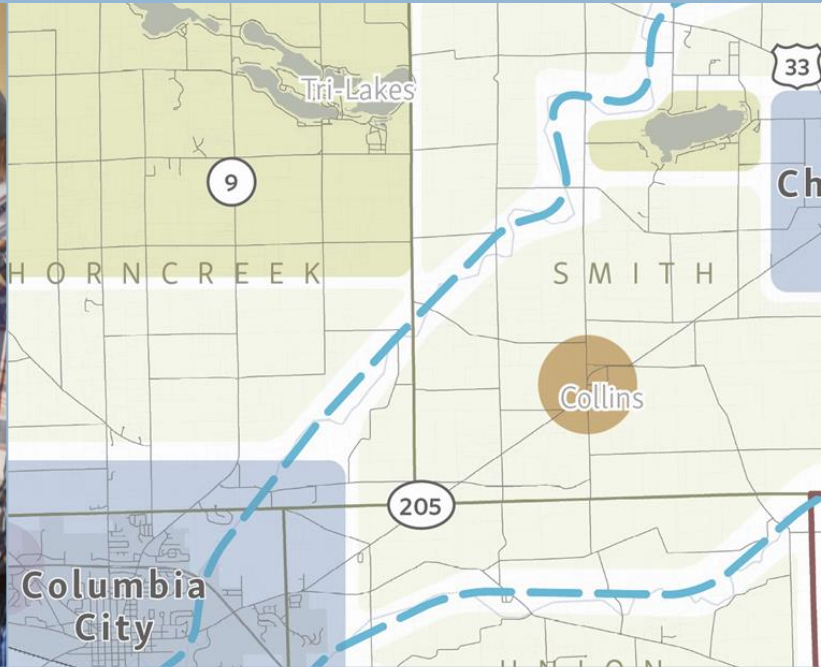


COLUMBIA CITY/WHITLEY COUNTY JOINT PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

This is the Annual Report of the:

Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department
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Columbia City, IN 46725
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Date of publication: March 3, 2021

Cover images:

Public engagement on the County Comprehensive Plan update, October
Touring the nearly completed auditorium of the new Columbia City High School, August
In the background is the Opportunities Map from the draft Comprehensive Plan

Photos by Department staff unless noted

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

In last year's Annual Report, I concluded this section with the following,

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.

When that was written in February 2020, there was already some indication that things would change, but little did anyone realize what an unprecedented year it would become in the subsequent months. However, despite the quarantines, shutdowns, remote meetings, and all of the other complications of 2020, I think that we were still able to help our communities be greater.

Even with the pandemic, there were significant projects going on in 2020. We saw two new major subdivisions begin development in the City, as well as additional sections of others, all of which will create acutely needed lots in 2021; the start on a new assisted living center; the completion of Van Buren Flats downtown; the opening of the new Columbia City High School and the Whitko Career Academy; and the development of the first utility-scale solar field in the county. While the number of new home permits for the year was slightly lower than previous years, nearly all other types of permits were higher, especially the "miscellaneous" category, which increased by 99 permits over 2019. Through the year, it seemed that quarantined homeowners opted to spend stimulus checks on decks, fences, remodeling, constructing pole buildings, and doing home additions. The start of a Comprehensive Plan update, rezonings, development plans, variances, and code changes continued for the jurisdictions as well.



Construction in a hallway of the new high school, March

All of this kept the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department busy. The leadership of the City and County permitted the Department to continue to provide these services, while some nearby counties and municipalities essentially shut down for nearly two months. It would be hard to imagine what the result would be if this Department had also been closed for so long.

As we look into 2021, I expect growth and change will continue for Whitley County, although hopefully we will be able to call it a relatively "precedented" year.

-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>	Mark Cullnane
Planning & Permit Technician <i>Processes permits and handles 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; he also served as an officer for the Indiana Association of Building Officials. Nathan Bilger is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners and serves on the Indiana planning association’s legislative committee. Staff members participate in training throughout the year, though with the pandemic many typically available training opportunities were cancelled or postponed.



Mark Cullnane works with residents during the Comprehensive Plan public input session in Larwill, November.

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 or developer's initial inquiries and concept design to the completion of their buildings.

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 2020, the members were:

Ryan Daniel, Chair	Mayor
George Schrupf, Vice chair	County Commissioner
Chad Banks	County Council
Don Langeloh	City Plan Commission
Jenny Reffitt	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 2020, the Board met on February 21 and June 3.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2020

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:

- Operated with a limited or alternate office staffing arrangement through the first half of the COVID-19 quarantine in April; building inspections continued throughout as normal
- Returned to full staffing by mid-April due to upturn in permit applications
- Set up payment vendor and started accepting credit card payments in April; this was a critical accomplishment that kept the office functioning while the building was on lockdown
- Selected consultant for Whitley County Comprehensive Plan update and began update process in July; major public engagement workshops occurred in October and November
- In February, obtained court order and injunction on a property with outstanding zoning violations; worked with the Sheriff and Humane Society to remove more than 60 dogs from the dwelling
- Worked with the Columbia City Board of Works to partially demolish an unsafe dwelling on South Main Street
- Hosted a housing forum in January that brought together public officials, real estate professionals, developers, and builders to discuss the status of housing throughout the county
- Approved the first plats in the Churubusco jurisdiction to be filed in several years
- Drafted a zoning ordinance amendment for South Whitley that defined kennels and refined uses permitted in the A-1 and GB districts
- Drafted and approved a subdivision code amendment in the City to require connectivity and minimum access for new subdivisions
- Held Development Plan and Technical Review meetings for commercial projects and residential subdivisions in Columbia City and the County
- Worked with several petitioners throughout the year in their rezoning requests to commercial, industrial, and agricultural production zoning districts in the County, City, and South Whitley
- Craig Wagner served as Secretary-Treasurer for the Indiana Association of Building Officials (IABO)
- Staff members attended a planning and professional development workshop on solar energy in Bluffton in March
- Hosted one Northeastern IABO meeting; others that would typically be held were cancelled due to the pandemic



Demolition of an unsafe building on South Main Street in March, Columbia City

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
- 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



Development in progress of the IMPA solar field in Columbia City, May

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT STATISTICS

Building permits issued	735	New single-family permits	92
Inspections completed	3,644	New commercial building permits	10
Building department vehicle mileage	38,182	Demolition permits	21
Unsafe building violation notices	10	Unsafe building orders	3
Improvement location permits issued	594	Mobile home renewals	0
Pond permits issued	13	Permit/code violation notices	29
Plan Commission applications	44	BZA applications	35
Planning meetings held	39	Redevelopment Commission meetings	22
Total fees collected	\$ 169,723.77	Total operating expenses	\$ 297,045.87

POPULATION

The population for Whitley County was estimated by the U.S. Census as 33,964 as of July 1, 2019, the most recent estimate available, a growth of 2.0% above the 2010 Census count. The estimated county population did fall by 0.2% from 2018 to 2019, with the municipalities seeing mixed population growth and decline over that year. The general trend in these population estimates correlate with the increases in permitting mentioned in recent annual reports, though each year varies due to the Census’ methodology.

