

EVANSVILLE TOURISM MASTER PLAN

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT • APRIL 20, 2021



April 20, 2021

Mr. James T. Wood
President & CEO
Evansville-Vanderburgh County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Inc. 401 SE Riverside Drive
Evansville, IN 47713

Dear Mr. Wood:

We have completed the study process and preparation of this Tourism Master Plan for the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area. Organizations and individuals throughout the Evansville region have contributed to this process. Input from over 1,000 residents and over 55 local and regional organizations have contributed valuable insight into the preparation of this Plan. Our research process included outreach to sports tournament and league organizers, event planners, visitor industry representatives in competitive and aspirational markets, and analysis of existing data provided by your Visit Evansville team.

This Tourism Master Plan will serve as a valuable tool in helping to shape a vision for future development, and in identifying opportunities to distinguish and elevate the Evansville-Vanderburgh County region within the visitor industry. The recommendations presented herein cannot be implemented by a single entity or agency. In fact, participation from a variety of public and private sector entities will be necessary to realize the potential of Evansville-Vanderburgh County in the visitor industry economy. This Plan can serve as a roadmap for the diverse organizations that will be relied on to help implement key recommendations.

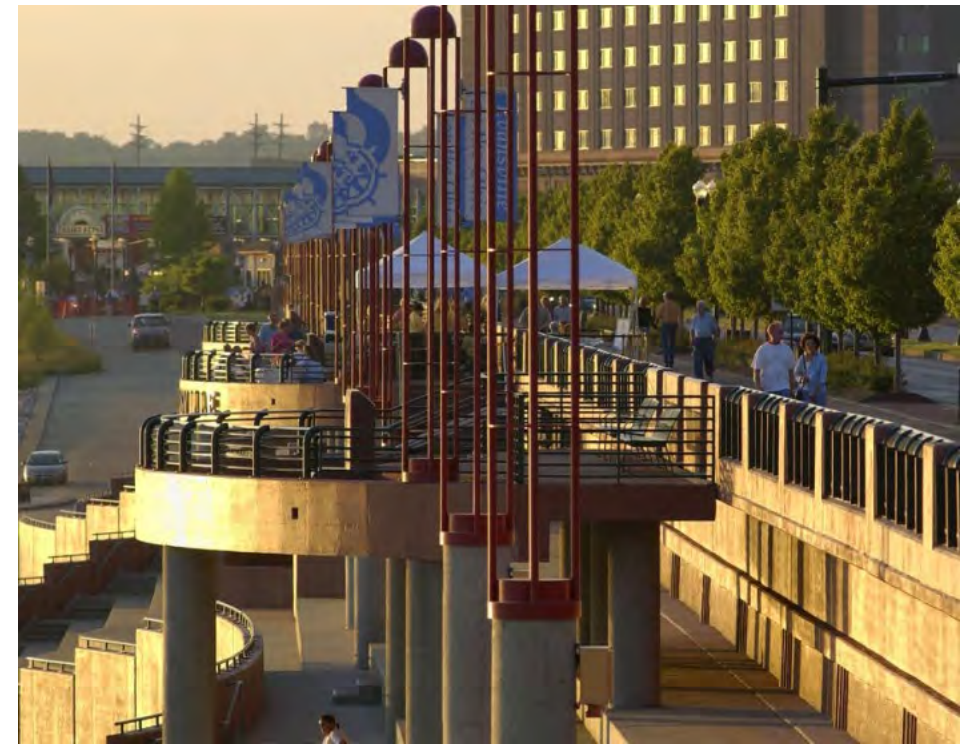
The participation of you and your staff has been integral to the success of the study process. We greatly appreciate your professionalism in all respects during the preparation of this Plan.

Very truly yours,

CSL International

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Existing Asset Overview	4
3.	Benchmarking Analysis	24
4.	Community Survey	38
	Recommendations Interlude	43
5.	Amateur Sports	44
6.	Convention Industry	63
7.	CVB Resources and Initiatives	76
8.	Downtown and Riverfront	85
9.	Outdoor and Eco Tourism	105
10.	Festivals	120
11.	Addressing Community Goals	134



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Detroit, Michigan, taken at dusk. The arena's distinctive curved, metallic facade is illuminated by the setting sun. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of the arena. The surrounding cityscape includes various buildings, trees, and streets. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds from the sunset.

1 Introduction

1. Introduction

The economy of any destination can be influenced by many factors outside the control of community leaders. Economic conditions, corporate relocations, changes in governmental or institutional presence and other factors will influence employment, income, tax revenues and other critical aspects of an economy.

In the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area, as with many communities, the visitor industry also plays an important role in local and regional economic health. Visitors to a market offer an opportunity to inject new dollars into the economy, with only limited use of public infrastructure. Visitor spending then generates net new tax revenue, reducing the tax burden on residents.

At the same time, the competition for visitor industry market share is fierce. Communities throughout the country, many competing with Evansville, continue to invest in assets and amenities that are designed directly or in part to attract visitors. To remain competitive and gain greater market share as a destination, Visit Evansville retained CSL to develop an action-oriented, forward looking Tourism Master Plan (TMP) that creates a strategic vision for enhancement of destination assets and sustained growth in tourism-related economic impacts.

This TMP is designed to serve as a valuable tool in helping to shape a vision to develop, distinguish and elevate the market within the visitor industry. The community outreach associated with this process has been significant, designed to ensure that the opinions of a broad cross-section of community stakeholders is fully reflected.



1. Introduction: Tourism and Economic Development

Tourism as a Holistic Economic Development Tool

Though primarily seen as a tool for drawing visitors and growing room nights in a destination, a Tourism Master Plan can also provide support for economic development initiatives that make for a highly desirable place to live and work. Through the creation of attractions, amenities, and events and festivals that align with consumer, lifestyle, and travel trends, a destination can become more attractive to prospective full-time residents and employers *in addition* to leisure, group, and sports visitors. The graphic below summarizes these elements.



The Tourism Master Plan presented herein considers this dual-importance of tourism-related investment in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area, with many of the recommendations having both a visitor industry and broader talent recruitment/economic development benefit.

The specific research elements and study process for identifying these opportunities are summarized on the following page.

1. Introduction: Research Summary

The process of developing the TMP has been highly collaborative and research-based, with specific analysis steps including the following:

- Conducted over 55 interviews with local and regional organizations from the public and private sector.
- Made two multi-day site visits consisting of extensive tours of notable Vanderburgh County and surrounding region destination assets.
- Analyzed extensive data, research and existing reports on visitor industry assets and performance in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area.
- Surveyed over 1,000 local residents in partnership with Downtown Evansville and Gray Loon Marketing Group, Inc.
- Interviewed more than 30 out-of-market planners of conventions, sports tournaments, concerts and festivals to discuss potential event facility opportunities in the Evansville market. Completed in-depth comparative analysis of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area with 13 similar markets throughout the country.
- Conducted case study research in more than 30 markets throughout the country focusing on creative visitor-generating assets.
- Developed six areas of focus from which to base recommendations for the enhancement of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area's destination product, programming and policies.

The recommendations presented herein cannot be implemented by a single entity or agency. In fact, participation from a variety of public and private sector entities will be necessary to realize the potential of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area in the visitor industry economy.

We sincerely appreciate the assistance and cooperation we have been provided in the completion of this process and would be pleased to be of further assistance in the interpretation and application of our findings.



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena at dusk. The arena's facade is illuminated with a grid pattern, and the "Ford FORD CENTER" logo is visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalk in front of the arena. The surrounding cityscape includes several high-rise buildings, one of which has a "GERMAN" sign. The sky is filled with soft, orange and grey clouds from the setting sun. The text "2 EXISTING ASSET OVERVIEW" is overlaid in large white font in the center of the image.

2 EXISTING ASSET OVERVIEW

2. Existing Assets: Introduction

As the commercial, medical, and cultural hub of Southwestern Indiana, and the third most populous city in Indiana, Evansville is well-positioned as a drive-in sports, leisure, and convention tourism market. With corporate headquarters in town such as Berry Global, Koch Enterprises, and OneMain Financial, the business transient market has led to the development of a robust inventory of select service hotels in town, while facilities such as Old National Events Plaza, Evansville Sports Complex, and Ford Center generate room nights by hosting events with non-local draws.

With its central location in the Tri-State region between Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois, accessibility to I-69, and its location on an oxbow in the Ohio River, the very same reasons that led to Evansville's development as an economic hub can continue to contribute to its growth as a visitor destination. Plans are in place to create a more vibrant live/work/play environment in downtown Evansville through placemaking projects and residential development; plans to attract more diverse talent are being led by the Evansville Regional Business Committee; and the area continually grows as a haven for youth and amateur sports tournaments.

At the same time, the Evansville-Vanderburgh area faces several key challenges that can negatively impact the visitor's experience and the ability to grow the visitor industry economic footprint. Limited hotel options in downtown Evansville impact its market capture in the convention and leisure business; the area lacks a restaurant scene; and the area has relatively few signature attractions that could be marketed on a regional and national level.

The Existing Assets chapter summarizes the inventory of existing assets, opportunities and challenges. We begin with an evaluation of primary tourism assets in the region. This is followed by a review of past studies and plans that have contributed to the research and recommendation development for this Plan. A summary of input provided by more than 55 interviewed stakeholders is also presented.

