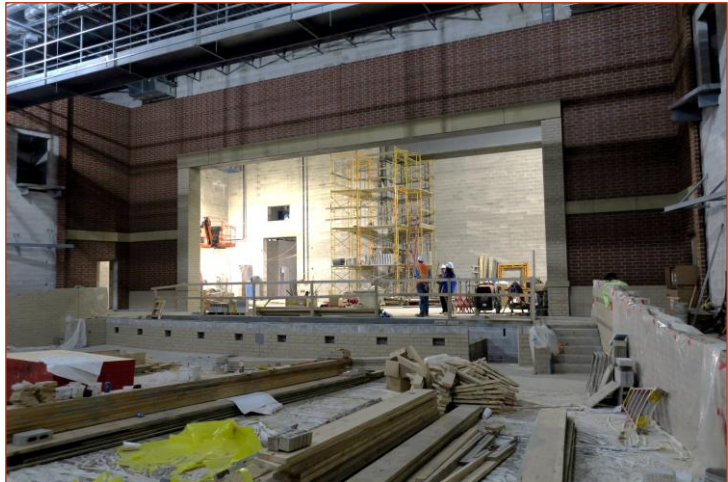
PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT SINCE 2006



Source: Indiana Department of Education

As mentioned in previous reports, it will be important for all of the communities and school corporations in the County to cooperate in finding ways to offset the decrease in students or otherwise stabilize the education systems. Planning longer-term, comprehensive solutions would be an ideal goal for all involved.

One example of such a possible solution was a multi-sponsor, multi-disciplinary program announced in October 2019 that will be located in the former Whitko Middle School in Larwill. As planned, the school would provide training for employment opportunities in local businesses, broader vocational classes, and potentially college-level courses for students and adults throughout the region. With time, this program could become another key institution in Whitley County’s education system.



The new Columbia City High School auditorium in September. Photo by friendsofwccs¹.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is an important statistic for the Department and communities to utilize in planning efforts. In November 2019, the most recent data available, the County unemployment rate stood at a seasonally-unadjusted 2.7%, having risen from a low of 2.4% in September. This rate was essentially unchanged from the two preceding Novembers, despite an increase in the labor force of 2.4% during the same period. While it is not certain what exactly created this increase in available workers, it may be related

¹ Friendsofwccs. (2019, September 12). [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/friendsofwccs/status/1172115987392585729>.

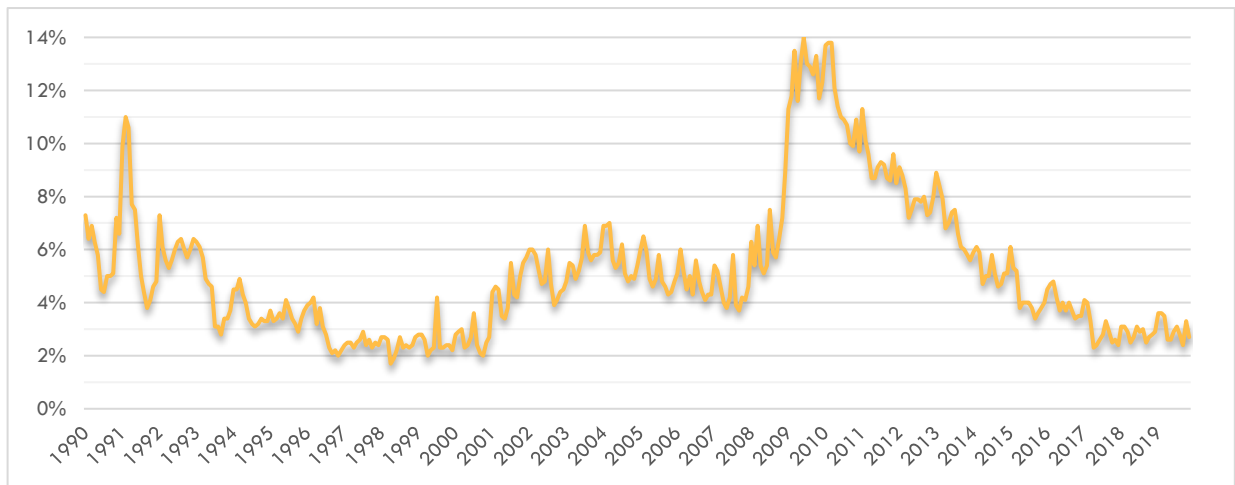
COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

to the causes of population increase discussed above, individuals still returning to the labor force after the Great Recession, retirees returning to work, or an influx from outside the County.

On a planning level, the increase in labor force is an important factor to consider, perhaps more than that of solely the unemployment rate in the current economic situation. Increasing the worker pool means that businesses have more opportunities for hiring, while the currently employed are not in jeopardy of losing their jobs.

However, a sustained rate below 3% still is a concern as it can indicate that current businesses are being starved for employees and may begin to look elsewhere for expansion possibilities, while new businesses may pass the county by due to a lack of an immediately available workforce. This difference can be made up for by commuters into the County, but only up to certain point, and a large proportion of commuting has drawbacks as well. In 2019, this topic came to the forefront with small business owners, the EDC, and others starting to explore investing in projects that would encourage qualified workers to locate in the County. These proactive efforts will likely be an important component of workforce growth over the next few years.

WHITLEY COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SINCE 1990



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, through November 2019

Viewing this in combination with the flat population and school statistics, it will be critically important that appropriate residential growth and educational opportunities be considered throughout the county in order to continue and promote business location and expansion.