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

	Census		Population Estimates								Change
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2010-19
Whitley Co.	33,292	33,358	33,335	33,283	33,444	33,444	33,475	33,722	34,047	33,964	2.0%
Columbia City	8,750	8,866	8,863	8,842	8,879	8,908	8,913	9,065	9,179	9,234	5.5%
Churubusco	1,796	1,863	1,860	1,850	1,852	1,857	1,873	1,875	1,916	1,979	10.2%
South Whitley	1,751	1,774	1,768	1,761	1,759	1,751	1,748	1,746	1,757	1,741	-0.6%
Larwill*	283	285	284	283	285	284	285	285	288	284	0.4%

**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.*

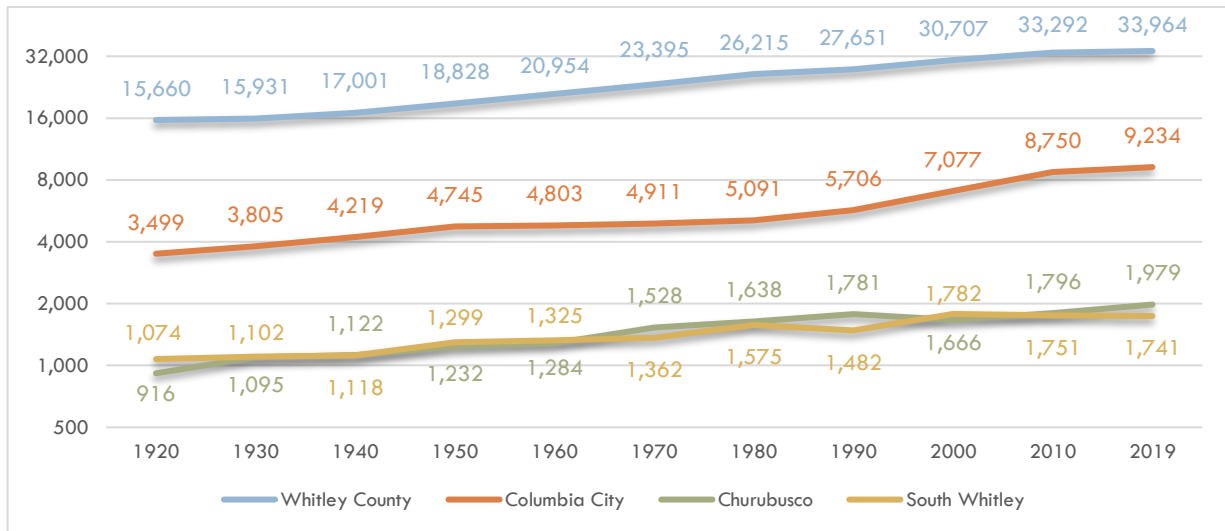
Over the 2010-19 time period, Allen County had an estimated 6.7% growth, Kosciusko County had 2.7%, and the state as a whole was 3.8%. However, Whitley County has seen more estimated growth than other nearby counties: Noble (0.4%), Huntington (-1.6%), and Wabash (-5.8%). Note that due to the methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau, each annual estimate also revises the preceding years, so comparisons can only be made when looking at the series in one estimate (in other words, these numbers do not match those in last year’s report). The 2020 Decennial Census, the results of which are planned to be released later in 2021, will check the annual estimates and could revise the estimates’ base figure.

As discussed in prior reports, the population growth rates in the 2010s are 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

COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

years, although Churubusco did have a surge during the active construction in Thresher's Ridge subdivision, which was completed in 2019.

POPULATION GROWTH SINCE 1920



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As stated in previous reports, if the trend indicated by the estimates is reflected in the 2020 Census, Whitley County would have its lowest growth rate since 1930. It would be an example of a *flattened curve*.

SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

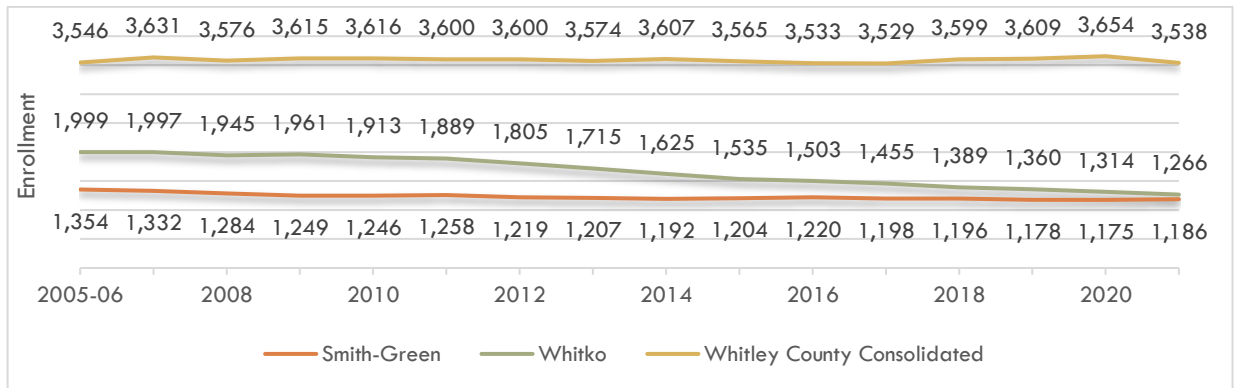
School enrollment is an important factor to consider in planning as it can be another indicator of the long-term vitality of our communities.

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 57% and 14% of their 2005 enrollments. Whitley County Consolidated Schools has been on a statistical plateau over that time.

Since the number of remote learning students enrolled in each district are not shown in the annual enrollment figures, determining impacts on school enrollment is difficult. However, both Whitko and WCCS saw decreases in students in the 2020-21 year from the previous year. This was despite both systems opening new school buildings in the fall. Many factors could cause this; though a shift to home-schooling might be an intuitive cause.

Whitley County's only independent alternative school, TROY Center, had a continual increase in enrollment from 13 students in 2012 to 46 in 2019-20. The number of students fell to 32 for the 2020-21 year though, with the cause likely being related to the fall in enrollment for the other school corporations. Still, the overall 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 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 that opened in the fall of 2020 located in the former Whitko Middle School in Larwill. The Whitko Career Academy provides training for employment opportunities in local businesses, agriculture, broader vocational classes, and college-level courses. Along with the new facilities for Eagle Tech in Columbia City High School and the necessary electronic learning capabilities, the scope of Whitley County’s education system broadened significantly in 2020.