Our review of area attractions focuses on several different subject areas, including its inventory of museums, sports facilities, walkable districts, historical/cultural assets, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and other visitor industry assets. This review provides a foundation on which to evaluate potential investment that may support increases in future event and room night activity. The map on the following page highlights the area's various attractions, followed by descriptions of the primary destination assets.



USS LST Memorial



Haynie's Corner



WWII Wartime Museum



Museum of Arts, History, and Science



Burdette Park



Tropicana Casino



Koch Family Children's Museum

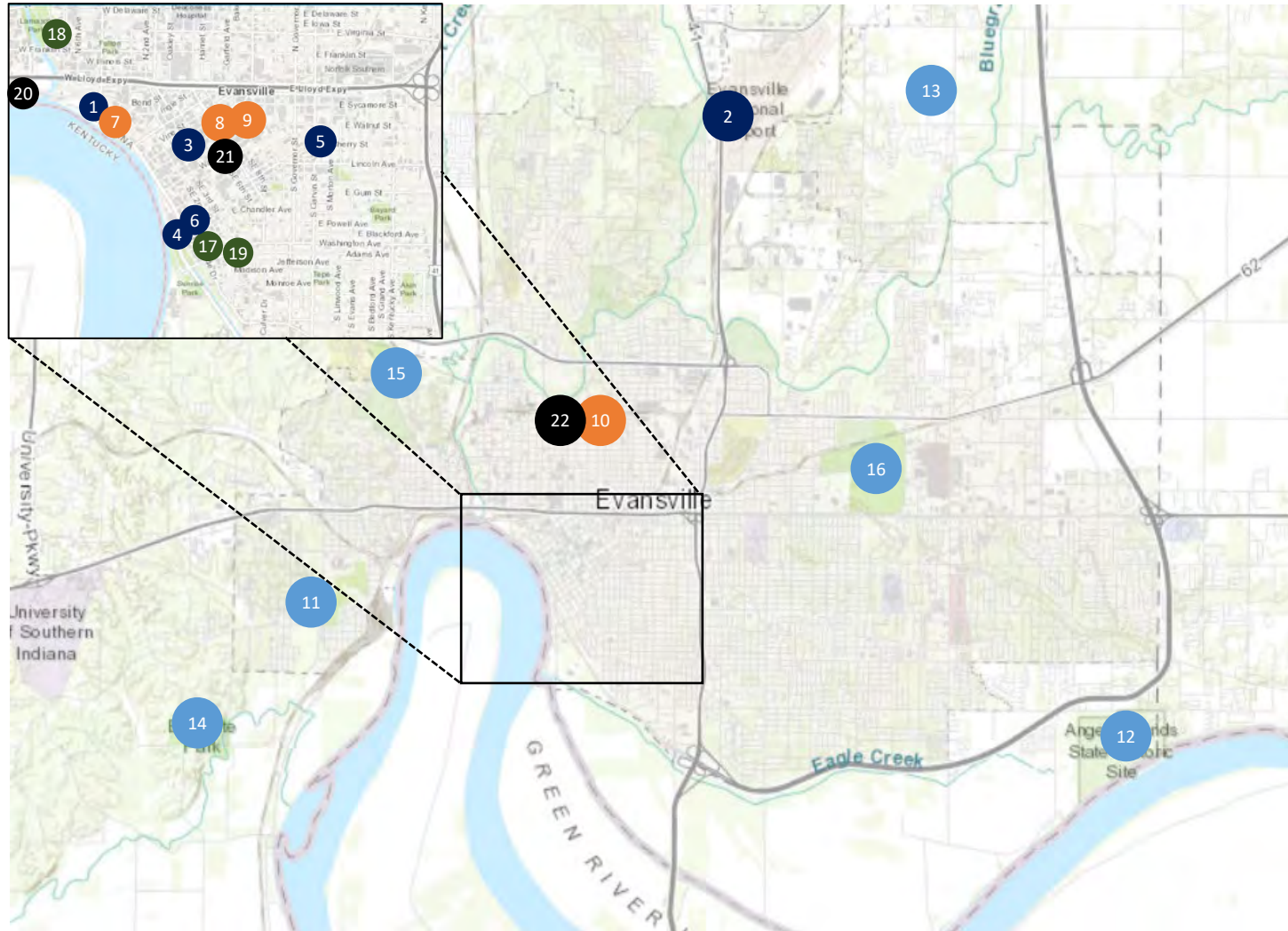


African American History Museum



Ford Center

2. Existing Assets: Overview



#	Attraction
Museums	
1	USS LST Memorial
2	WWII Wartime Museum
3	Koch Family Children's Museum
4	Evansville Museum of Arts, History, and Science
5	African American History Museum
6	Reitz Home Museum
Entertainment	
7	Tropicana
8	Ford Center
9	Old National Events Plaza / Victory Theatre
10	Bosse Field
Outdoor Activities	
11	Howell Wetlands
12	Angel Mounds State Historic Site
13	Deaconess/Goebel Sports Complex
14	Burdette Park
15	Mesker Park Zoo
16	Wesselman Woods
Unique Districts	
17	Historic District in Downtown
18	West Franklin
19	Haynie's Corner
Miscellaneous Facilities	
20	Ohio River Overlook
21	Medical School in Downtown
22	Deaconess Aquatic Center

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

USS LST Memorial



Located on Riverside Drive in downtown Evansville, the LST-325 is the last fully operational World War II Landing Ship Tank (LST) and is open for tours seasonally while stationed in Evansville, the vessel's home port. The LST leaves port in early fall to sail the nation's inland rivers with a crew of volunteers to showcase the history of the incredible vessels, the men and women who built them, and those who served on them.

LST-325 was commissioned on February 1, 1943 and served in the invasion forces at Sicily; Salerno, Italy; as well as Normandy, France for D-Day and other missions. Of the 171 US LSTs that served in the D-Day landing, the LST-325 is the only one still in operation. Tours showing every area of the ship are given six days a week when docked in Evansville. The LST Memorial is the top ranked museum in Evansville, according to TripAdvisor.

Evansville WWII Wartime Museum



Opened in May 2017, the vision of the Evansville Wartime Museum was to create an educational destination for guests of all ages, illustrating general military history, with a specific focus on the Evansville region's contributions to supporting the World War II effort.

The museum highlights the products that were made in Evansville and its surrounding communities during WWII and highlights the stories of the men and women the region sent to the battle front during the war.

Museum leadership values their current site at the Evansville Regional Airport, though future expansion plans of the Airport may require a move of the Museum elsewhere. Potential may exist to re-locate the facility in or near downtown and therefore closer to other historic destination assets in Evansville.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science



Ranked the 2nd most popular museum destination in Evansville on TripAdvisor, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science was founded in 1904 and is located on the Ohio riverfront.

The museum has a permanent collection of more than 30,000 objects including fine arts, decorative arts, historic documents and photographs, and anthropologic and natural history artifacts. The Koch Immersive Theater houses a 40-foot diameter domed screen with 360-degree digital projection featuring astronomy and science programming, which was added as part of a \$14.1 million, three-year renovation in 2014. Guided and group tours are offered by the museum, and there is an area for families that offers participatory exhibits and programs to inspire kids of all ages.

African American History Museum



Sitting on the former location of the Lincoln Gardens housing project, which was the second Federal Housing Project created under the New Deal in 1938, the Evansville African American History Museum serves as a place of storytelling for the rich and complex African American experience in the Evansville area over the years.

Permanent and temporary exhibits create an immersive and educational environment designed to accommodate visitors of all ages. One goal of the museum is to be as interactive as possible, which has been achieved with exhibits such as the interactive LEGO stations that teach kids what it means to be community builders through their own creativity and imagination. Recently, the Museum and site was designated as a state historic site.

With their success in implementing engaging, hands-on exhibits, Museum leadership could potentially be tapped to consult other attractions in the region on improving interactivity and technology.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Koch Family Children's Museum



As the only museum designed for children under the age of 12 in the region, the Children's Museum of Evansville currently is a 20,000 square foot facility housing hands-on interactive exhibits and programming for kids and families. Some of the popular exhibits include the signature 20-foot-tall duck that children can climb, the art maker studio and "speak loud," where visitors can act out a play and watch it on TV.

In 1990, the Junior League of Evansville formed Hands On Discovery to provide a learning laboratory for children throughout the region. According to management, the Museum hosted approximately 84,000 visits in 2019 and an estimated 65 percent of this figure consisted of school field trips. In the future, Museum leadership would like to host more state of the industry, rotating exhibits offering highly interactive and technological elements.

Tropicana



Tropicana Evansville is a casino hotel and entertainment complex located in downtown Evansville, owned by Gaming and Leisure Properties and operated by Caesars Entertainment. It opened in 1995 as the state's first riverboat casino. In 2017, Tropicana moved its current land-based location in downtown Evansville, with 41 table games and 1,177 slots. Approximately 1.5 million people visit the casino each year. According to Tropicana representatives, approximately 40 percent of the casino's visitors come from 50 or more miles outside of Evansville.