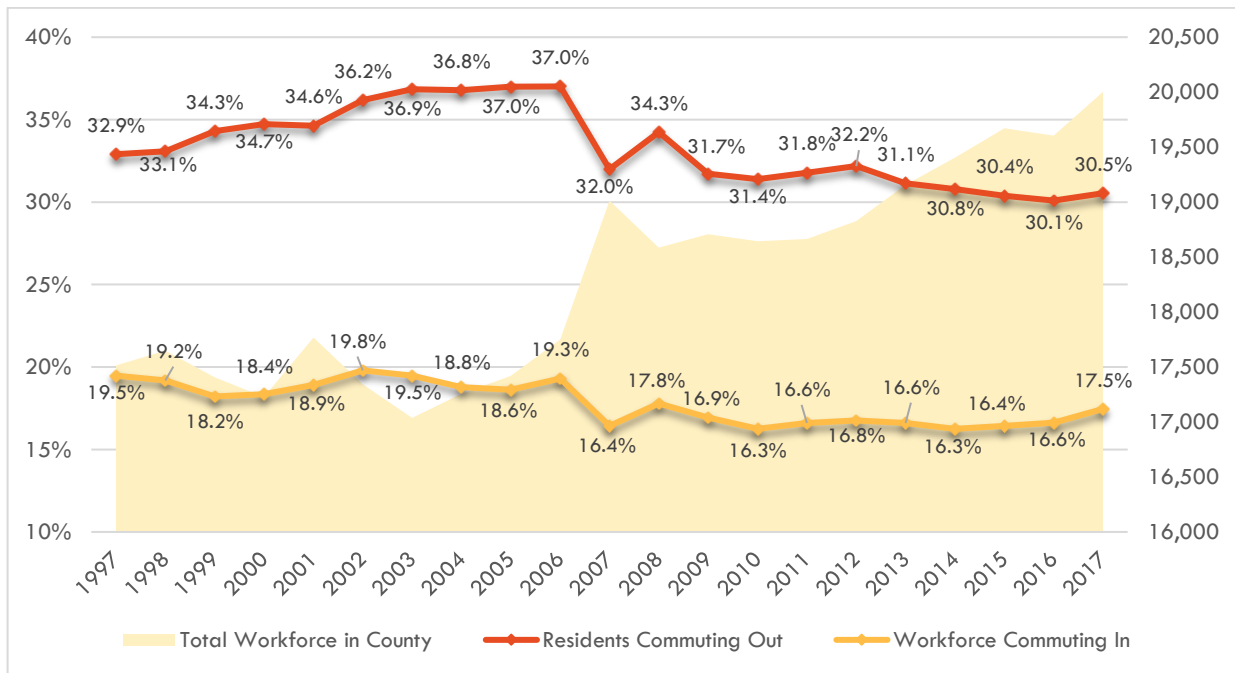
COMMUTING PATTERNS

Closely related to population and employment are the commuting patterns of our residents and workers. Understanding commuting into and from the county is important to the Department because it provides information on the flow of workers and potential labor supply available to employers.

First, a few notes on this data. The data presented below is based on information provided on state tax returns, so only those people who file tax returns are included in the “labor force” figures. Given the data

source, retired persons, homemakers, working dependents, and unemployed individuals are under- or overrepresented, which artificially inflates both the resident labor force and number of people who live and work in the same county. So, these data should not be used as a source for employment patterns, nor do the numbers match labor force or employment numbers from other sources. However, within these limitations, useful interpretations can be made on the County's commuting.

WHITLEY COUNTY COMMUTING TRENDS, 1997-2017



Source: Indiana Business Research Center, using Indiana Department of Revenue data

In 2017, the most recent data available, a little less than a third (30.5%) of the working residents in Whitley County worked outside of the County. Comparatively, before 2008, up to 37% worked outside the County. This shift may be due to a few causes, but it seems that whatever the reason, roughly 7% of the County's labor force that had been working out of the County found and has kept post-recession job opportunities within the County.

On the other side of the commuting, the number of inbound commuters fell from the 18-19% before 2008 to 16-17% post-2008. It is likely that whatever caused Whitley County's increased retention of workers also affected other counties; however, the shift in the share of workers was not as dramatic for the inbound commuters.

Looking at the actual numbers of commuting workers since 2008, the number of residents who left for work in other counties decreased by 699, or 8.8% over that timeframe, and the number of people who commuted into the county from other counties increased by 185, or 5.6%. Barring any significant disturbance to the regional economy, the number of residents who commute out of the county for work is then expected to

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

decrease annually by approximately 47, and, more importantly, the number of commuters entering the county for work is expected to increase annually by approximately 21 workers. The ongoing creation of job opportunities within the County should reinforce the continuation of those trends.

Comparing the counties of the Northeast Indiana region, Whitley County ranks first in percentage of outbound commuters and third in percentage of inbound commuters. Statewide, it ranks 28th in both figures.

COMMUTING PATTERNS OF SELECTED INDIANA COUNTIES, 2017

Northeast Indiana Counties	Inbound commuters (of workforce)	Outbound commuters (of labor force)	Selected Other Counties	Inbound commuters (of workforce)	Outbound commuters (of labor force)
Adams	14.9%	15.2%	Cass	13.2%	17.1%
Allen	10.0%	5.5%	Clark	21.0%	29.8%
DeKalb	21.5%	20.6%	Elkhart	21.9%	6.6%
Huntington	13.0%	22.0%	Fulton	11.3%	20.9%
Kosciusko	14.1%	13.3%	Grant	13.0%	9.7%
LaGrange	18.2%	22.7%	Hamilton	18.9%	31.4%
Noble	17.0%	25.2%	Hancock	19.9%	41.0%
Steuben	17.2%	15.7%	Hendricks	22.4%	38.3%
Wabash	12.6%	15.0%	Johnson	16.6%	35.1%
Wells	15.2%	25.0%	Marion	26.7%	9.2%
Whitley	17.5%	30.5%	Ohio	29.8%	43.0%

Source: Indiana Business Research Center, using Indiana Department of Revenue data

Having high percentages of commuting in both directions can indicate that jobs available in a county may not be suitable for its residents, so the local jobs are being filled by outsiders while residents work elsewhere; Ohio County is a likely example of this. However, in other instances, it can be an indication of an active and fluid metropolitan area where jobs are available throughout a region; around Indianapolis, for example.

For planning purposes, it should be important to consider ways to improve the attractiveness of Whitley County as a place of residence for those who commute into the county for work. Broadly, these efforts would be similar to those to address the issues with stagnant population growth. They could include revising residential zoning districts to more closely match market demands; facilitating cooperation between developers, elected and appointed officials, and landowners; and ensuring that residential expansion occurs in a manner that is based in planning best practices and favorable to all parties.

Finally, one commuting pattern not examined here, but which could be a beneficial analysis to perform later, is the number of commuters *through* Whitley County. Anecdotally, by observing license plates on U.S. 30, it seems that there is a sizable number of Allen County and Kosciusko County residents regularly commuting across Whitley County. There may be additional commuters crossing through the County on SR 9, SR 14, and other major routes. As a matter of planning, an accounting of these commuters is important for evaluation of impacts on our transportation network. It may also give information for businesses on another pool of potential customers, as well as being a possible source of new residents.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

CHURUBUSCO

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	0	Variance	2
Zoning text amendment	1	Subdivision replat	0	Appeal	0
Development plan	0	Special exception	3	Other	0

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Paula Grawcock	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Jeremy Hart, President	Town Council	Employee
Ashley Johnson	County Commissioners	1/1/2020
Wayne Krider	Town Council	1/1/2020
Mark Pepple	Town Council	Elected official
Madalyn Sade-Bartl	Town Council	Elected official
Vivian Sade	Town Council	1/1/2022
Brenda Saggars, Vice president	Town Council	1/1/2022
Pat Stanford	Town Council	1/1/2022

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Churubusco Plan Commission held 2 meetings in 2019, in which the Commission considered a zoning ordinance amendment and a review of the Comprehensive Plan.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
David Crabill, Vice chair	Town Council	1/1/2020
Paula Grawcock, Chair	Plan Commission	Biennial appointment
Alan Malcolm	Town Council	1/1/2023
Brenda Saggars	Town Council	1/1/2020
Miles Wilson	Town Council	1/1/2023