The Whitko Career Academy’s new sign representing its multi-disciplinary, vocational focus

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rate is an important statistic for the Department and communities to utilize in planning efforts. In November 2020, the most recent data available, the County unemployment rate stood at a seasonally-unadjusted 3.5%. This was a higher rate than the previous three years, but comparable to 2015 and lower than the years before. Of course, the events of 2020 created an unprecedented spike in unemployment that peaked in April at 17.2%.

Fortunately, Whitley County seemed to be resilient, with unemployment falling to 3.7% by October without a significant change in the size of the labor force. Comparatively, Huntington County’s unemployment peaked at 19.6% and fell to 3.9% in October, but they also lost nearly 4% of their labor force over that time. Noble County fared even worse, with its labor force shrinking by 10% in 2020.

In Northeast Indiana, it appears that only Wells and Whitley Counties had both recovered unemployment rates below 4% and not lost more than 1% of the labor force over the year. This is a particularly interesting

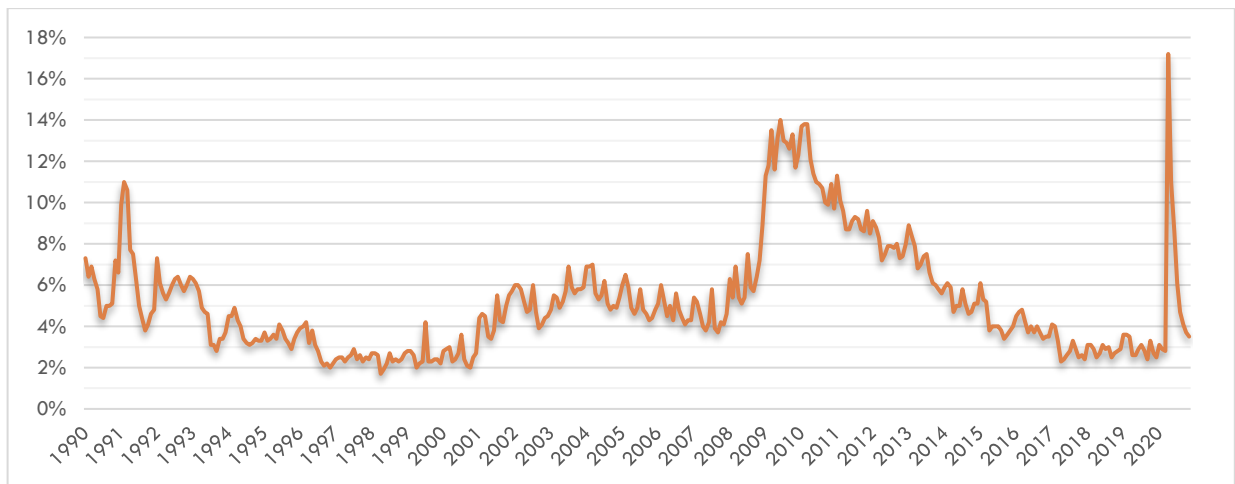
COUNTY-WIDE STATISTICS

statistic, but the investigation for causes and the assessment of its implications goes far beyond the scope of this annual report.

However, on a planning level, the changes to the labor force is still 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.

As has been noted before, a sustained rate below 3%, as we saw for at least three years ending in April 2020, is something to be aware of 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.

WHITLEY COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE SINCE 1990



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, through November 2020

A final outcome of 2020 may be the growth of work-from-home careers. The lockdowns and quarantines have shown the potential for such work environments to function, and some businesses are expected to convert some, if not all, of their office positions to remote ones. Whitley County could capitalize on this possible trend by touting its lower cost of living despite being far away from traditional business hubs. Also, the County's strong availability of on-site jobs could be unique by being able to offer two-income families opportunity for remote and local occupations. Of course, remote jobs still have requirements, including excellent internet connectivity and exceptional quality of life features, that the County would need to provide to be truly attractive for those new workers.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

CHURUBUSCO

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	0	Subdivision plat	2	Variance	2
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	1	Appeal	0
Development plan	0	Special exception	0	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
Wayne Krider	Town Council	1/1/2024
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
Ashley Wagner	County Commissioners	1/1/2024

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Churubusco Plan Commission held 2 meetings in 2020, in which the Commission considered three subdivision requests.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Jason Bartl, Chair	Town Council	1/1/2024
Paula Grawcock, Vice chair	Plan Commission	Biennial appointment
Alan Malcolm	Town Council	1/1/2023
Brenda Saggars	Town Council	1/1/2024
Miles Wilson	Town Council	1/1/2023

Summary of BZA actions

The Churubusco Board of Zoning Appeals held 3 meetings in 2020 and considered cases for a fence type variance and lot standards variance.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

COLUMBIA CITY

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	5	Subdivision plat	4	Variance	6
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	0	Appeal	0
Development plan	2	Special exception	5	Other	2

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Walt Crowder	City Council	Elected official
Doug Graft	County Commissioners	1/1/2023
Jon Kissinger	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Don Langeloh	Mayor	1/1/2023
Chip Hill	City Council	Employee
Dennis Warnick	Mayor	1/1/2024
Dan Weigold	City Council	Elected official
Larry Weiss, President	Mayor	1/1/2021
Patrick Zickgraf, Vice president	Mayor	1/1/2022

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Columbia City Plan Commission held 9 meetings in 2020. The Commission approved development plans for Autumn Trace and 9& 30 Mini Storage; two major and two minor subdivisions; and five rezonings. They also recommended a subdivision control code update regarding connectivity and access and began a second general update.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

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

Summary of BZA actions

The Columbia City Board of Zoning Appeals held 5 meetings in 2020. The Board considered variances for apartment floor area, setbacks, fences, and lot coverage; and special exceptions for a home salon, childcare, apartments, and outdoor storage/display.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

SOUTH WHITLEY

PETITIONS FILED

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

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Sherri Ayres	County Commissioners	1/1/2023 <i>appointed in July</i>
Wendy Bills, President	Town Council	1/1/2021
Dawn Boggs	Town Council	1/1/2022 <i>appointed in June</i>
Randy Cokl	Town Council	Elected official
Timothy Gable	County Commissioners	1/1/2024 <i>appointed in July</i>
Les Hoffman	Town Council	Elected official
Taylor Kessie	Town Council	1/1/2023 <i>appointed in June</i>
Anna Simmons	Town Council	1/1/2023
Brock Waterson, Vice president	Town Council	Elected official

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The South Whitley Plan Commission held 3 meetings in 2020. The Commission recommended a zoning text change related to kennels, considered a rezoning, and approved a two-lot plat.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
Sherri Ayres	Plan Commission	Annual appointment
Frank Baldrige	Town Council	1/1/2023
Rod Hardesty	Town Council	1/1/2021
Taylor Kessie	Town Council	1/1/2021
Doug Morrissey	Town Council	1/1/2023

Summary of BZA actions

The South Whitley Board of Zoning Appeals held did not meet in 2020. While there is a goal to hold at least one meeting per year even if there are no petitions filed, the lockdowns, quarantining, and social distancing of 2020 made holding any unnecessary meetings undesirable.