The main entertainment facility consists of a 45,000 square foot casino, the 250-room Tropicana Hotel, a 1,660-vehicle parking garage, as well as housing facilities, retail and restaurants. In 2006, the \$40 million Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District opened, which includes a 100-room boutique hotel and a multi-venue entertainment facility centered on a riverfront park.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Old National Events Plaza



Located on Locust Street and across the street from the Ford Center, Old National Event Plaza (“ONEP”) opened in 1999 and is owned by the City of Evansville. ONEP is connected via skywalk to the Ford Center and to the newly constructed 241-room Double Tree Hotel, which is the only hotel within a half mile from the convention center.

The 280,000 square-foot facility features a 2,500-seat auditorium, a 38,000-square-foot exhibit hall, a 14,000-square foot ballroom, and 12 flexible 1,000-square foot meeting rooms. The facility is frequently used for conferences, conventions, public shows, theater events and smaller concerts.

In the long-term, the Plaza may be able to increase market share in the regional convention and conference industry through sales and marketing initiatives, benefitting from the DoubleTree Hotel development. These opportunities will be discussed later herein.

Bosse Field

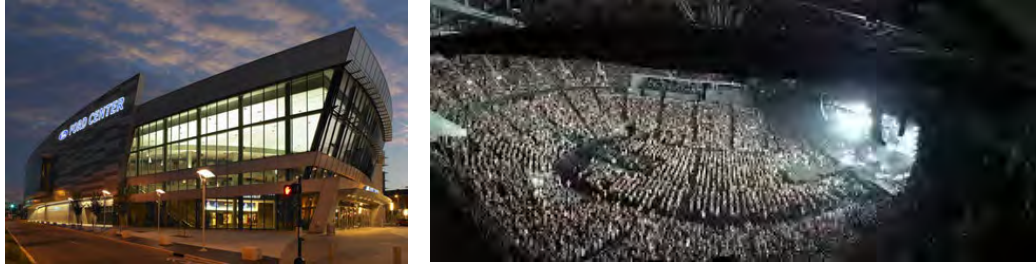


Opened in 1915, Bosse Field is the third-oldest ballpark still in regular use for professional baseball (behind only Fenway Park, 1912, and Wrigley Field, 1914). The Field was the first municipally owned sports stadium in the United States and is currently the home of the independent Frontier League’s Evansville Otters, in addition to a plethora of high school and American Legion games. The 5,181-seat stadium is owned by the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation and is operated by the Evansville Otters.

The ballpark was used in 1991 to film multiple scenes for the movie “*A League of Their Own*,” starring Tom Hanks. The Otters have been the primary tenant of Bosse Field since 1995, in which time they have set the league record for attendance multiple times and won the Frontier League championship in 2006. Notably, the ballpark is ranked the #1 landmark in Evansville on TripAdvisor. Field management has also expressed a desire to host more outdoor concert activity during the summer, a possibility that is evaluated further later herein.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Ford Center



Home of the University of Evansville men's and women's basketball teams and the Evansville Thunderbolts of the Southern Professional Hockey League, the Ford Center is a multi-use indoor arena in downtown Evansville with a total capacity of approximately 11,000. The Center, opened in 2011, is mainly used for basketball, hockey and concerts.

At 290,000 square feet, the Ford Center is the region's largest sports and entertainment facility. The arena also boasts extensive premium offerings with sixteen 20-person suites, a 40-person suite, two eight-person mini suites, two 10-person mini suites, and 95 main concourse loge seats. According to Pollstar, the arena hosted an average of 17 concerts annually over the past three years.

Ford Center management has indicated a desire to increase event and attendance levels over the summer, but opportunities to do so may be limited as the touring concert industry has shown increasing demand for outdoor venues during this time. However, moderate opportunities may exist to host more flat floor events at the venue such as beer festivals or other social gatherings.

Deaconess / Goebel Sports Complex



Deaconess Sports Park is an eight-field complex owned and operated by the Evansville Convention & Visitors Bureau. It features state of the art amenities for girls' fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball, women's fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball, men's fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball, adult and co-ed softball league play, and boys' baseball for 12 & Under tournaments.

Developed at a total cost of \$14 million, the Deaconess Sports Park opened in 2014. Adjacent to the Deaconess Sports Park is Goebel Soccer Complex, a ten-field soccer and lacrosse complex built in 2004 that was designed to host local and regional tournaments and the broader community needs.

Both complexes host numerous youth sports events during the year, including the 1,000-room night All American Showcase that took place at Deaconess Sports Park in 2019, and the 2019 Veterans Invitational Tournament that took place at Goebel Soccer Complex and generated 450 contracted room nights.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Burdette Park



Burdette Park is owned and operated by Vanderburgh County and provides a recreational and educational environment for patrons of all ages. The park is comprised of approximately 170 acres of scenic rolling hills in southwestern Indiana and offers a wide variety of year-round recreational opportunities such as fishing, hiking, picnicking and camping. The park also features four professional and fully lit tennis courts, basketball and volleyball courts, multiple hiking trails, RV and tent camping grounds and multiple softball fields. Burdette Park also offers twelve shelter houses and six chalets on property.

Burdette Park also has an aquatic center which features a large Olympic pool with two diving boards, as well as a family pool and a children's pool. In 2003, the \$2.1 million O'Day Discovery Lodge opened on the property, which hosts a number of weddings, corporate events, and other events throughout the year.

Park management continues to discuss potential expansion and enhancement of the Park. These plans are discussed and analyzed later herein.

Mesker Park Zoo



Located on Evansville's northwest side, Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden opened in 1928 and is run by the City of Evansville. In 2008, a major expansion of the Zoo was completed that included a \$15 million tropical rainforest exhibit and a new entry complex. In 2018, the Engelbrecht Carousel with an adjacent bird aviary was added at a cost of approximately \$3.0 million. A new \$6.8 million penguin exhibit is slated to open in 2021.

In total, the Zoo spans 50 acres and houses more than 700 animals and 200 species. Additional attractions at the Zoo include giraffe feeding, the budgie walkabout, the Engelbrecht Carousel, the zoo tram, paddleboats, and bumper boats. On TripAdvisor, the Zoo is ranked as the #1 outdoor activity in Evansville. The adjacent Mesker Amphitheatre, which closed in 2012, represents a potential opportunity to expand or enhance the Zoo's offerings. Potential options for the site are discussed later herein.

The Zoo attracts approximately 186,000 visitors per year on average.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

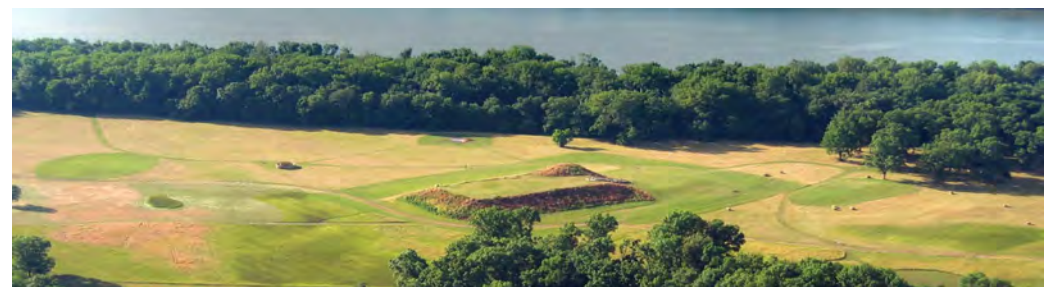
Howell Wetlands



The Howell Wetlands features 35 acres of marshland, bald cypress slough, oxbow lake, lowland hardwood forest and upland meadow, as well as the wildlife found in these habitats which include such animals as muskrats, beavers, herons, wood ducks, geese and deer. The wetlands is one of only five urban wetland parks in Indiana and features multiple walking trails and boardwalks throughout the site, offering staff-led programs and tours for the public and school groups.

Adjacent to the Howell Wetlands is Howell Park, which offers recreational activities such as miniature golf, basketball courts, a par 3 golf course, and swimming pools.

Angel Mounds



Located on the banks of the Ohio River in southwest Indiana, Angel Mounds State Historic Site is one of the best-preserved, pre-contact Native American sites in North America. Built between A.D. 1000 and 1450, the town was occupied by more than 1,000 people who were part of the Mississippian culture, where they built a number of earthen mounds to elevate important buildings.

The 1,000-year-old village site is located across 600-acre acres and includes an interpretive center that teaches visitors about the Middle Mississippian culture inhabiting the area from 1000 to 1450 A.D. Visitors can also hike through the beautiful grounds, and learn about noted Indiana archaeologist Glenn Beck, who conducted the fieldwork at Angel Mounds for many years. Tours, school groups, winter and summer camps and special events are also offered. In total, the Western Region of State Historic Sites estimates that Angel Mounds hosts approximately 30,000 visitors per year.

The site has recently worked very well as a championship-quality cross country field, hosting a number of high school and NCAA competitive events.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Haynie's Corner



Adjacent to the Ohio River in downtown Evansville Indiana, a creative community of four neighborhoods (Riverside, Culver, Goosetown, Blackford's Grove) defines the Haynie's Corner Arts District. The arts and culture neighborhood supports and promotes the residents, artists, galleries, retailers, restaurants, business, non-profit organizations and events within the district itself and within Evansville.