Summary of BZA actions

The Churubusco Board of Zoning Appeals held 2 meetings in 2019 and considered cases for a special exception of certain uses in GB, a parking variance, and modification of conditions of approval.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

COLUMBIA CITY

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	0	Variance	6
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	1	Appeal	0
Development plan	3	Special exception	5	Other	1

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Walt Crowder	City Council	Elected official
Doug Graft, President	County Commissioners	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Don Langeloh	Mayor	1/1/2023
Jeff Walker	City Council	Employee, <i>retired in April</i>
Chip Hill	City Council	Employee, <i>appointed in April</i>
Dennis Warnick	Mayor	1/1/2020
Dan Weigold	City Council	Elected official
Larry Weiss, Vice president	Mayor	1/1/2021
Patrick Zickgraf	Mayor	1/1/2022

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Columbia City Plan Commission held 5 meetings in 2019. The Commission approved development plans for Van Buren Flats, McDonald's, and ProFed; a subdivision replat; and the secondary plat for Ravenwood, Section 2.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Cathy Gardner	City Council	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger	Plan Commission	Annual appointment
Dwayne Knott, Vice chair	Mayor	1/1/2021
Anthony Romano	Mayor	1/1/2022
Dennis Warnick, Chair	Mayor	1/1/2021

Summary of BZA actions

The Columbia City Board of Zoning Appeals held 8 meetings in 2019. The Board considered variances for signs, fences, and floor area; and special exceptions for a clinic, child care, home occupations, and outdoor storage/display.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

SOUTH WHITLEY

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	0	Variance	2
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	0	Appeal	0
Development plan	1	Special exception	0	Other	0

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Wendy Bills, President	Town Council	1/1/2021
Randy Cokl	Town Council	Elected official
Tom Dome	Town Council	1/1/2022
Les Hoffman	Town Council	Elected official
Anna Simmons	Town Council	1/1/2023
Brock Waterson	Town Council	Elected official, <i>appointed in March</i>
Wayne Swender, Vice president	County Commissioners	1/1/2020
<i>Vacant</i>	Town Council	1/1/2023
<i>Vacant</i>	County Commissioners	1/1/2023

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The South Whitley Plan Commission held 2 meetings in 2019. The Commission approved a development plan for the library.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Frank Baldrige	Town Council	1/1/2023
Tom Dome	Town Council	1/1/2020
Rod Hardesty	Town Council	1/1/2021
Doug Morrissey, Vice chair	Town Council	1/1/2023
Wayne Swender, Chair	Plan Commission	Annual appointment

Summary of BZA actions

The South Whitley Board of Zoning Appeals held 4 meetings in 2019 and considered variances of setbacks, parking, and lot coverage.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

WHITLEY COUNTY

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	7	Subdivision plat	13	Variance	19
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	2	Appeal	0
Development plan	6	Special exception	9	Other	4

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Elizabeth Deckard	County Commissioners	1/1/2022
John Johnson, Secretary	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Joe Wolf	County Commissioners	1/1/2022
Brad Wolfe, Vice president	County Commissioners	1/1/2022
Doug Wright, President	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Thor Hodges	County Council (member)	Annual appointment
Mark Mynhier	County Surveyor	Duration of Office
Tom Western	County Commissioner (member)	Annual appointment
John Woodmansee	County Agricultural Educator	Duration of Office

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Whitley County Plan Commission held 13 meetings in 2019, including one workshop on residential zoning districts. The Commission granted primary approval of twelve plats and two replats, approved three plat vacations, made recommendations on seven rezoning requests and a TIF district, and approved development plans for Mach Medical, Triad Metals, Whitley RC Investments, and others.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

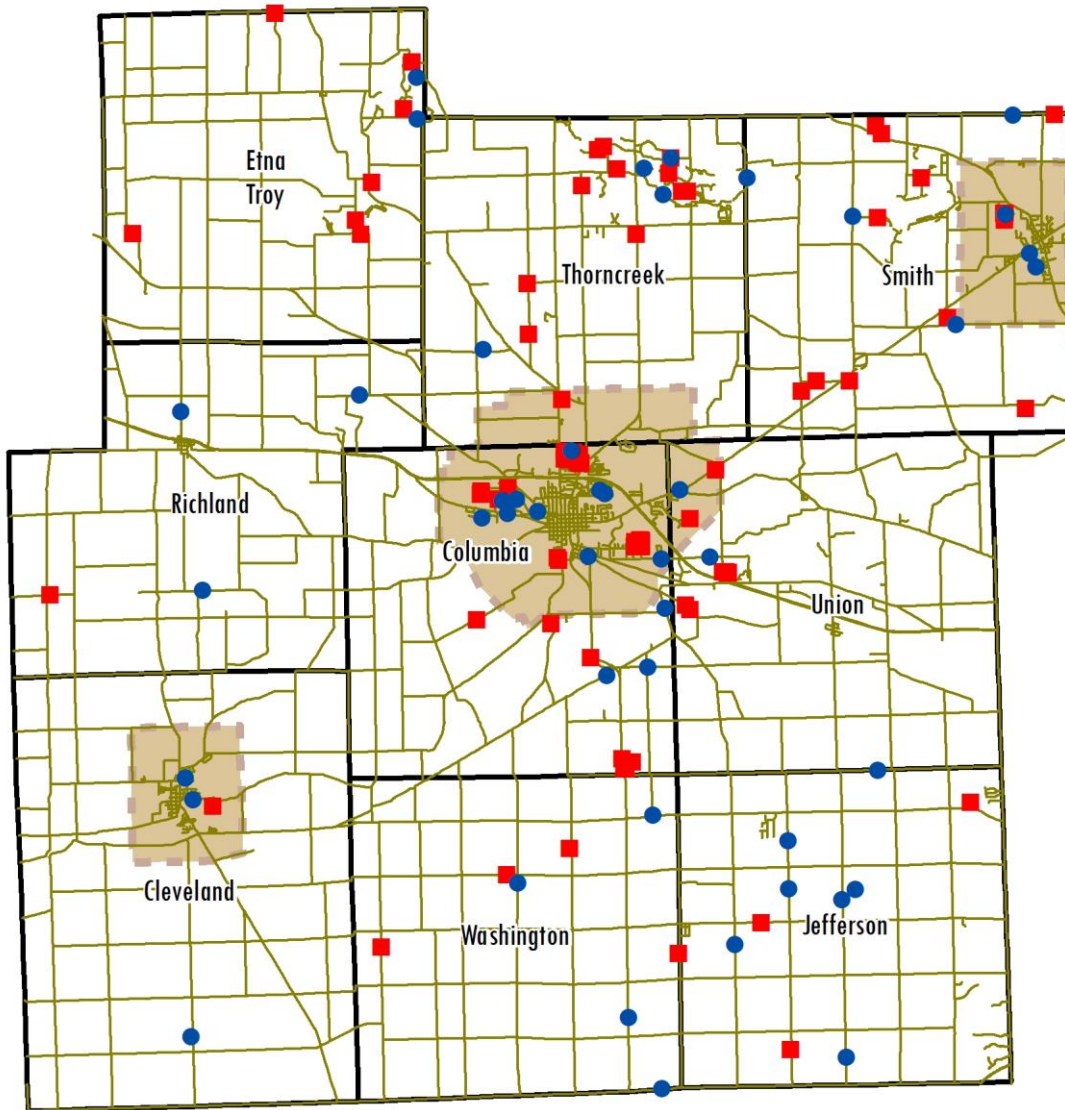
	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Alternate</u>
Elizabeth Deckard, Vice chair	County Commissioners	1/1/2022	Joe Wolf
Tim Denihan	County Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Sarah Lopez	County Council	1/1/2023	Kelley Sheiss
Danny Wilkinson, Chair	County Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Doug Wright	Plan Commission Member	Annual appointment	