PLANNING AND ZONING ACTIVITIES

WHITLEY COUNTY

PETITIONS FILED

Rezoning	4	Subdivision plat	17	Variance	12
Zoning text amendment	0	Subdivision replat	5	Appeal	1
Development plan	2	Special exception	9	Other	0

PLAN COMMISSION

Membership

	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>
John Johnson, Secretary	County Commissioners	1/1/2021
Kim Kurtz-Seslar	County Commissioners	1/1/2022 <i>appointed in Sept.</i>
Troy 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 <i>resigned Sept.</i>
Charles Zumbrun	County Surveyor	Duration of Office <i>served Oct.-Dec.</i>
Tom Western	County Commissioner (member)	Annual appointment
John Woodmansee	County Agricultural Educator	Duration of Office <i>became advisor Oct.</i>
Brent Emerick	Co. Ag. Ed. Representative	Annual appointment <i>started Oct.</i>

Summary of Plan Commission actions

The Whitley County Plan Commission held 9 meetings in 2020. The Commission approved 16 primary plats, five replats, and one primary plat modification; made recommendations on four rezoning requests; and approved development plans for SDI and AgPlus.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS

Membership

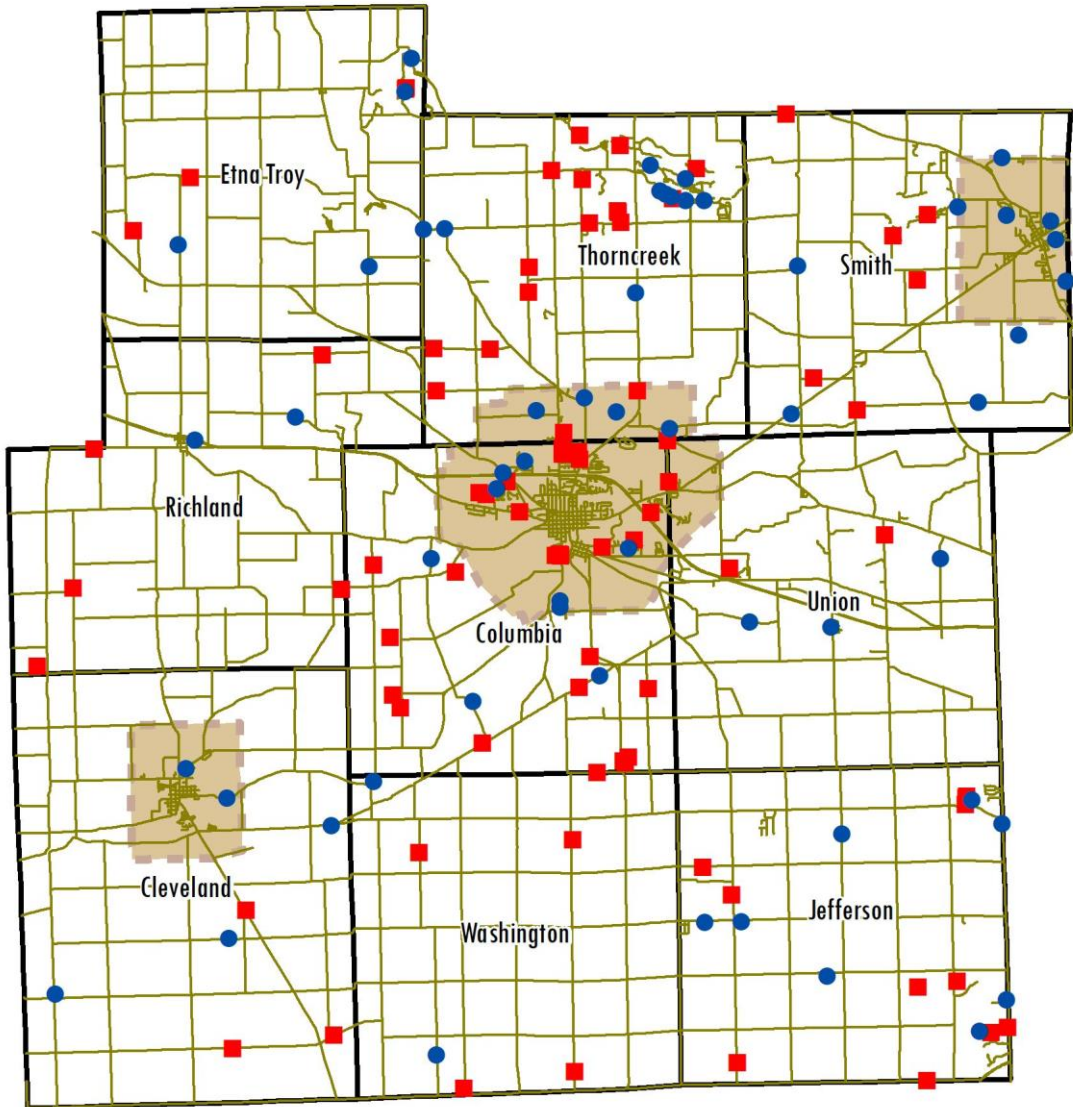
	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Alternate</u>
Tim Denihan	County Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Sarah Lopez	County Council	1/1/2023	Kelley Sheiss
Danny Wilkinson, Chair	County Commissioners	1/1/2023	
Troy Joe Wolf	County Commissioners	1/1/2022	
Doug Wright	Plan Commission Member	Annual appointment	

Summary of BZA actions

The County Board of Zoning Appeals held 8 meetings in 2020. Among the cases the Board considered were variances for setbacks, industrial buffering, and an EMC; special exceptions for secondary dwelling units, manufactured homes, and propane tanks.

CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

MAP OF RESIDENTIAL PERMITS



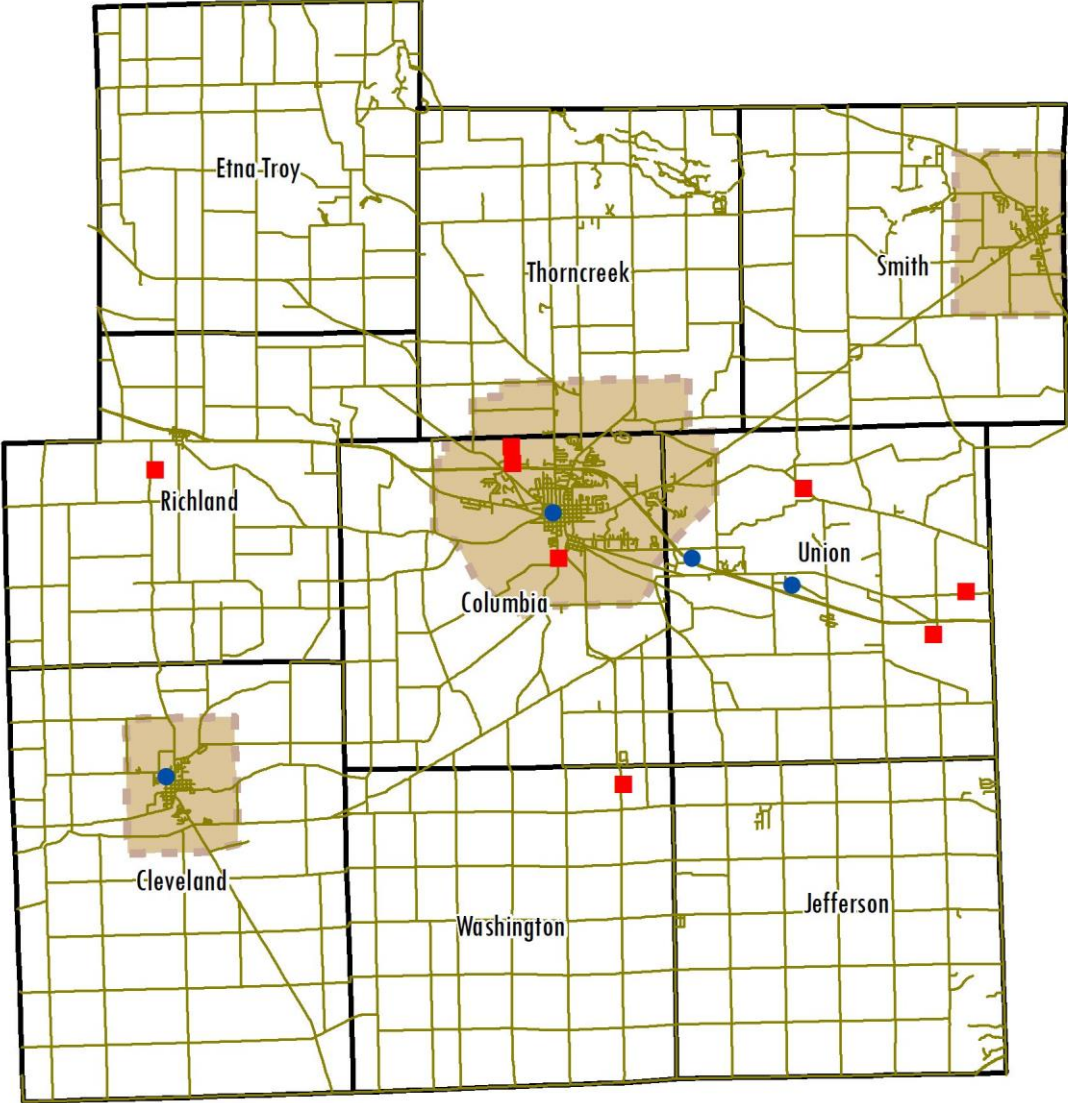
■ *New construction*
Includes single-family, two-family, modular, etc.
Does not include multi-family.

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



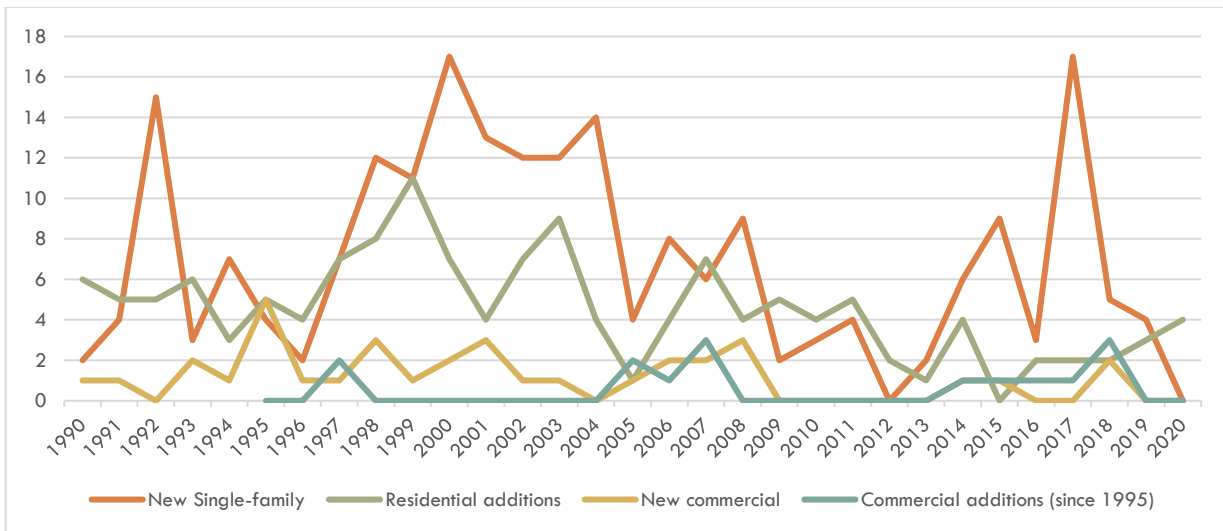
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

CHURUBUSCO

2020 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	0	\$ -
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	-
Residential additions	4	232,420
Residential accessory buildings	7	78,300
Agricultural buildings	1	16,000
Commercial/industrial	0	-
Commercial/industrial additions	0	-
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	33	289,359
TOTAL	45	\$ 616,079

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Room addition	\$ 65,000	Private club building remodel	\$ 40,000
Pole building	40,000	Residential remodel	30,000

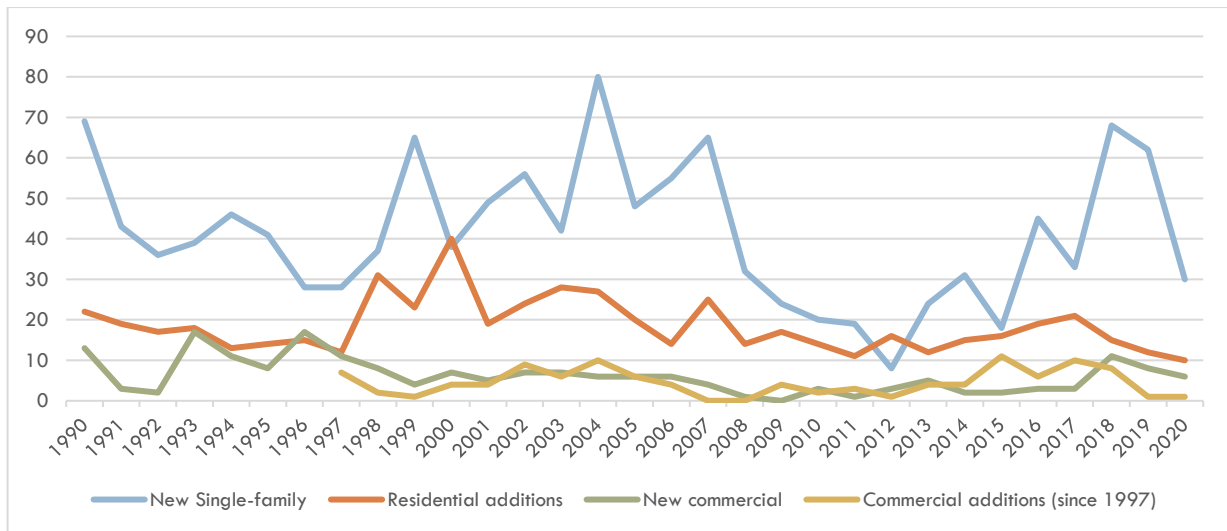
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