With private investment and the help of government assistance, Haynie's Corner has seen an influx of new restaurants, bars, and businesses over the past 10 years. New housing developments have been added to replace blighted homes that have been torn down. Unique popular restaurants and bars include Walton's International Comfort Food, Bokeh Lounge, Mo's House and Sauced.

Haynie's Corner is also home of the annual Funk in the City Spring Art Festival which features and promotes artists from around the region.

West Franklin District



The West Franklin District, located just west of Downtown Evansville, has become perhaps the center of events and unique retail within the City. The district – which is bordered by St Joseph Avenue on the west, First Avenue on the east, and Illinois Street and Michigan street which run parallel to Franklin Street – features numerous locally owned restaurants, bars and retail.

In addition to the retail and restaurants available, the West Franklin Corridor is the site of numerous events during the year, including the West Side Nut Club Fall Festival in October and the Franklin Street Mardi Gras Grand Parade in February. The Franklin Street Bazaar operates every Saturday from late May through the end of August and features over 100 vendors from local businesses and restaurants.

According to Esri GIS software, the West Franklin District has nearly five times the total retail sales per square mile as compared to Downtown Evansville, as well as more than double the eating and drinking sales per square mile.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Riverside Historic District in Downtown



Roughly bounded by Riverside Drive, Walnut, Third, and Parrett streets, the Riverside Historic District in downtown Evansville became a United States historic district in 1978. It consists of approximately 1,010 acres and 425 buildings.

Located in the heart of the historic district is the Reitz Home Museum, which was built in 1871 and is noted as one of the finest examples of French Second Empire architecture in the United States. The Reitz home is the most prominent home of the many in the district that have been preserved to showcase the people who helped develop the City of Evansville. Various coffee shops, restaurants, and bed and breakfasts are also available in the district, creating an inviting environment for visitors.

Downtown Evansville



Evansville is located in Vanderburgh County in southwest Indiana. With a 2020 population of 120,259, Evansville is the third most populous city in the state following Indianapolis and Fort Wayne.

Popular areas of downtown Evansville include Haynie's Corner, the West Franklin District, and the Riverside Historic District. In 2017, the Tropicana Evansville casino moved from its original riverboat into a land-based facility in conjunction with the \$40 million Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District expansion and has become an extremely popular tourist destination. Downtown Evansville also offers popular attractions and landmarks such as the USS LST Ship Memorial, the Wartime Museum, Bosse Field, Mesker Park Zoo, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science, the African American Museum and the Children's Museum.

2. Existing Assets: Case Studies

Medical Campus in Downtown



Indiana University School of Medicine-Evansville is located in the heart of downtown Evansville at the Stone Family Center for Health Sciences, a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to collaborative medical education and clinical research. A 30,000-square foot world-class simulation center, the facility includes a large human structures lab, virtual hospital and twelve-room virtual clinic. Numerous private and collaborative study spaces, convenient access to faculty and technology create a balanced work-study environment.

Long term plans include further buildout of the site area, inclusive of added School of Medicine facilities and private businesses catering to the relevant medical sectors. The school serves approximately 500 total students at all stages of training, with an additional 100 teachers and support staff. The campus has the potential to generate significant downtown workforce, room nights and associated economic impact.

Deaconess Aquatic Center



Scheduled to open in the Summer of 2021, the Deaconess Aquatic Center is a two-story aquatic-specific facility located in Garvin Park, situated across from Bosse Field. The \$28 million project was fully funded by community donors and will replace the current indoor Lloyd Pool. Ground was broken on the site in December 2019.

The center is divided into two separate areas – competitive and recreational - each with their own dedicated locker rooms. The competition pool is a stretch 50-meter pool accommodating simultaneous diving and swimming activities. The 50-meter pool can be converted to accommodate both collegiate and high school swim meets. There is also a mezzanine large enough to hold 960 people providing views of the entire pool area. The leisure pool will have a zero-depth entry area and will include play features, basketball goals and space for swimming lessons. A splash park is located outside, adjacent to this space.

2. Existing Assets: Past Study Efforts

The formulation of this Tourism Master Plan draws, in part, from research and planning efforts that have been conducted over the past several years by Visit Evansville, Downtown Evansville, the Evansville Regional Business Committee, the city of Evansville, and other entities. Guidance provided by past research efforts can help validate and, in some cases, refine Tourism Master Plan study efforts. The exhibits below and on the following pages include summaries of several notable studies and strategic planning documents that were especially useful in the preparation of both the research and recommendations included herein.



Evansville Downtown Master Plan

Year Completed: 2016

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Activating Main Street
- Investment in Riverfront
- Creation of Makers District
- Development of public domain

The Downtown Evansville Master Plan identifies priorities for downtown improvements, policies and actions over the course of a five- to seven-year investment cycle. Building on the positive momentum spurred by the development of the Medical Campus and DoubleTree by Hilton Convention Hotel, the Plan offers guidance for attracting skilled young professionals to live and work in the downtown area.

The Plan focuses on four main development strategies, including activating Main Street, activating the Riverfront, developing a “Makers District”, and improving public spaces. These strategies are aligned with many of the recommendations included later herein. The Plan also led to the development of the Downtown Evansville Economic Improvement District, which has benefitted downtown through high-level real estate planning, beautification and maintenance of public spaces, promotion, event development, and advocacy of the Downtown Master Plan.



Downtown Market Analysis

Year Completed: 2019

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Opportunity to grow downtown foot traffic through added residential
- Need for more hotel rooms
- Opportunity for retail

The Downtown Evansville Development Corporation commissioned a third-party consulting firm to analyze downtown Evansville's market conditions and highlight key strengths and shortcomings as part of an effort to guide future development in the area. The report identifies opportunities to build around unique first-level retail environments located in clusters throughout downtown, as well as build on recently completed and proposed developments such as the Stone Family Center of Health Sciences, the new Deaconess Clinic, and the Post House Development.

Later in this document, CSL provides a number of strategies for creating a more vibrant area to live/work/play through attraction development and policy. Many of these will help address the Downtown Market Analysis's identified shortcomings in residential units, hotel rooms, and retail storefronts.

2. Existing Assets: Past Study Efforts



Evansville Economic Development Indicators

Year Completed: 2020

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Evansville is not drawing new residents like some of its peer destinations.
- Key areas for improvement include younger population growth, increase in diversity, and overall health

Chmura Economics and Analytics recently conducted a benchmarking study of Evansville and ten similar destinations nationally. Compared metrics included demographics, economic measures, human capital, and social factors over the course of 10+ year time spans.

While wages have increased and poverty has decreased in Evansville in recent years, the analysis also showed a plateauing population in Evansville that lacks younger people and minorities. Many of the recommendations presented in this Tourism Master Plan, including special events, arts-related investments, and outdoor and ecotourism initiatives, would make the destination a more appealing place for young professionals and diverse talent. Additionally, outdoor and eco tourism initiatives would address the Evansville area's falling health index.



Talent 2025 Initiative: Promising Practices Research

Year Completed: 2019

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Frames strategic approaches to address education, health, population, employment, and poverty challenges in Evansville



Talent 2025 Initiative:
Promising Practices Research

August 23rd, 2019

In response to the Evansville demographic, economic, human capital, and social conditions highlighted by Chmura, the Evansville Regional Business Committee retained Fourth Economy to inventory and analyze a number of case studies nationally that helped communities address issues with education, health, population, employment, and poverty.

Several of the case studies identified within the Promising Practices document would help attract a young professional population that would in turn support added dining, art, and nightlife in the Evansville area. Highlighted initiatives such as the “Millennial SWAT Team” in Springfield, Missouri and “Say Yes to Spartanburg” in Spartanburg, South Carolina help expose outside young talent to the key selling points of living in the respective destinations. Just as a CVB attracts visitors, these communities are creating entities designed to attract targeted workers.

2. Existing Assets: Past Study Efforts



Millennial Plan for 2040

Year Completed: 2014

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Prioritizes the preservation and enhancement of parks and green spaces
- Encourages creation of a land bank and TIF mechanisms to redevelop vacant/blighted areas

The Millennial Plan for 2040, prepared by the Sustainable Evansville Area Coalition, provides a blueprint document for prioritizing land and infill development throughout the Henderson, Vanderburgh, and Warrick County areas. The Plan highlights the area's robust inventory of green spaces and parks that should be preserved and enhanced with in-fill, as well as the blighted and underused urban areas that are due for redevelopment. Many of the strategies and goals described align with the recommendations in this Plan as well as with the priorities noted by the Talent 2025 Initiative, including the development of "The Wharf", a commercial-laden version of a downtown Evansville riverfront development, the development of regional food hubs in urban and suburban areas, and the creation of the Leadership Roundtable 2040 that will work with the area's communities to execute strategies.



Transportation Improvement Program 2020-2024

Year Completed: 2019

Tourism-Related Takeaways:

- Provides detailed plans regarding auto, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements throughout the destination

The Evansville Metropolitan Planning Organization, a planning entity for Henderson, Vanderburgh, and Warrick Counties, recently completed a short-term Transportation Improvement Program that prioritizes the development of bicycle infrastructure (bike lanes, cycle tracks, greenways, shared use paths, etc.) throughout the region (particularly in downtown Evansville) as well as providing transit routes and stops on a more regional basis throughout the three counties. The plan also recommends reducing congestion and travel times on high volume roadways, including the removal of the area's many traffic signals.

