



## **Sustainable Recovery** South Central Elkhart



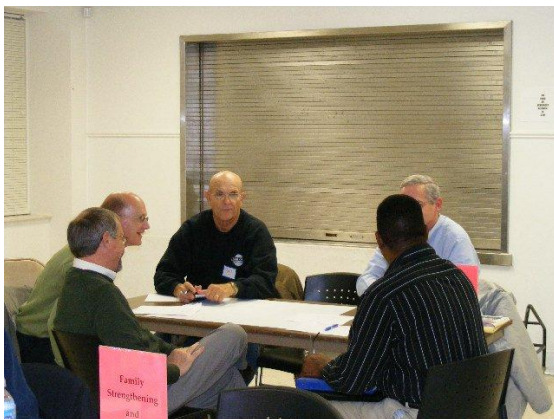
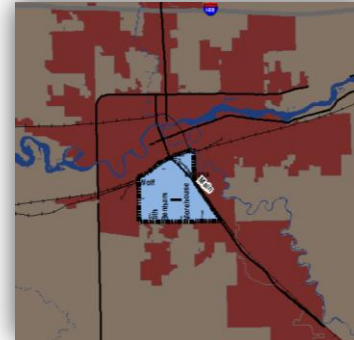
# Comprehensive Community Development (CCD)

## WHAT IS A QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN?

In short, a Quality of Life Plan is a community's roadmap to the future. It's a collection of hopes, dreams, and practical action steps. The South Central Elkhart Quality of Life Plan was developed through the collaborative efforts of residents, business owners, service providers, and civic leaders. It gives voice to the vision of the South Central community and describes the steps and partnerships necessary to make that vision a reality.

# south central

Part of the city's early industrial base, South Central Elkhart has long been home to working people whose labors built the foundation of the city's success. South Central's German-speaking, Italian, and African-American communities built businesses and churches, traditions of mutual-aid and resilience that carry through good times and bad. From housing expansion after World War II to the end of housing segregation in the 1960s, to the contested "Benham West" redevelopment project — these neighborhoods have experienced significant change in recent decades. The Hispanic population in the area has also grown considerably, creating new opportunities and challenges.



The recent recession — with high unemployment, low wages, and loss of family homes to foreclosure and tax sale — has disproportionately impacted South Central Neighborhoods. Since the early 1990s, neighborhood organizations have been addressing noise, graffiti, violence, and demolition of structures. Local residents believe Elkhart can be a “comeback” city. Their plans for a sustainable future draw from the community's strong entrepreneurial spirit and its enduring work ethic.

Comprehensive Community Development takes a broad approach to revitalization, addressing not just single issues, but the interconnectedness of civic, social, and economic problems — and the solutions to those problems, building on local assets. CCD is about empowering the community residents to lead. This Quality of Life Plan is a part of a larger effort to demonstrate that the people who live in a neighborhood are the best architects of positive change.

**Financial and Technical Support**  
The JP Morgan Chase Foundation awarded a grant to the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development (IACED) to partner with LaCasa, Inc. to introduce comprehensive community development to South Central Elkhart. One result of that process is the Quality of Life Plan.

*“There is real vision in the plan. But you’ve got to be plugged in to make it work.”*  
~ Rick Newbill,  
South Central Elkhart

## our vision:

South Central Elkhart will be a vibrant neighborhood where youth have quality P-12 educational experiences and graduate from high school with opportunities to go to college. Empowered residents will have access to employment, neighborhood green spaces and recreation, a local farmer's market, and a variety of restaurants, retail choices, and banks. The neighborhood will celebrate its many cultures through art, cultural activities, and food.

The farmer's market and neighborhood art and cultural activities will provide opportunities for job training and entrepreneurship, while exposing youth and adults to cultural foods and local foods.

Area youth will not only have the opportunity to go to pre-school and be prepared to learn, but will graduate from high school.

Neighborhood youth will have the qualifications and financial capability to go to college.

*"The true experts on community issues are people who live here every day. Real change comes when we join together on what matters and make our voices heard."*

~ Jason Shenk, South Central Elkhart



### WHO IS LEADING THE WAY?

The South Central Improvement Coalition (SCIC) is a group of civic-minded residents from several South Central Elkhart neighborhoods who have joined forces to address matters of mutual concern. They meet 4 times a year to review project updates, to monitor progress, and to modify the quality of life plan in response to neighborhood needs and opportunities. LaCasa provides SCIC with staff support and resource development guidance.

*"You start with the children...Help them do positive things...Let them see that we care. I believe that will enhance our neighborhoods."*

~ Jean Robinson, South Central Elkhart

## EARLY ACTION SUCCESS

### Community Land Use and Gardens: Learning Tour

The Community Land Use and Gardens action group travelled to Detroit to visit Earthworks, Detroit, and Detroit Black Community Food Security Network's D-Town Urban Farms.