COLUMBIA CITY

2020 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family/Two-family dwellings	30	\$ 8,187,210
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	0	-
Residential additions	10	508,000
Residential accessory buildings	36	639,507
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	6	10,125,000
Commercial/industrial additions	1	5,000
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	191	2,489,505
TOTAL	274	\$ 21,954,222

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Autumn Trace, assisted living	\$ 5,500,000	Indiana Municipal Power Agency, solar field	\$ 1,500,000
ProFed, bank	2,375,000	Single-family residence	856,949

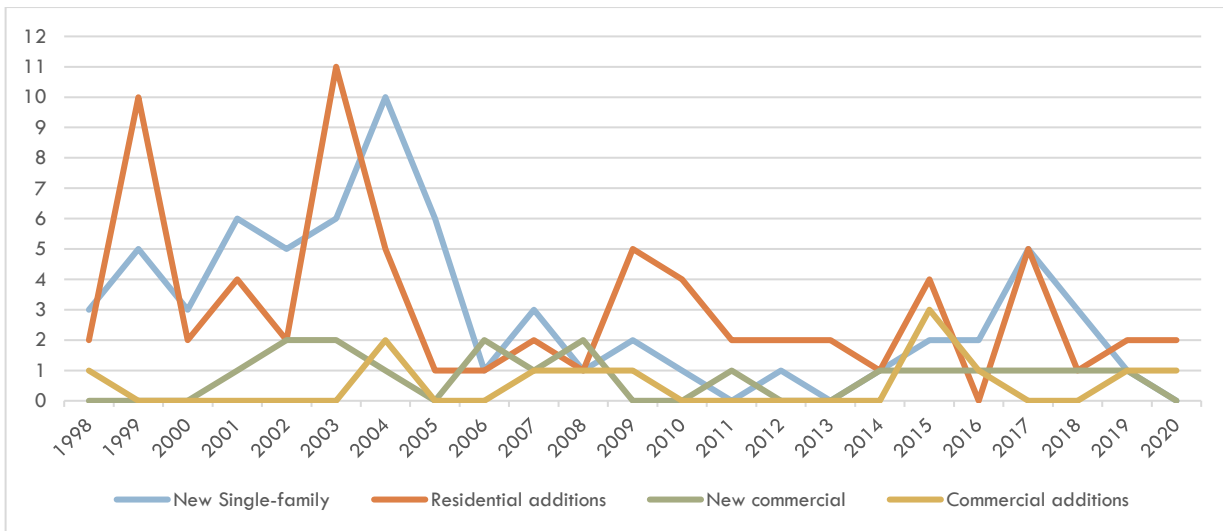
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

SOUTH WHITLEY

2020 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family dwellings	0	\$ -
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	1	6,500
Residential additions	2	44,200
Residential accessory buildings	7	76,348
Agricultural buildings	0	-
Commercial/industrial	0	-
Commercial/industrial additions	1	12,000
Institutional	0	-
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	22	107,651
TOTAL	33	\$ 246,699

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
Accessory structure addition	\$ 48,000	Cell tower co-locate	\$ 25,000
Residential addition	40,000	Residential remodel	15,000

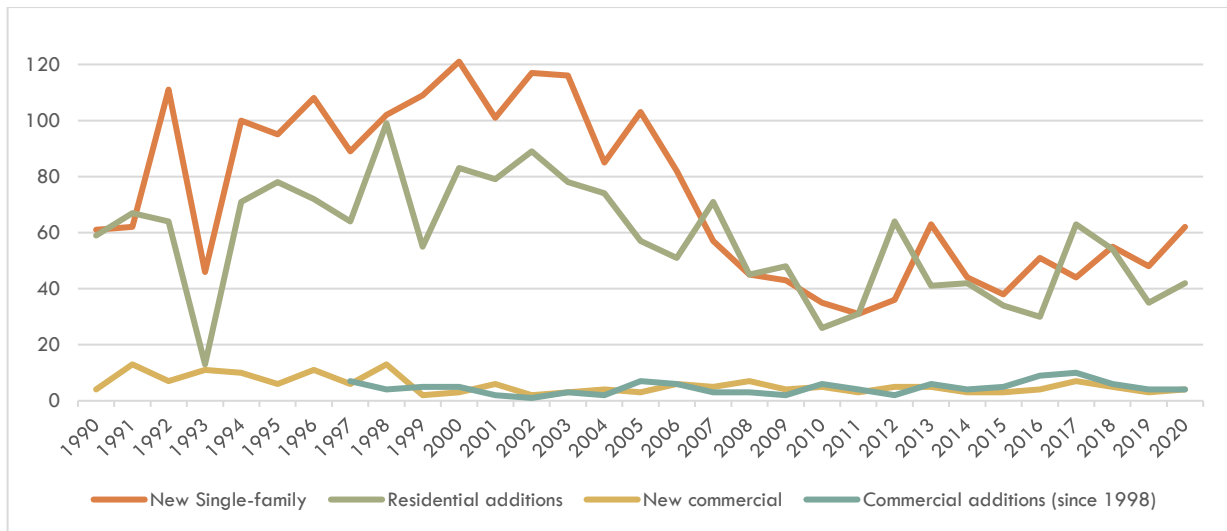
CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY

WHITLEY COUNTY

2020 BUILDING PERMITS

Type of Permit	Number of Permits	Est. Value of Construction
Single-family dwellings	62	\$ 18,655,616
Multi-family dwellings	0	-
Manufactured/mobile homes	7	158,500
Residential additions	42	2,856,445
Residential accessory buildings	106	3,613,937
Agricultural buildings	37	3,679,928
Commercial/industrial	4	5,624,000
Commercial/industrial additions	4	6,910,751
Institutional	3	1,373,000
Institutional additions	0	-
Miscellaneous/remodels/ILP/other	237	\$3,903,235
TOTAL	502	\$ 46,775,412

PERMITS ISSUED SINCE 1990



HIGHEST CONSTRUCTION VALUES

Project	Construction Value	Project	Construction Value
Iotron Industries, industrial addition	\$ 6,434,151	More Family Farms, CFO barn	\$ 1,100,000
Briggs Crop Nutrients, dry fertilizer building	5,400,000	D. Western, CFO barn	1,000,000

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	\$ 7,298.00	\$ 4,018.00	\$ 11,316.00	6.67 %
Columbia City	5,791.00	30,140.75	35,931.75	21.17 %
South Whitley	6,983.00	2,111.25	9,094.25	5.36 %
County	35,096.65	78,285.12	113,381.77	66.80 %
TOTALS	\$ 55,168.65	\$ 114,555.12	\$ 169,723.77	

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 2020.