Each of these initiatives would make the Evansville destination more navigable and accessible to visitors. The bicycle initiatives, in particular, are explored in greater depth as part of the Outdoor chapter herein.

2. Existing Assets: stakeholder Input

Extensive in-market interviews were conducted with a wide cross-section of over 55 stakeholders, including organization leaders and decision makers from the local visitor industry, politicians, economic development entities, regional event promoters, and attraction management. This research provides insight into existing destination strengths and weaknesses and assists in the ideation of product development and initiatives that can help grow the local visitor economy. The organizations that participated in this process are listed below.

Amy's on Franklin	Evansville Regional Airport	Mesker Park Zoo
Ashley Academy	Evansville Regional Business Committee	Old National Events Plaza
Bosse Field	Evansville Sports Complex	Parks & Recreation - Evansville-Vanderburgh County
Burdette Park	Evansville Sports Corp	Reitz Home Museum
Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville	Evansville Trails Coalition	Southwest Indiana Chamber
City of Evansville	Evansville Wartime Museum	Tropicana Evansville
Downtown Evansville	Ford Center	University of Evansville
Dunn Hospitality	Gray Loon Marketing Group	University of Southern Indiana
Evansville African American Museum	Hilton DoubleTree	USS LST Memorial
Evansville Basketball Academy	Indiana Sports Corp	Vanderbergh County
Evansville City Council	Indiana State Historic Sites	Visit Evansville
Evansville Events	Jackson Kelly	Visit Evansville Board of Commissioners
Evansville Metropolitan Planning Organization	Kahn, Dees, Donovan & Kahn	Wesselman Woods

The common themes discussed during these local stakeholder interviews have been broadly segmented into two primary topics: challenges and threats faced by the destination, followed by its strengths and destination development opportunities. Summaries of both these interview categories are presented on the following pages.

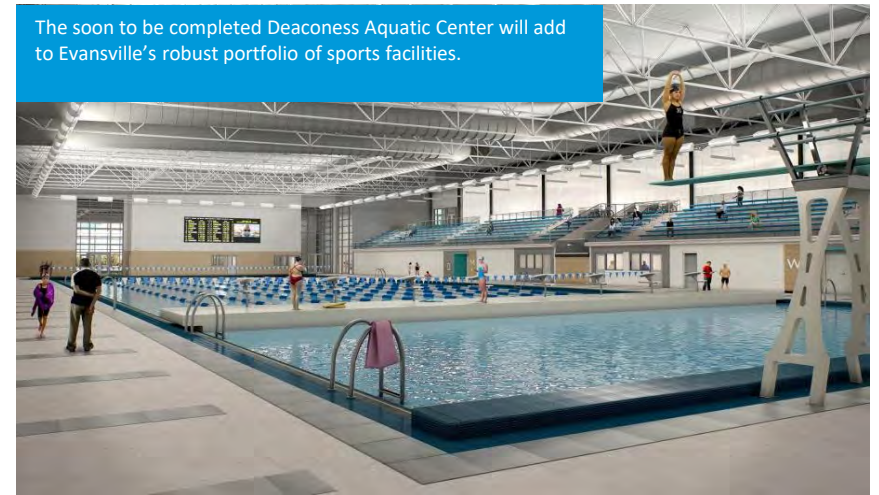
2. Existing Assets: Stakeholder Input - Strengths and Opportunities

Participants in the stakeholder research process noted a wide range of attractions, events, developments and other assets unique to the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area that should be celebrated, with some offering untapped potential as visitor draws. Commonly highlighted strengths and opportunities in the destination are summarized below.

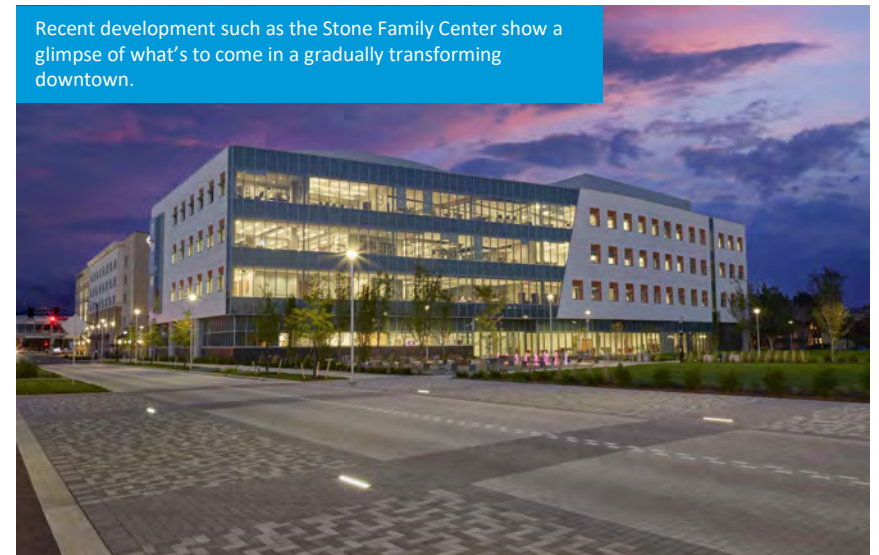
Sports – With Deaconess Sports Park, Goebel Soccer Complex, Swonder Ice Arena and the Ford Center, the Evansville sports tourism market has experienced significant success over the past decade. Minor league professional, collegiate, high school, youth and other amateur competitions and tournaments continue to be attracted to the area due to the robust facility inventory and the pro-active approach of Visit Evansville and Evansville Sports Corporation. The addition of the Deaconess Aquatic Center to the market will also bring a new sports segment to the market. Evansville’s sports activity represents a significant mainstay of its visitor industry, and therefore is a critical area of focus addressed later herein.

Positive Downtown Momentum – Many stakeholders noted the positive impacts spurred by the DoubleTree by Hilton Evansville and Stone Family Center for Health Sciences, in addition to those associated with the Ford Center’s opening ten years ago. This acknowledgement was paired with optimism regarding future plans to expand the medical district, the recently announced redevelopment of the tower at 420 Main, and the Downtown Master Plan’s visions for the Riverfront and NoCo Makers District. Downtown Evansville will continue to evolve due to pro-active efforts to bring more businesses downtown, develop events in the area, and establish more resources for guiding future downtown development. These initiatives, being championed by numerous organizations including the Downtown Evansville Economic Improvement District, should be built on by recommendations later described as part of this Plan’s chapter on the Downtown.

Progressive Planning Efforts – In conjunction with visionary planning for downtown, a number of organizations such as the Evansville Regional Business Committee, the Southwest Indiana Chamber and the Evansville Metropolitan Planning Organization have led a number of studies and plans focused on positioning Evansville for the next generation. Their efforts have led to numerous insights regarding the area’s demographic and socioeconomic challenges, as well as initiatives that could be led to attract a next generation workforce to the destination.



The soon to be completed Deaconess Aquatic Center will add to Evansville’s robust portfolio of sports facilities.



Recent development such as the Stone Family Center show a glimpse of what’s to come in a gradually transforming downtown.

2. Existing Assets: Stakeholder Input - Strengths and Opportunities

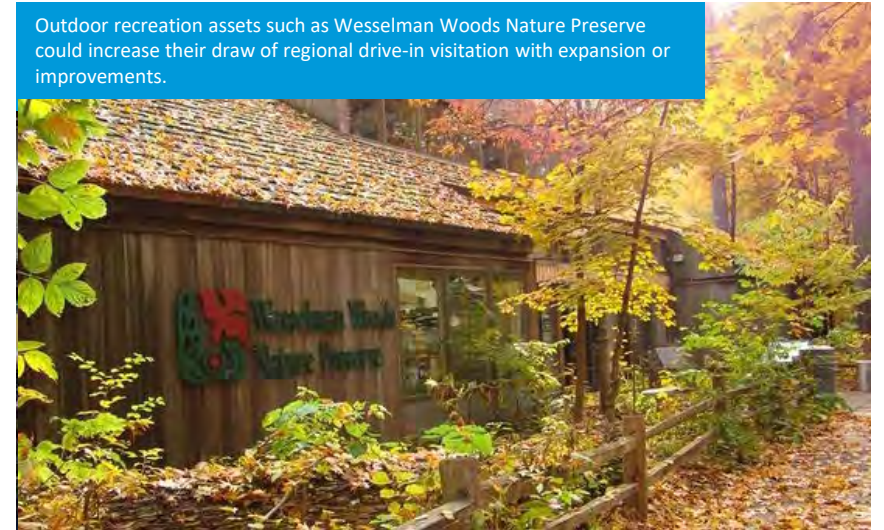
Outdoor Recreation – The Evansville—Vanderburgh County area offers a number of quality opportunities for outdoor recreation, several of which could be further improved as visitor assets through tourism-related investment. Burdette Park’s management envisions a substantial expansion and improvement plan of the facility that would make it a highly unique outdoor adventure center, while leadership at Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve have expansion plans that include new forest experiences and youth attractions. These are supported in the Tourism Master Plan, which also provides recommendations that would enhance these plans further with additional concepts for attraction development. Other outdoor assets such as Angel Mounds State Historic Site, Howell Wetlands, and the riverfront in Newburgh to the east also represent key nodes in Evansville’s outdoor experience inventory, and opportunities exist to better link each of these areas through bike/hike trail investments.