Summary of BZA actions

The County Board of Zoning Appeals held 11 meetings in 2019, including a training session in May. Among the cases the Board considered were 14 setback and 2 sign variances, and special exceptions for home occupations, secondary dwelling units, and Class 2 CFOs.

CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF RESIDENTIAL PERMITS



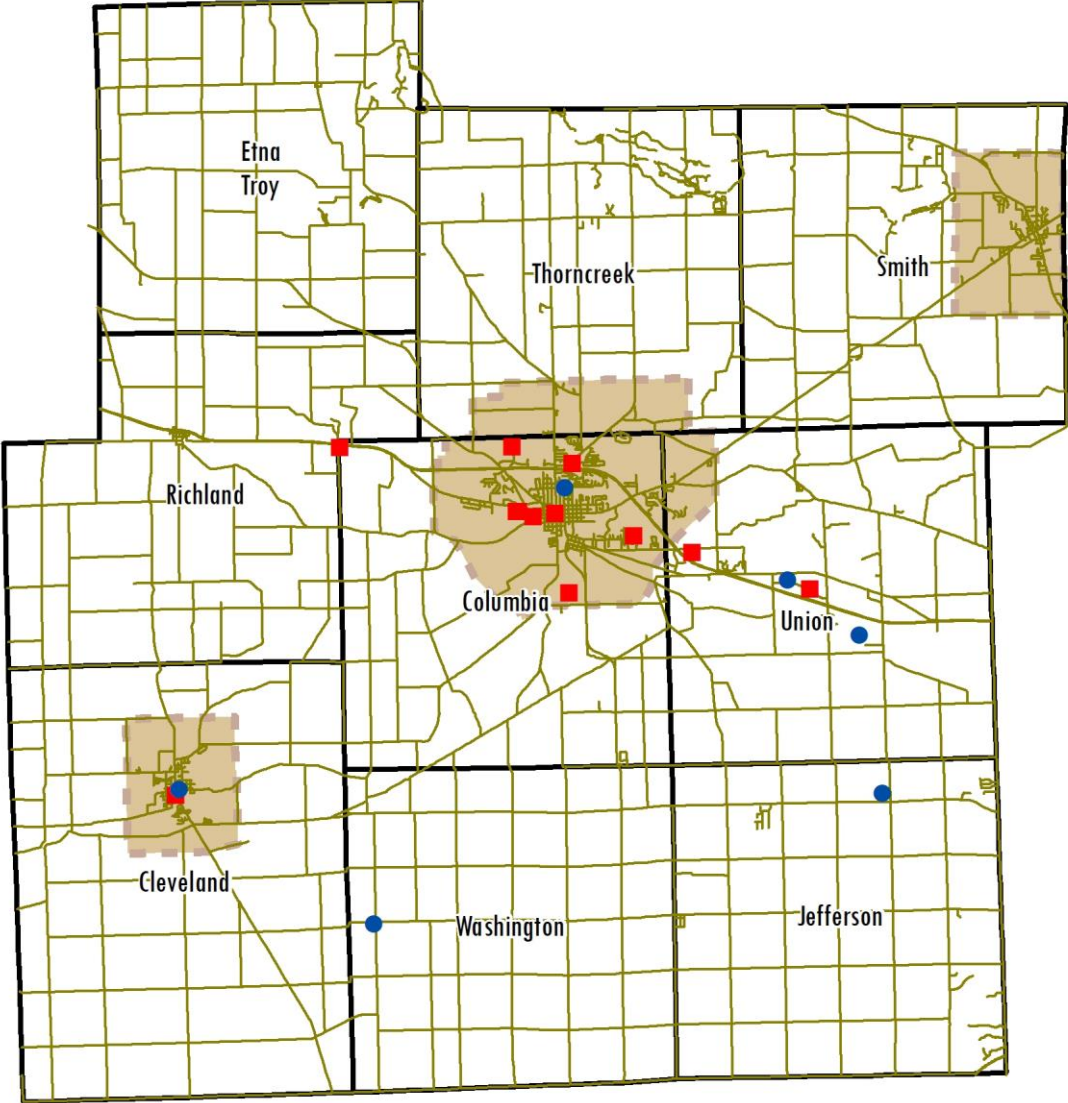
■ *New construction*
Includes single-family, two-family, modular, etc.
Does not include multi-family.

● *Additions*
Room or garage additions, adding stories, etc.
Does not include decks, porches, or remodels.



CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF COMMERCIAL PERMITS



■ *New construction*
Includes commercial, industrial, multi-family, and institutional uses.

● *Additions*
Additions to existing commercial, industrial, multi-family or institutional uses. Does not include remodels.



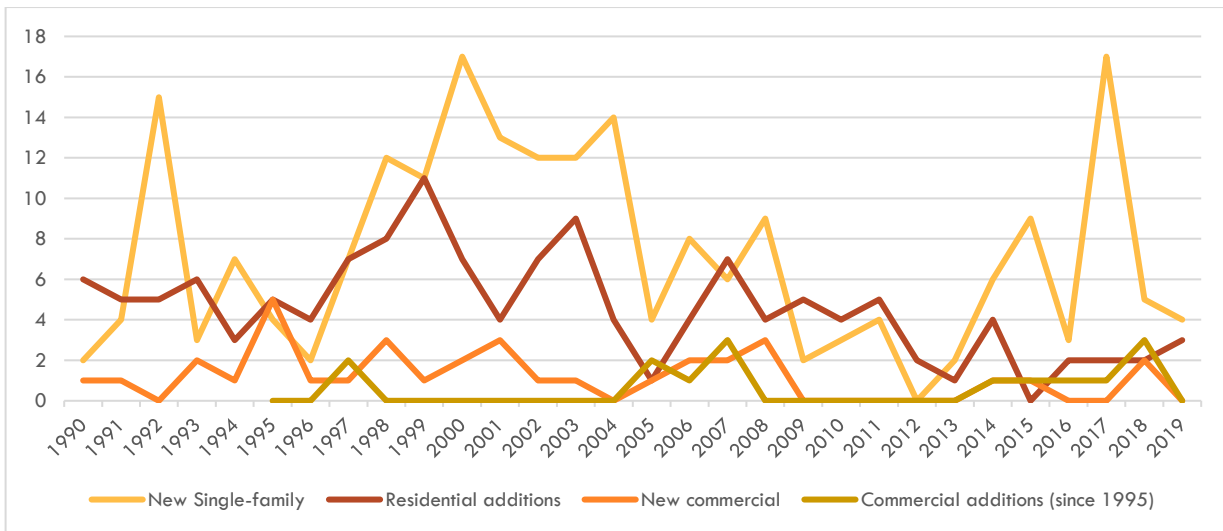
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