EXPENDITURES

Shared expenses	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
Salaries	\$ 287,493.00	\$ 312,119.00	\$ 269,054.83	93.6 %
Travel & auto	10,000.00	10,000.00	3,452.01	34.5 %
Equipment	7,000.00	7,000.00	6,258.93	89.4 %
Supplies	2,800.00	2,800.00	2,375.99	84.9 %
Printing	1,150.00	1,150.00	996.27	86.6 %
Memberships	1,030.00	1,030.00	841.00	81.7 %
Dues & subscriptions	550.00	550.00	188.50	34.3 %
Telephone	500.00	500.00	87.34	17.5 %
Subtotal	\$ 310,523.00	\$ 335,149.00	\$ 283,254.87	91.2 %

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

Jurisdiction-specific expenses *	Appropriations		Expended	Percent of budget
	(Budget)	(Final)		
County PC/BZA attorney	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 0.00	0.0 %
County PC/BZA member stipends	11,700.00	11,700.00	6,675.00	57.1 %
Professional services	9,000.00	16,316.10	6,604.00	73.4 %
Refunds	1,000.00	1,000.00	512.00	51.2 %
Subtotal	\$ 24,700.00	\$ 32,016.10	\$ 13,791.00	55.8 %
GRAND TOTAL	\$ 335,223.00	\$ 367,165.10	\$ 297,045.87	88.6 %

* 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 2020 were well within the original budget appropriations. Salaries increased due to County-wide raises, but the anticipated hiring of a full-time inspector was postponed to 2021, decreasing the overall impact on the budget. The County Plan Commission and BZA legal counsel changed to Bloom Gates Shipman & Whiteleather at the beginning of 2020; this resulted in hourly rates being paid from the Professional Services category and the discontinuance of the “attorney” category. Even with a major BZA case being heard in the courts early in 2020, the legal counsel expenses were still within the original budget amount, so there was no need to encumber leftover funds from 2020 to 2021.

Travel & Auto expenses were again significantly under budget. This was due largely to unavailability of conferences and the extended downturn in fuel costs, both due to the pandemic. Similarly, the expenditure for member stipends was far lower than typical, largely due to the cancellation of four meetings in March and April. In the future, the newfound ability for members to participate electronically may result in more member participation, as members may participate even if they are out of town for a meeting date.

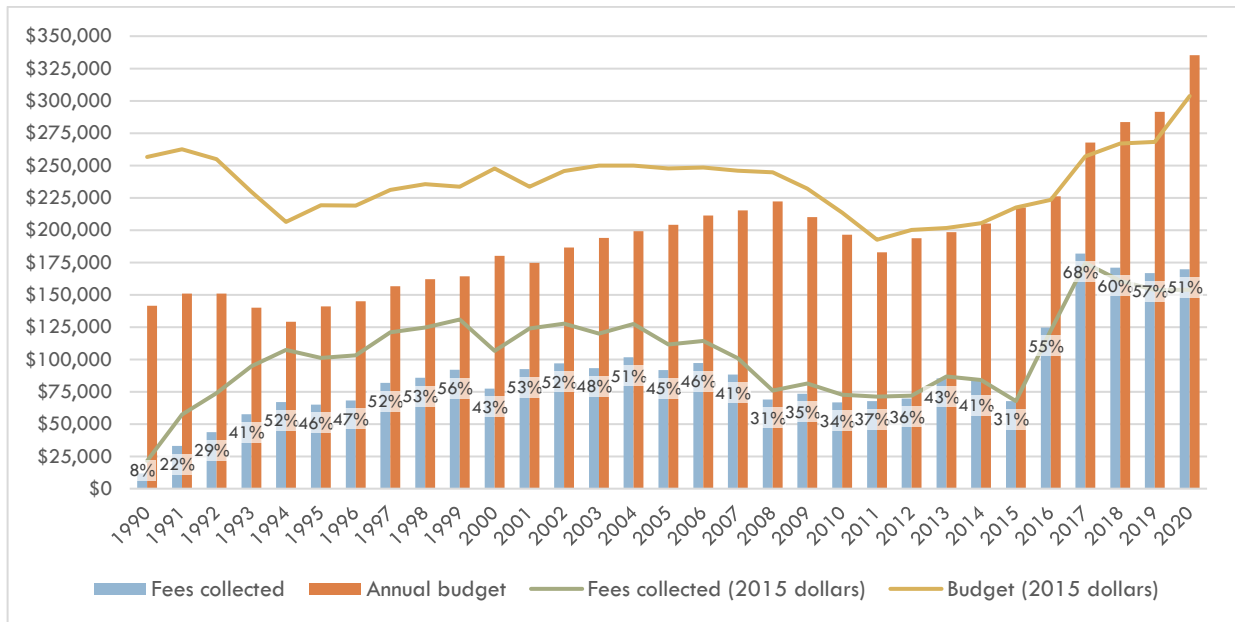
FEE REVENUES VS. EXPENSES

The Department is not a self-supporting agency. Its 2020 budget of \$335,223.00 was supported by the two joint 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 this year, the year-end operating ratio of revenues collected to actual expenses was 57.1%, or revenue to original budget of 50.6% (this is the figure 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, though a reevaluation of fees for 2021 should be performed.

REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES

FEES COLLECTED AS PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET



As seen in the chart above, the total fee revenue in 2020 was just above that of 2019, making the year 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. Ever-increasing salaries, and the additional need for personnel as the department handles more permits and takes on more planning, quality of life, and economic development projects versus simply administrating permits and petitions, will result in budget increases. Methods to improve worker efficiency, such as effective permitting and application tracking software will be needed to offset such increases.

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 failed Collamer Dam in the Eel River, January

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021

Based on the review of 2020 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 some adjacent counties, residential growth in 2020 slowed once again. This may be partially due to the pandemic, but likely as much due to the lack of available lots in the year.

When excluding the two mass-permit projects in 2018 and 2019 (Quail Ridge and Ravenwood II, respectively), the total single-family 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 2020 is still within an expected norm, but it is also not an upward trend.