Affordability – Sports and leisure industry stakeholders commented on Evansville’s significant inventory of select service hotels as a strength for drawing sports groups, families, and other cost-conscious drive-in travelers. Dining, entertainment, and other hospitality-related expenditures are also more affordable relative to other nearby destinations in Louisville, Nashville and Indianapolis. At the same time, Evansville offers a walkable urban experience in its downtown, and opportunities to leverage this more affordable urban experience are considered as part of the TMP.

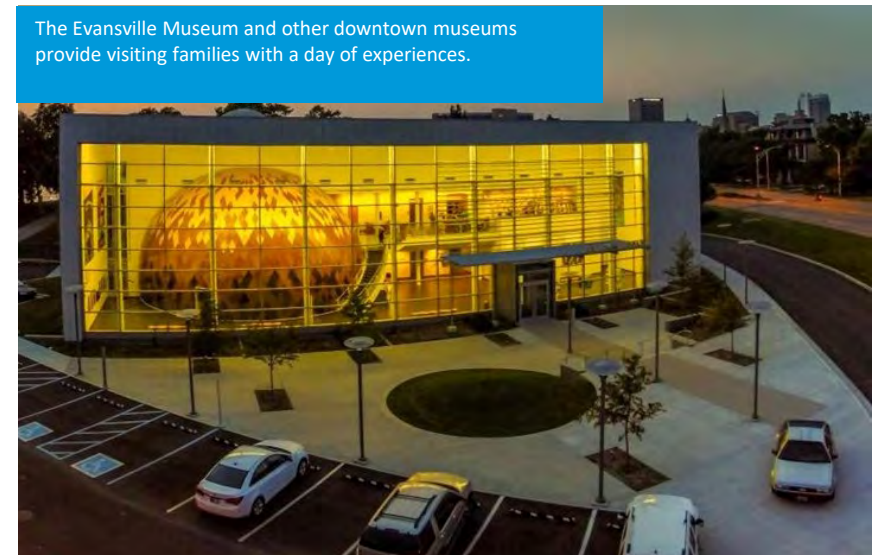
Family-Friendly Assets – With several museums in the downtown, Mesker Park Zoo, and a number of family friendly festivals that occur throughout the year, Evansville is positioned well as a family destination. Young families that visit may also have potential to become one-day residents of the area, so continuing to market these assets to drive-in leisure markets should be an important initiative driven by Visit Evansville and supported by other stakeholders.

Central Location – Essentially located between the Bluegrass and Midwest regions, the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area is within a three-hour drive of Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, St. Louis and Cincinnati. Many of the recommendations herein are intended to draw drive-in convention groups, sports teams and leisure visitors from each of these markets.

Outdoor recreation assets such as Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve could increase their draw of regional drive-in visitation with expansion or improvements.



The Evansville Museum and other downtown museums provide visiting families with a day of experiences.



2. Existing Assets: Stakeholder Input - Challenges & Threats

Every destination has unique challenges that can negatively impact their ability to attract visitors. It is critical that a Tourism Master Plan explore these challenges and identify ways in which they can be addressed; or if this is not possible, ensure that future development recommendations take into consideration the challenges that are more likely to persist.

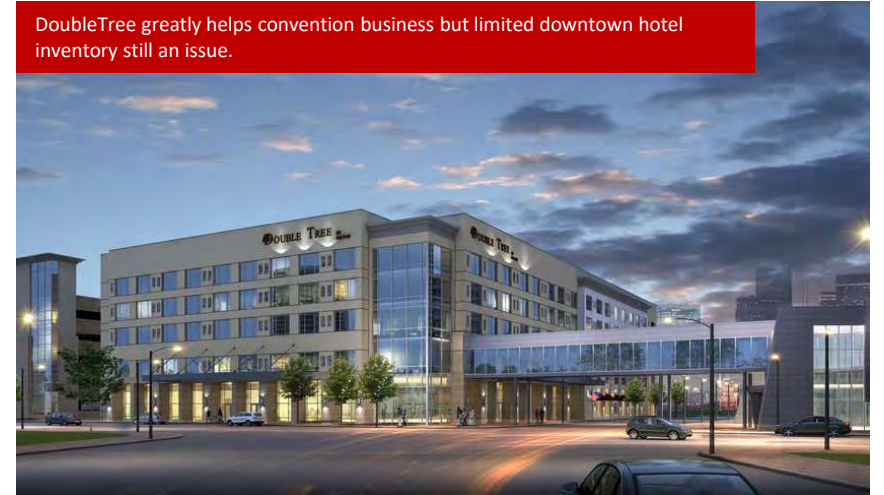
Currently, there are several broad challenges or “headwinds” impacting the ability to compete for visitors and future residents in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area, including the following.

Downtown Hotel Inventory – With the opening of the Hilton by DoubleTree in downtown Evansville in 2017, Visit Evansville and Old National Events Plaza (ONEP) sales staff were able to leverage a much-needed convention hotel to accommodate regional and national convention business at the ONEP. However, the total hotel room inventory within walking distance of the ONEP still presents challenges for accommodating larger, economically impactful groups. Future properties totaling approximately 250 rooms, the Hyatt Place and Holiday Inn Express, are also being planned and will help address this challenge but added room inventory within closer proximity to the ONEP will be important for attracting significantly more regional and national events

Underdeveloped Pedestrian Experience – Many local stakeholders from the hospitality industry commented on the downtown’s lack of lighting, pedestrian wayfinding, public art and other signature identifiers. Prioritizing this type of infrastructure has been a priority for the Downtown Evansville organization, and supporting the continued investment in these pillars of the pedestrian experience will help make downtown 1) more navigable for visitors, and 2) more vibrant and appealing to prospective residents and businesses.

Lack of Millennial/Gen-Z Draws – The Evansville-Vanderburgh County area is a great place to live and work for multiple generations and young families. However, the lack of nightlife, an arts and culture scene, live music, and unique entertainment make it difficult for under-35 visitors and residents to consider visiting or moving to the destination.

DoubleTree greatly helps convention business but limited downtown hotel inventory still an issue.



Lack of draws for Millennial and Gen-Z travelers addressed throughout this Plan.



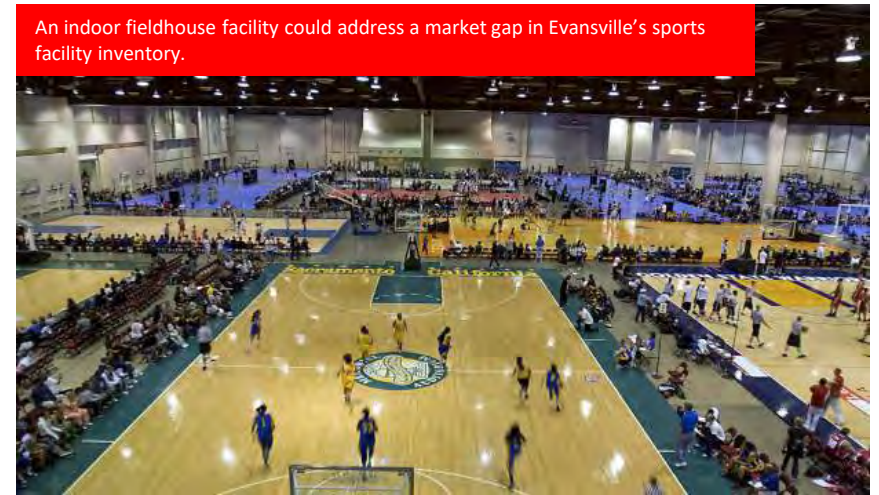
2. Existing Assets: Stakeholder Input - Challenges & Threats

Signature Attractions – Evansville has an extensive array of valuable regional draws, including several quality museums, a mix of outdoor destination centers, several notable neighborhoods, and the Ford Center. However, the area lacks a signature attraction with a true national draw, one that could be featured in national ads or travel magazines. Examples of signature attractions are wide ranging; from Falls Park in Greenville, South Carolina; to the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri; to 4th Street Live! in Louisville, Kentucky; to the Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina. Recommendations herein present several potential product developments that would help transform existing assets into true Evansville visitor industry landmarks.

Indoor Amateur Sports – Goebel Soccer Complex and Deaconess Sports Park provide ample inventory of outdoor fields for soccer and baseball/softball tournaments, respectively, and continue to serve the destination by hosting thousands of sports participants and spectators on an annual basis. However, Evansville does not offer a similar product for indoor sports groups. Many from the hospitality industry expressed optimism that Evansville could achieve similar success with a tournament-quality indoor facility that could host basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, martial arts and other users.

Under-Activated Riverfront – Situated along a bend in the Ohio River, Evansville shares geographic similarities with many similar sized cities throughout the country. However, while many markets such as Fort Wayne, South Bend, and Owensboro have created vibrant, walkable districts along their waterfronts, downtown Evansville’s Riverfront is largely dormant throughout much of the year due to a limited built environment and traffic and safety issues along Riverside Drive. Downtown Evansville has spearheaded a transformational vision for this area as detailed in the Downtown Master Plan, which will be explored further herein.