### Hawthorne Elementary Gardening After-School Program

The Elkhart Local Food Alliance community group worked with Hawthorne Elementary School to start their first school garden in South Central Elkhart.

### Southdale Bridgebuilders: Stiver Park Development

The Southdale Bridgebuilders Neighborhood Association's goal with the Stiver Park project is to create a space for families to come together and to build intercultural relationships within the neighborhood.

# GOALS AND STRATEGIES

## Housing and Safety

The vision of the housing and safety action group is that neighbors feel safe, connected and invested in their community, and that houses are occupied and attractive.

### Strategies:

- Improve the appearance of 50 houses in South Central Elkhart by 2015 through property maintenance and building maintenance and repair
- Decrease vacancies in South Central Elkhart to 12% by 2016 to reduce opportunities for crime and vandalism
- Transfer distressed properties to home ownership through an improved tax sale process and a county-wide land bank.
- By 2014, establish effective communication with landlords so rental properties are maintained, preserving and enhancing local property values

## Working Across Race, Culture, Power, and Decision-Making

As neighbors and stakeholders in south central Elkhart, we will honor the histories, cultures, and dignity of this community in order to live, study, work, worship, and raise families such that we leave a legacy of growth, vitality, and justice to future generations.

### Strategies:

- Encourage individuals and groups operating in our community to recognize that all are created equal: eliminate discrimination and establish equal opportunity
- Commit to learning together – increasing relevance to our varies communities by growing in intercultural competency
- Educate all community organizations working in South Central Elkhart about how their composition (staff and board) must reflect the diversity of the community in which they work to ensure equity and opportunity
- Provide resources, support, and connections to four resident-led initiatives by 2016.

## Family Strengthening

Celebrating Elkhart's diverse families and cultures, we seek to connect families and youth to vibrant existing community resources and to establish programs that respond creatively to the needs of the community.

### Strategies:

- Raise awareness of local services and build capacity of local residents by creating and distributing a booklet to all South Central Elkhart residents listing resources for youth and families by 2014
- Build partnerships that will increase revenue, volunteers, and participants in the Summer Academy program at the Historic Roosevelt Center by 25% per year to reach as many local youth as possible
- Develop a family literacy program reaching 50% of South Central Elkhart families by 2016 to support strong families
- Quarterly financial literacy classes available in the South Central Elkhart community to increase local assets
- Three additional services will be available in the neighborhood by 2013 to meet the social service needs of local residents

## Community Spaces and Gardens

Our action group seeks creative land uses growing out of community needs and guided by neighborhood leaders, with an emphasis on education and job creation through sustainable agriculture applications and the cultivation of flexible community gathering spaces.

### Strategies:

- By 2012, organize a Learning Tour to gardening and community center projects in the region for 10 or more neighborhood residents to build a foundation for community gardens in South Central Elkhart
- Build local capacity for land use and community gardens by developing ten local partnerships by 2014
- Raise awareness of community gardening by installing three demonstration projects such as gardens, orchards, greenhouses, etc., on land connected to community space by 2015
- Create local food related entrepreneurship opportunities through a free job-training and skills-development program by 2016
- Increase awareness of sustainability and job opportunities in sustainability related businesses by providing regular classes related to nutrition, food preservation, cooking, sustainable living, etc. by 2015
- Ensure all people have opportunities for gardening by

assisting with four garden installations per year for individuals and groups across the community beginning in 2012

- Encourage home sustainability by supporting four home sustainability projects throughout the community by 2016
- Provide access to local foods and entrepreneurship opportunities related to local food by establishing a local farmers' market focused on local produce by 2013
- Establish a traveling market or fresh food delivery to provide local food to people on outskirts of community without transportation to central market by 2016
- Create a space for families to come together and to build intercultural relationships within the neighborhood by developing the city-owned vacant lot Stiver Field into a park by 2014
- Provide space for SCIC activities by reclaiming an existing building by 2016

## Economic Development and Skills Building

The group for Economic Development and Skills Building has a vision to provide tools and resources that will empower members of the community to increase their job opportunities through skills and education. We seek to assist the disadvantaged residents as well as to encourage and foster entrepreneurial initiatives.

### Strategies:

- Create a free job-training and skills development program and direct residents to local services that will provide the resources needed to obtain local job opportunities by 2014
- Increase the number of residents who obtain a GED to 500 in South Central Elkhart through current resources by 2014
- Encourage and support small resident owned business development in South Central Elkhart

*"Since I came to this country there were people who gave me a hand...I've always felt the commitment to repay such assistance. That led me to help in the South Central neighborhood."*

~ Lupita Zepeda, South Central Elkhart