In January 2020, we held a housing forum to discuss the need for housing throughout the county. In the end, the major points learned were the short supply of affordable buildable land, the need for housing of all types in most jurisdictions, and a large demand for moderate-priced new homes. Some other points were the ongoing need for quality of life improvements, such as day care services, and extension of available infrastructure. In the year following, some new development has occurred, though the need for housing is still apparent.

Columbia City did have two new major subdivisions developed in 2020, with lots becoming available in spring 2021 for new homes in the lower- and mid-price points. The final section of Cambridge Crossing is expected in mid-year, finishing the Chesapeake Landing-Cambridge Crossing subdivision. With these and the remainder of existing subdivisions, lots will likely be available in the City through 2022 or '23. It should be expected that new developments will need to occur in the next 18 months to replenish these lots.

The County will see additional lots available in Lincoln Pointe Section 5 in 2021, and minor plats of one and two lots, but generally development has remained near the municipalities. If affordable development land is not available near the municipalities,

In 2019, Churubusco ran out of buildable lots (aside from older, infill lots). This supply was not replenished in 2020, nor is there expectation that new lots will become available in 2021. Similarly, South Whitley is still nearly out of lots. Both Towns have started to try to incentivize residential growth in different ways, but even such proactive efforts take time to implement.

While residential development is not an absolute requirement for a well-functioning community, especially at the County level, 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?

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 concluding a large Comprehensive Plan update by mid-2021. Depending on the resulting recommendations of the updated Plan, zoning code and zone map changes to bring the Plan and regulations into alignment will be proposed later in the year or in 2022.

Columbia City is expected to address obsolete and outdated standards in the Subdivision Code. They may also start to look at revamping parts of their zoning code.

Churubusco is expecting to undertake a revalidation of their Comprehensive Plan, which may yield some code changes. They have already discussed a new downtown-specific zoning district, which was placed on hold during the pandemic.

South Whitley had expected to conduct a minor Comprehensive Plan update in 2020, but that was deemed unnecessary. They are currently working to leverage their TIF districts to encourage residential development, which is largely supported by the Plan, so it is unlikely that any Plan or code changes will be necessary for the Town in 2021.

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 was anticipated that a second full-time inspector would be hired in mid-2020 to supplement the existing inspectors. Due to the pandemic and the ability to adequately cover the needed workload, this hiring was deferred to 2021. The current plan is to seek a person for the start of the summer building season, but again, 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.

Looking at responsibilities in the Department, each staff member now has taken on a relatively technical role, be it planning and petitions, permit administration, or inspections. This has resulted in more comprehensive review of permits and petitions, but at the cost of rote administrative tasks, such as filing and violation notice compilation. In 2021, the implementation of an upgraded permit and petition handling software should aid in the efficiency of these tasks, but such a position may be still needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021

PERMITTING SYSTEM

In 2020, the Department, along with the Health Department, sought out a replacement for the current on-line permitting vendor, settling on the Schneider GIS product GeoPermits. This software is highly customizable and should resolve many of the issues both departments found when using the present system, with added benefits of automatic cross-department reviews and approvals.

Being customizable, it will take a few months to build and test the permit system before transferring all permitting activities to it. We estimate this will be completed by June; however, tweaks and fine tuning will be ongoing. Eventually, any department within the County with a permit or review process could use the system, making it valuable beyond just this Department.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: COUNTY-WIDE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY COMPARISON

	2019		2020	
	Permits*	Est. Value	Permits*	Est. Value
Single-family dwellings	116	\$ 26,573,156	92	\$ 26,842,826
Two-family	1	180,000	0	-
Multi-family	1	5,700,000	0	-
Manufactured homes	2	356,000	1	25,000
Mobile homes	9	236,500	7	140,000
Residential additions	51	2,644,200	58	3,641,065
Residential accessory buildings	145	3,820,530	156	4,408,092
Agricultural buildings	37	4,260,125	38	3,695,928
Commercial/industrial	10	10,168,240	10	15,749,000
Commercial/industrial additions	4	10,600,000	6	6,927,751
Institutional	3	97,200	3	1,373,000
Institutional additions	1	950,000	0	-
Miscellaneous/ILP only/Pond/other	397	6,473,170	496	7,025,880
TOTAL	777	\$ 72,059,121	867	\$ 69,828,542

*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	2020
Churubusco	33	25	48	37	35	57	40	36	33
Columbia City	151	149	179	138	188	186	214	221	198
South Whitley	36	19	25	30	40	45	29	33	24
County	399	428	395	398	407	431	342	402	480
Total	621	622	647	603	670	719	625	693	735

Improvement Location Permits	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco	19	12	28	31	22	41	42	36	29
Columbia City	96	111	158	112	166	154	195	189	193
South Whitley	20	10	19	22	24	38	23	29	22
County	293	331	289	301	300	327	258	298	350
Total	428	464	494	466	512	560	518	552	594

Receipts Written	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	737	634	749	784	842	792	882	986	876	895	993

APPENDICES

Inspections completed	2012*	2013*	2014*	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco				190	123	229	180	109	130
Columbia City				704	1,036	982	1,116	1,142	942
South Whitley				140	111	181	127	86	129
County				1,935	1,774	1,841	1,641	1,697	2,443
Total	2,734	2,973	3,004	2,969	3,044	3,233	3,064	3,034	3,644

*Inspections per jurisdiction were not tracked prior to 2015

New Single-Family Dwellings	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco	0	2	7	9	3	17	5	4	0
Columbia City	9	23	37	18	44	33	67	62	30
South Whitley	2	0	1	2	1	5	3	1	0
County	35	65	43	40	53	45	53	49	62
Total	46	90	88	69	101	100	128	116	92

Median Single-Family Dwelling Const. Cost	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco	NA	\$163,000	\$168,000	\$167,000	\$150,000	\$179,000	\$201,500	\$188,750	NA
Columbia City	\$170,000	\$152,000	\$163,500	\$160,500	\$170,000	\$191,800	\$173,675	\$199,053	\$264,900
South Whitley	\$248,000	NA	\$350,000	\$105,000	\$121,500	\$162,000	\$80,000	\$150,000	NA
County	\$220,500	\$218,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$190,000	\$250,000	\$275,000	\$283,500	\$267,433
Overall	\$217,000	\$181,250	\$177,500	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$203,448	\$204,900	\$220,000	\$264,900

Permits in Floodplain*	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia City	0	2	0	0	2	2	2	7	12
South Whitley	2	0	0	0	3	2	5	6	3
County	17	11	12	3	9	24	20	44	52
Total	19	13	12	3	14	28	27	58	67

*Counted if any part of parcel is located in regulatory floodplain; often the permitted improvement itself is not in the floodplain

Land Use Petitions Filed	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Churubusco	6	2	3	4	3	5	8	6	5
Columbia City	10	10	10	10	18	22	33	16	22
South Whitley	0	1	1	5	4	9	6	3	3
County	46	40	45	44	53	74	50	60	50
Total	62	53	59	63	78	110	97	85	80