Competitive Destinations – Many stakeholders highlighted other mid-sized markets nationally that have experienced significant tourism-related development or have undergone brand overhauls as leisure destinations in recent years with help from their respective tourism marketing entities. This TMP considers the product development *and* tourism marketing strategies that would help Evansville better compete with these destinations.



An indoor fieldhouse facility could address a market gap in Evansville’s sports facility inventory.

Competitive destinations such as Fort Wayne, IN (pictured below) have invested in their riverfronts, transforming them into signature attractions.

An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Detroit, Michigan, taken at dusk. The arena's facade is illuminated, and a large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of it. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds from the setting sun. In the background, other city buildings are visible, including a prominent skyscraper on the right. The text '3 BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS' is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

3 BENCHMARKING ANALYSIS

3. Benchmarking: Research Summary

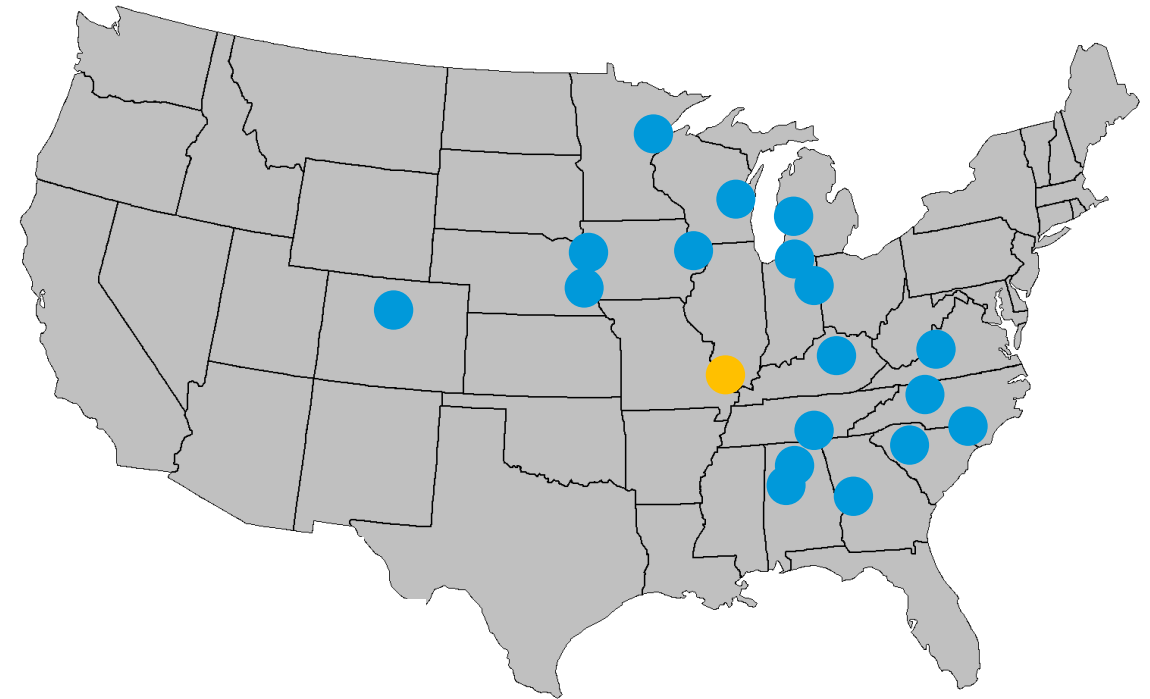
To better understand the relative strength and appeal of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area's various destination assets, CSL conducted a comparative analysis of several other core-based statistical areas (CBSA's) throughout the United States. Three different comparison analyses have been included, totaling 20 different markets:

1. **Destination Assets** – the tourism-related assets throughout the greater market area of each destination, including restaurants, museums, performance venues, landmarks, outdoor recreation attractions and others. Ratings were compiled using TripAdvisor and Yelp.
2. **Downtown Vibrancy** – the resident population, daytime population, dining sales, and retail sales in the downtowns of several compared markets.
3. **Demographics** – using Talent 2025 findings, a comparison of historical population growth, health indicators, and diversity among compared peer and aspirational destinations.

We begin with the Destination Assets analysis. The CBSA's that were analyzed include those surrounding Huntsville, (AL), Fort Wayne, (IN), South Bend, (IN), Lexington, (KY), Montgomery, (AL), Fayetteville, (NC), Lincoln, (NE), Springfield, (MO), Columbus, (GA), Duluth, (MN), Chattanooga, (TN), Fort Collins, (CO), and Asheville, (NC).

The compared elements of each destination were measured by tallying the number of positive TripAdvisor ratings for each relevant attraction, experience or business in each destination. For instance, an "Arts and Culture" score was generated by adding together the number of "4" and "5" star ratings given to the museums and performing arts venues in each market. Due to destinations with larger population bases, we have adjusted the response totals based on the population levels in each of the market's respective CBSA's (core-based statistical areas). Total TripAdvisor responses were divided by market population and multiplied by 1,000.

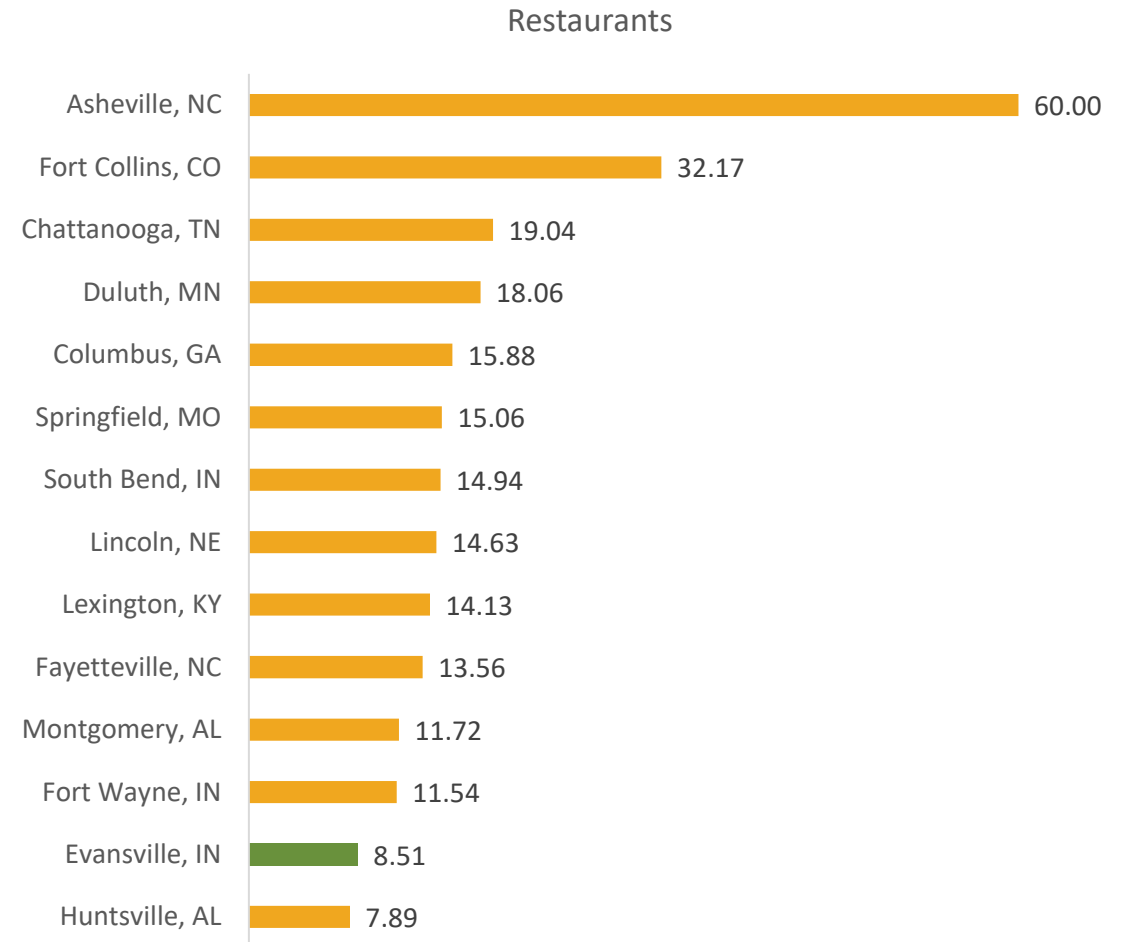
Compared Destinations



3. Benchmarking: Research Summary

To compare Evansville’s restaurant scene to comparable CBSAs around the country, positive reviews on Yelp were counted and divided by the market’s population, then multiplied by 1,000. It is important to note that this ranking reflects restaurants with positive reviews, not the total amount of restaurants in the market. A thriving local restaurant scene with a plethora of local establishments that are unique to Evansville is vital for a healthy, vibrant tourism sector.

As shown, Evansville ranks 13th of the 14 comparable CBSAs in terms of highly ranked restaurants. Numerous elements of this TMP seek to address this condition.