CHURUBUSCO

2019 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family dwellings	4	\$ 758,197
Multi-family dwellings	0	0
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	0
Residential additions	3	160,000
Residential accessory buildings	6	176,500
Agricultural buildings	1	57,000
Commercial/industrial	0	0
Commercial/industrial additions	0	0
Institutional	0	0
Institutional additions	0	0
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	35	178,924
TOTAL	49	\$ 1,330,621

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Single-family residence	\$ 217,697	Single-family residence	\$ 179,500
Single-family residence	198,000	Single-family residence	163,000

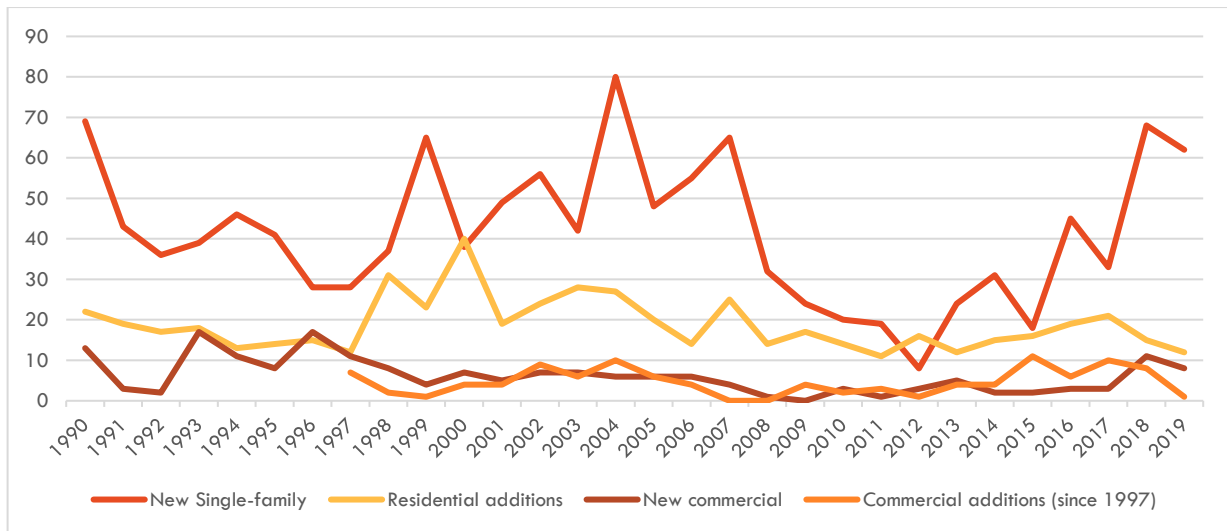
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

COLUMBIA CITY

2019 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	63	\$ 11,784,218
Multi-family dwellings	1	5,700,000
Manufactured/mobile homes	3	122,000
Residential additions	12	367,850
Residential accessory buildings	25	439,550
Agricultural buildings	1	7,000
Commercial/industrial	5	2,365,340
Commercial/industrial additions	1	800,000
Institutional	3	97,200
Institutional additions	0	0
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	151	2,622,175
TOTAL	265	\$ 24,305,333

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Van Buren Flats, apartment building	\$ 5,700,000	Farm Credit Services, remodel	\$ 800,000
McDonald's, new restaurant	1,900,000	Single-family residence	380,000

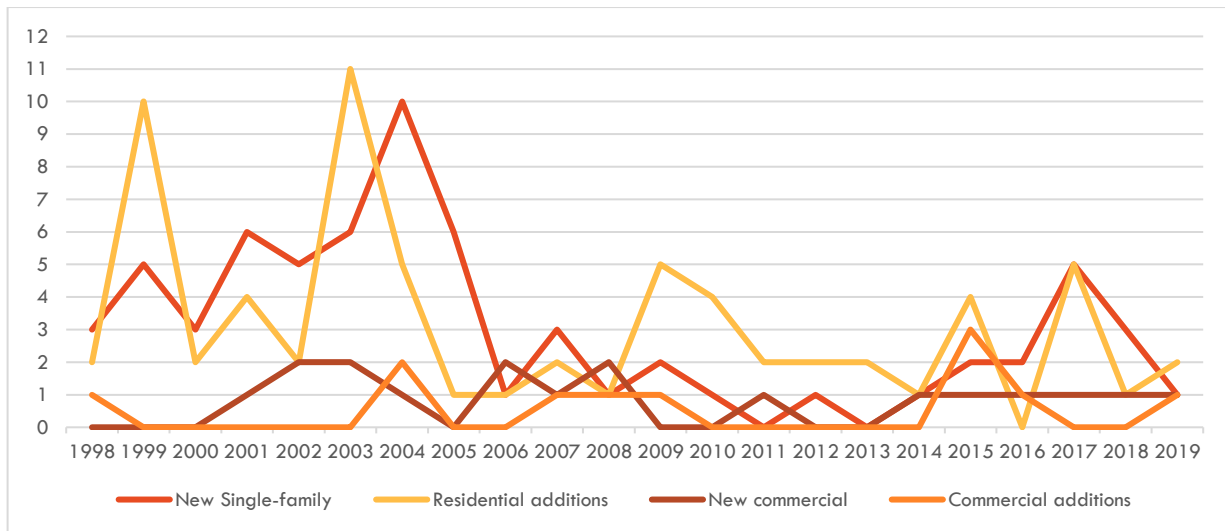
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

SOUTH WHITLEY

2019 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family dwellings	1	\$ 150,000
Multi-family dwellings	0	0
Manufactured/mobile homes	3	42,000
Residential additions	2	8,500
Residential accessory buildings	10	131,100
Agricultural buildings	0	0
Commercial/industrial	1	2,900
Commercial/industrial additions	0	0
Institutional	0	0
Institutional additions	1	950,000
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	22	303,570
TOTAL	40	\$ 1,588,070

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1998*



*Tracking for building permits started in 1998. The town fully joined the Department in 2002.

HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
South Whitley Library, addition	\$ 950,000	216 S. State Street, renovation	\$ 70,000
Single-family residence	150,000	Town of S. Whitley, park	60,000

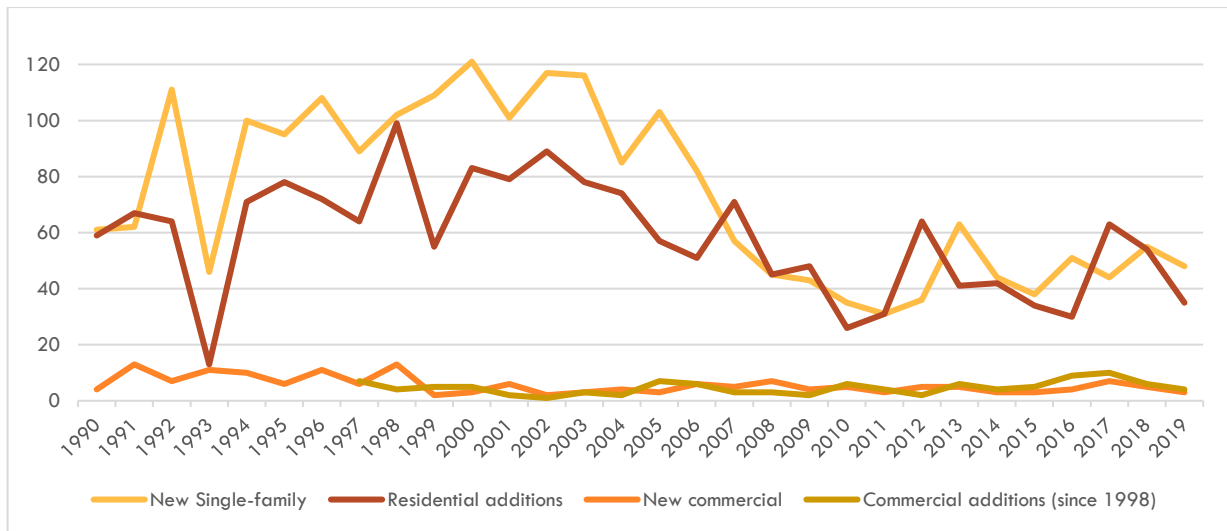
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

WHITLEY COUNTY

2019 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family dwellings	48	\$ 13,976,551
Multi-family dwellings	0	0
Manufactured/mobile homes	5	228,500
Residential additions	35	2,392,040
Residential accessory buildings	104	3,073,380
Agricultural buildings	35	4,196,125
Commercial/industrial	3	7,020,000
Commercial/industrial additions	3	10,280,000
Institutional	0	0
Institutional additions	1	300,000
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	191	3,372,701
TOTAL	425	\$ 44,839,297

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Whitley RC Inv., industrial addition	\$ 8,000,000	Micropulse, addition	\$ 1,500,000
Mach Medical, industrial	6,400,000	J. Sickafoose, CFO barn	1,100,000

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

FEES COLLECTED

The Department primarily collects fees for building permits and for petitions to the Plan Commissions and BZAs. Building permits make up all or nearly all of the building fees collected. Planning fees include Improvement Location Permits (i.e. zoning permits), petition filing fees, reimbursements for legal notices, and fees for providing services to South Whitley, Churubusco, and the Economic Development Corporation.

These are considered user fees, and they partially offset the time and expenses of performing the requested service (e.g. inspections, reviews, etc.). Owing to the joint nature of the Department, all fees are uniform throughout the County, which provides consistency for residents and businesses in any of the jurisdictions.

FEES COLLECTED, BY JURISDICTION

Jurisdiction	Planning fees	Building fees	Total	Share
Churubusco	\$ 7,156.40	\$ 4,215.00	\$ 11,371.40	6.82%
Columbia City	3,283.35	32,944.50	36,227.85	21.71%
South Whitley	6,776.80	4,692.00	11,468.80	6.87%
County	37,885.40	69,886.60	107,772.00	64.60%
TOTALS	\$ 55,101.95	\$ 111,738.10	\$ 166,840.05	

Court or attorney fees collected, joint expense reimbursements, and permit fee refunds are not shown on this table. Contract fees are included.

OPERATING EXPENSES

The tables below show the original approved budget, final appropriation after transfers and any additional appropriations, and the actual cash expenditures for 2019.

EXPENDITURES

Shared expenses	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
Salaries	\$ 248,219.00	\$ 248,219.00	\$ 238,229.07	96.0 %
Travel & auto	9,750.00	9,750.00	5,830.12	59.8 %
Equipment	7,000.00	7,000.00	6,979.49	99.7 %
Supplies	2,650.00	2,650.00	2,599.81	98.1 %
Printing	1,100.00	1,100.00	969.12	88.1 %
Memberships	900.00	900.00	839.87	93.3 %
Dues & subscriptions	550.00	550.00	212.50	38.6 %
Telephone	500.00	500.00	281.68	56.3 %
Subtotal	\$ 270,669.00	\$ 270,669.00	\$ 255,941.66	94.6 %

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

Jurisdiction-specific expenses *	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
County PC/BZA attorney	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	100.0 %
County PC/BZA member stipends	11,700.00	11,700.00	9,975.00	85.3 %
Professional services	5,000.00	9,254.10	1,938.00	38.8 %
Refunds	1,000.00	1,000.00	88.00	8.8 %
Subtotal	\$ 20,700.00	\$ 24,954.10	\$ 15,001.00	72.5 %
GRAND TOTAL	\$ 291,369.00	\$ 295,623.10	\$ 270,942.66	93.0 %

* These items are costs that are appropriated in the Department annual budget, but are not operating expenses shared between the City and County. They are charged directly to the jurisdiction to which they apply.

For the most part, expenditures in 2019 were fairly unremarkable and fell neatly within the original budget appropriations. The appropriation for the Professional Services category did increase with a \$4,254.10 encumbrance carried over from 2018, which was intended to be used to cover any remaining legal fees. Fortunately, fewer legal filings meant that legal expenses in 2019 were not as high as in the previous year, and so the category came in well under both the original and final appropriations.

Travel & Auto expenses were significantly under budget. This was due largely to the proximity of conferences and resulting lack of lodging and travel expenses, as well as continued low fuel costs. Also noteworthy is that salary expenses were lower than originally appropriated due to a position vacancy of six weeks and the new hire's lower probationary pay rate.

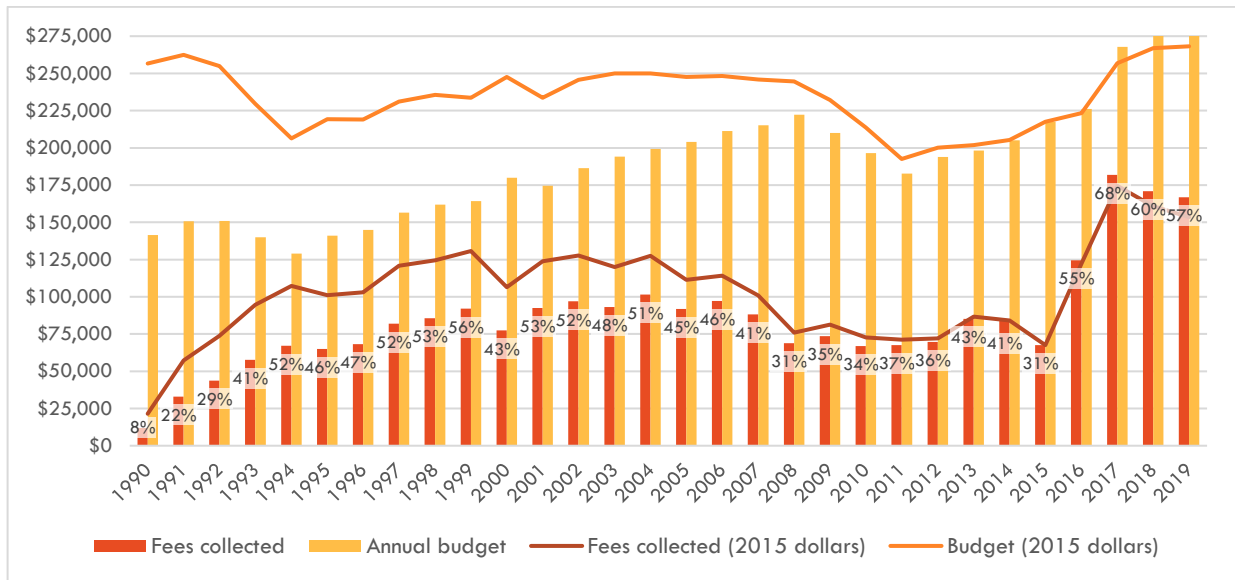
FEE REVENUES VS. EXPENSES

The Department is not a self-supporting agency. Its 2019 budget of \$291,369.00 was supported by the four member jurisdictions. However, as mentioned above, building permit application fees, petition filing fees, service contracts, and so on are user fees intended to offset the cost of the Department to provide those services and products. These funds are received and deposited in the Department's own bank account, and then transferred each month to the County's General Fund to help defray the expenses of the Department.

It is a standing goal of the Department to have fee revenues cover approximately fifty percent of expenses, while maintaining affordability relative to the region. For 2019, the year-end operating ratio of revenues collected to actual expenses was 61.6%, or 57.3% revenue to original budget (used for annual comparisons in the graph below). This ratio has been going down since the peak in 2017, which reflects lowered revenues and increasing operating costs. Still, the fifty percent goal was achieved for the year, and the operating ratio was again higher than in the building "boom" years of 1997-2006.

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

FEEES COLLECTED AS PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET



As seen in the chart above, the total fee revenue in 2019 continued to be high, ranking third to 2017 and 2018 in both absolute figures and when factored for inflation. However, the continually rising budget, when factored for inflation, may be concerning if there is not an accompanying rationale. One major budget item has been, and will be, the provision of permitting software used in the department. A fee or surcharge that would directly cover the cost of the system may be a fair method to account for this permit-driven item, which would separate its costs from the costs of providing other services.

Finally, while it may be tempting, due to the volatility of the construction and development industries, and the moderate size of Whitley County, the Department should not strive to be self-sufficient, based entirely on fee revenues. Nor should its expenses be permitted to outpace revenues unnecessarily. Rather, the Department should be expected to continue its history of reasonable expenditures, while striving to balance the workload required by our communities with corresponding fee revenues.



Demolition of the C-City Gas in Columbia City in November. This had been the last full-service station in the County, but closed due to a failing structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020

Based on the review of 2019 and future expectations, the following are recommendations for major goals for the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department in the coming year.

BALANCE GROWTH

As was first mentioned in the 2015 Annual Report, and repeated every year since, the continued slow population growth among all the jurisdictions over the past several years can lead to broader adverse community impacts. While we have seen a boost in permits and population since 2015, and the population is growing more rapidly when compared to adjacent counties, some aspects of 2019 could indicate another period of stagnation forthcoming.

New single-family dwelling permits fell for all jurisdictions in 2019. However, when excluding the two mass-permit projects in 2018 and 2019 (Quail Ridge and Ravenwood II, respectively), the total permit count has ranged from 82 to 105 per year since 2013 (except in 2015, see the table in Appendix B). So, the 90-some single-family permits for 2019 is still within an expected norm, but it is also not an upward trend.

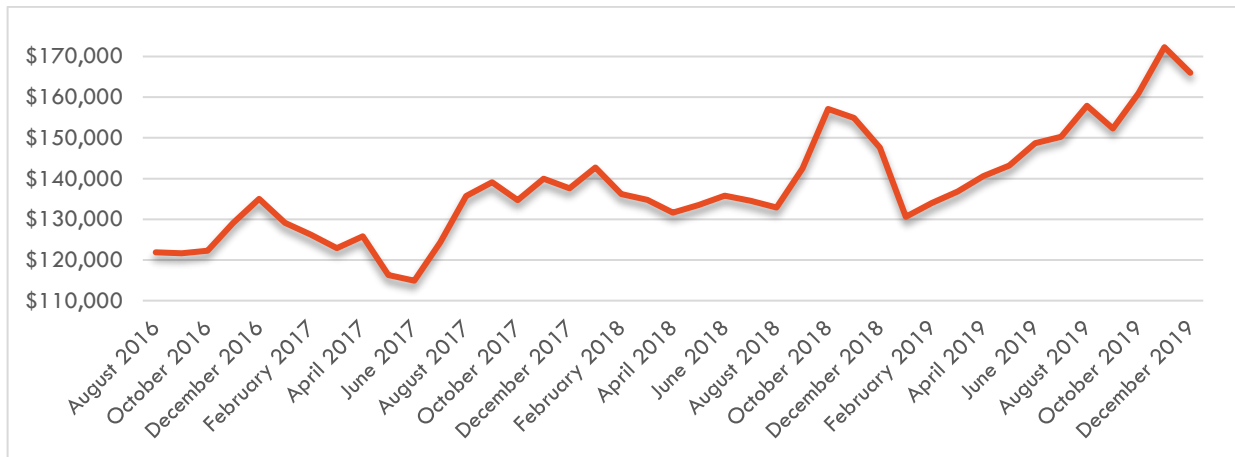
By data compiled by the department, by the end of 2019, Churubusco was out of available developed lots, without any new lots proposed to be developed in the coming year. Similarly, South Whitley has a nearly exhausted lot supply. Columbia City saw the build-out of Chesapeake Landing in 2019, and the second section of Cambridge Crossing will likely fill quickly 2020 and '21. Otherwise, the City also had no proposals for new development to come in 2020, and so its developed lot inventory could also be rapidly depleted. Unlike the towns, the City does have a fair number of approved, but undeveloped, lots remaining that could be drawn upon. For example, another section of Eagle Glen has been conceptually discussed several times in the past, but no action to develop has yet been taken.

Demand for living in Whitley County, however, has not fallen, and perhaps has even increased (increased job availability and quality of life being likely reasons). This then has resulted in an increase of the median sales price of homes (new and existing) in the county from \$122,000 in the fall of 2016 to \$161,000 in the fall of 2019², an increase of 32% over three years (see the graph below). While other northeast Indiana counties have also seen prices rise, this appears to be the highest increase in the region.

While residential development is not an absolute requirement for a well-functioning community, it must be accounted for in planning and community development efforts. If the sales of existing homes remain the same, and new home supply remains tight and demand continues to grow, should we prepare for higher and higher property values and home prices? Will that then make “affordable housing” a crucial community problem—or will the demand shift to places outside our county that have adequate supply, further stagnating our situation? Should our communities be actively recruiting builders and developers to encourage building residences? How should development of rental housing units, often disregarded in housing discussions, be recruited to supplement the overall housing stock?

² Zillow.com. (December 2019). Median Sales Price – Seasonally Adjusted. Retrieved from <https://www.zillow.com/research/data/>

MEDIAN HOME SALE PRICES IN WHITLEY COUNTY, 2016-19



Zillow.com

As stated in previous reports, to the extent that it is possible, the Department should continue to assist the jurisdictions in preparing for and encouraging a diversity of quality residential developments that would supply an increasing population. This is an even more crucial goal for both the Department and communities than ever before.

PLAN AND CODE CHANGES

The County will be pursuing a large Comprehensive Plan update in 2020. Depending on the resulting recommendations of the updated Plan, zoning code and zone map changes to bring the Plan and regulations into alignment may be proposed late in the year. Columbia City is expected to address obsolete and outdated standards in the Subdivision Code. South Whitley is seeking to amend its Comprehensive Plan to better incorporate trails and recreational opportunities. Churubusco has discussed adopting a new downtown-specific zoning district that could be similar to Columbia City's. Any code updates or revisions of course will require the diligence of the Department, committees, Plan Commissions, legislative bodies, and citizens to develop, revise, and adopt.

STAFFING

As has been discussed in previous years, it is anticipated that a second full-time inspector will be hired in mid-2020 to supplement the existing inspectors. While anticipated and budgeted, the final decision to hire for the position will be contingent on the present workload and the need to train the inspector to take over as Chief in the future. If there is not enough workload nor training need, the hiring might be deferred to 2021.

Looking at responsibilities in the Department, it seems that code enforcement has long been given a lowered priority in contrast to building inspection and zoning administration. These tasks may become a responsibility of the full-time inspector, or may be better served by a separate position. Given similarities of performing enforcement in the Health Department, it could be that a shared position would be advantageous for efficient and effective investigation and follow-through for both departments. These options should be evaluated in 2020 for implementation in the future.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: COUNTY-WIDE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY COMPARISON

	2018		2019	
	Permits*	Est. Value	Permits*	Est. Value
Single-family dwellings	131	\$ 29,288,290	115	\$ 26,488,966
Two-family	2	280,000	1	180,000
Multi-family	2	3,615,000	1	5,700,000
Manufactured homes	17	309,500	2	156,000
Mobile homes	0	-	9	236,500
Residential additions	53	2,238,800	52	2,928,390
Residential accessory buildings	113	2,452,530	145	3,820,530
Agricultural buildings	28	2,574,000	37	4,260,125
Commercial/industrial	19	19,137,200	9	9,388,240
Commercial/industrial additions	6	3,756,000	4	11,080,000
Institutional	3	1,091,855	3	97,200
Institutional additions	3	915,000	2	1,250,000
Miscellaneous/ILP only/other	370	4,181,201	399	6,477,370
TOTAL	747	\$ 69,839,376	779	\$ 72,063,321

*Note that this table includes both building permits and improvement location permits. Many projects have both, so totals do not match those below.

APPENDIX B: YEARLY COMPARISONS

Building Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	35	25	50	45	34	57	57	36
Columbia City	177	182	247	173	87	185	277	221
South Whitley	40	25	34	40	40	45	42	33
County	419	435	410	382	509	432	366	403
Total	671	667	741	640	670	719	742	693

Improvement Location Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	19	12	28	31	22	41	42	36
Columbia City	96	111	157	112	168	154	195	190
South Whitley	20	10	19	22	24	38	23	29
County	294	331	290	301	300	328	258	298
Total	429	464	494	466	514	561	518	553

Receipts Written	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	638	737	634	749	784	841	790	886	987	878	869

APPENDICES

Inspections completed	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco				190	123	229	180	109
Columbia City				704	1,036	982	1,116	1,142
South Whitley				140	111	181	127	86
County				1,935	1,774	1,841	1,641	1,697
Total	2,734	2,973	3,004	2,969	3,044	3,233	3,064	3,034

*Inspections per jurisdiction were not tracked prior to 2015

New Single-Family Dwellings	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	0	2	6	9	3	17	5	4
Columbia City	8	24	31	18	45	33	68	62
South Whitley	1	0	1	2	1	5	3	1
County	36	63	44	38	51	44	55	48
Total	45	89	82	67	100	99	131	115

Median Single-Family Dwelling Const. Cost	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	NA	\$163,000	\$168,000	\$167,000	\$150,000	\$179,000	\$201,500	\$188,750
Columbia City	\$170,000	\$152,000	\$163,500	\$160,500	\$170,000	\$191,800	\$173,675	\$199,053
South Whitley	\$248,000	NA	\$350,000	\$105,000	\$121,500	\$162,000	\$80,000	\$150,000
County	\$220,500	\$218,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$190,000	\$250,000	\$275,000	\$283,500
Overall	\$217,000	\$181,250	\$177,500	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$203,448	\$204,900	\$220,000

Permits in Floodplain*	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia City	0	2	0	0	2	2	2	7
South Whitley	1	0	0	0	3	1	5	6
County	17	11	13	4	8	22	20	44
Total	18	13	13	4	13	25	27	58

*Any part of parcel is located in regulatory floodplain; often the permitted improvement is not in the floodplain

Land Use Petitions Filed	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Churubusco	6	2	3	4	3	5	8	6
Columbia City	10	10	10	10	18	22	33	16
South Whitley	0	1	1	5	4	9	6	3
County	46	40	45	44	53	74	50	60
Total	62	53	59	63	78	110	97	85