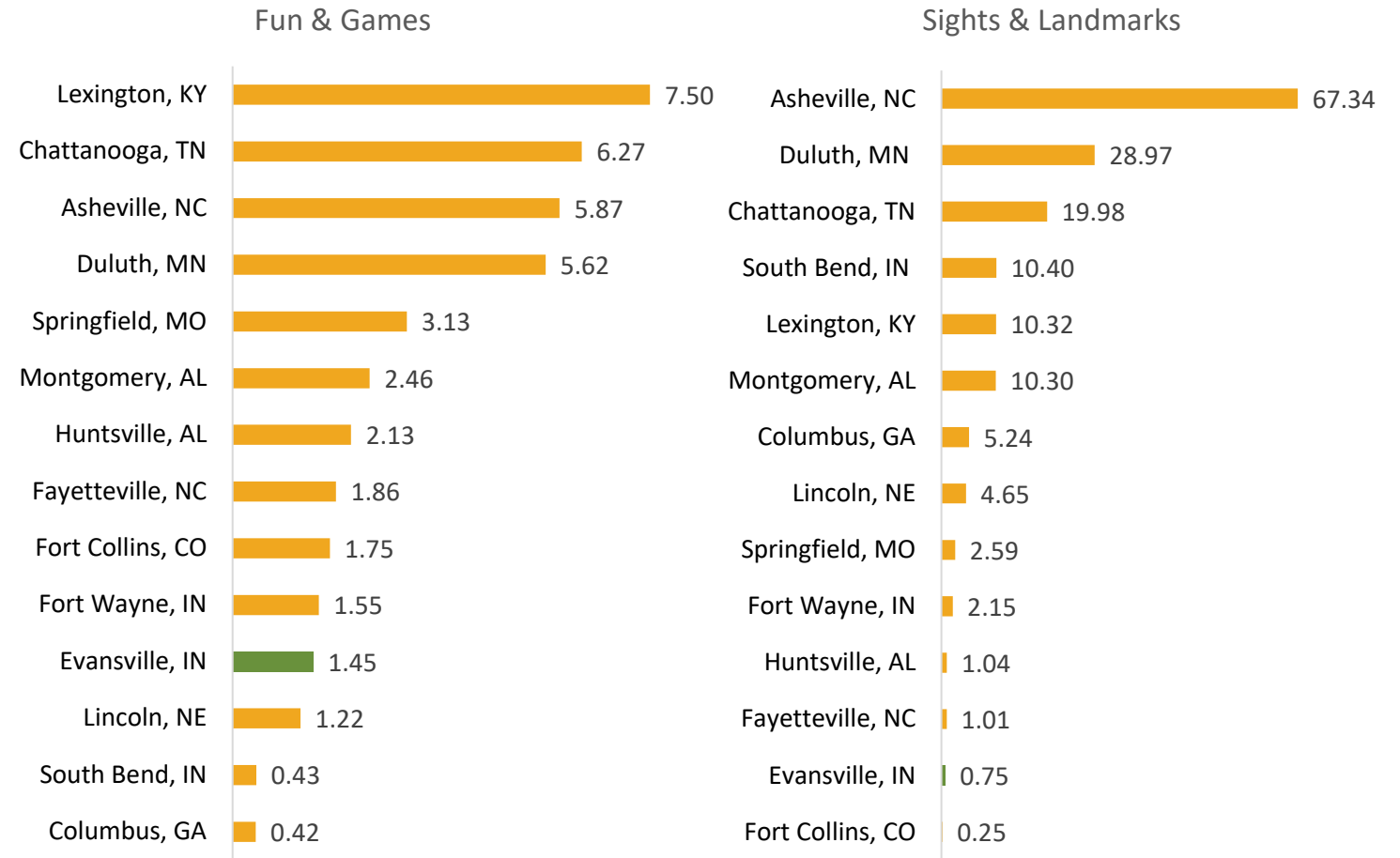


3. Benchmarking: Research Summary

Fun & games and sights & landmarks are two categories that are available on TripAdvisor and can be used to compare Evansville to its comparable peers. Examples of the top ranked assets in the fun & games category in Evansville include the Tropicana Casino, Breakout Games and Walther's Golf & Fun.

Sights & Landmarks in a city can be an important component to attracting high tourism levels. The top sights & landmarks in Evansville as ranked on TripAdvisor include Bosse Field, Angel Mounds State Historic Site, and the old Evansville Courthouse.

As shown, Evansville ranks 11th of the 14 comparable CBSAs in terms of fun & games, and 13th of 14 in sights & landmarks. Many of the recommendations presented later in this TMP seek to enhance the Evansville area attractions base.



3. Benchmarking: Research Summary

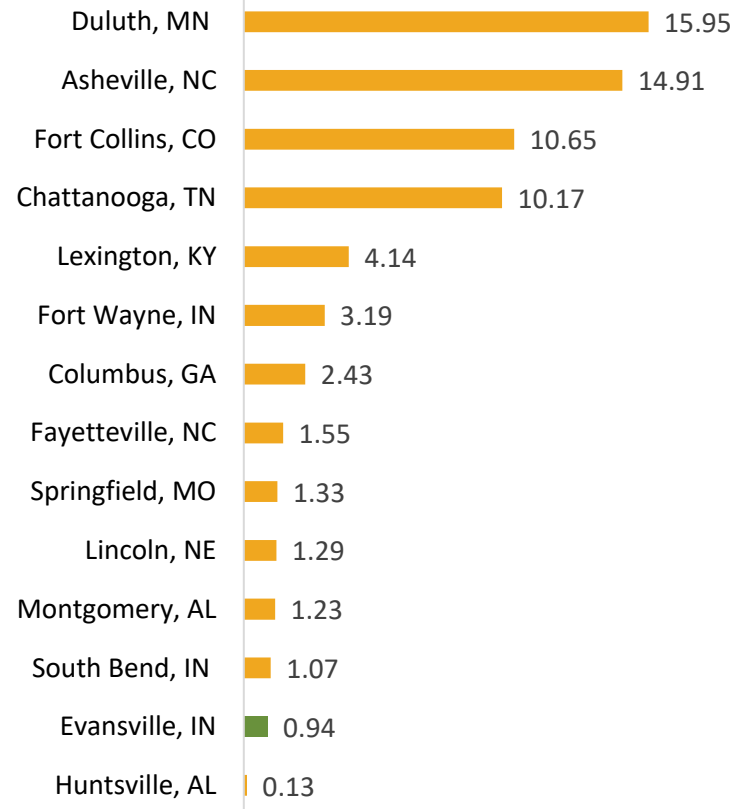
Outdoor activities not only serve to attract tourists, but also create a destination that would attract potential residents. Top outdoor activities in Evansville include the Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden, Burette Park, Wesselman Woods, and Eagle Valley Golf Course.

Nightlife is especially important for attracting a younger demographic to a city. Evansville's nightlife ranking (7th of 14) is boosted by the options in the West Franklin District. Popular nightlife venues include Bud's Rockin' Country Bar and Grill, Carson's Brewery, and Mo's House.

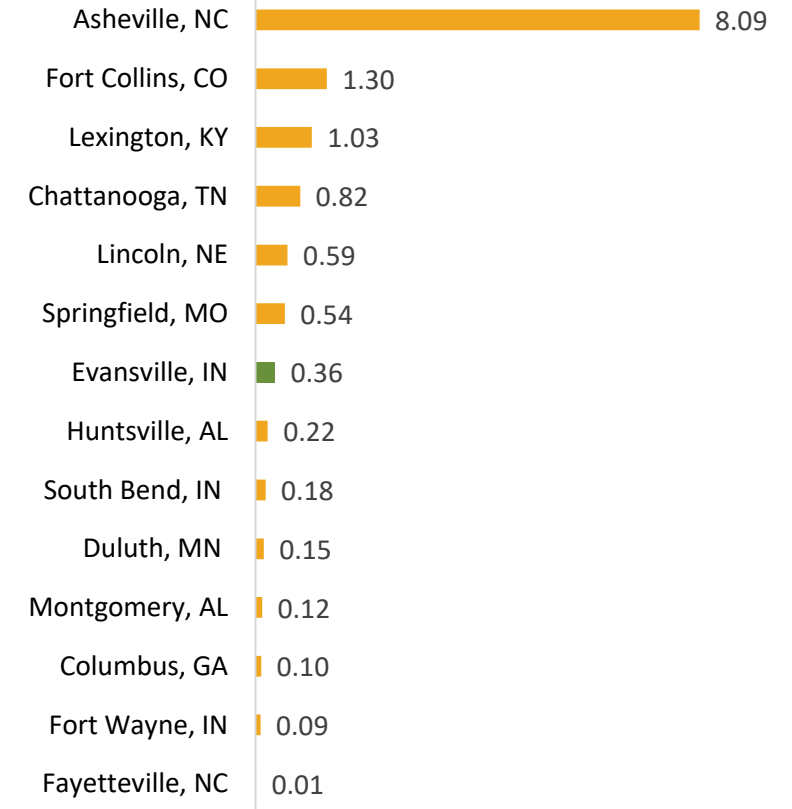
As shown, Evansville ranks 13th of the 14 comparable CBSAs in terms of outdoor activities, and rank 7th in terms of nightlife.



Outdoor Activities



Nightlife

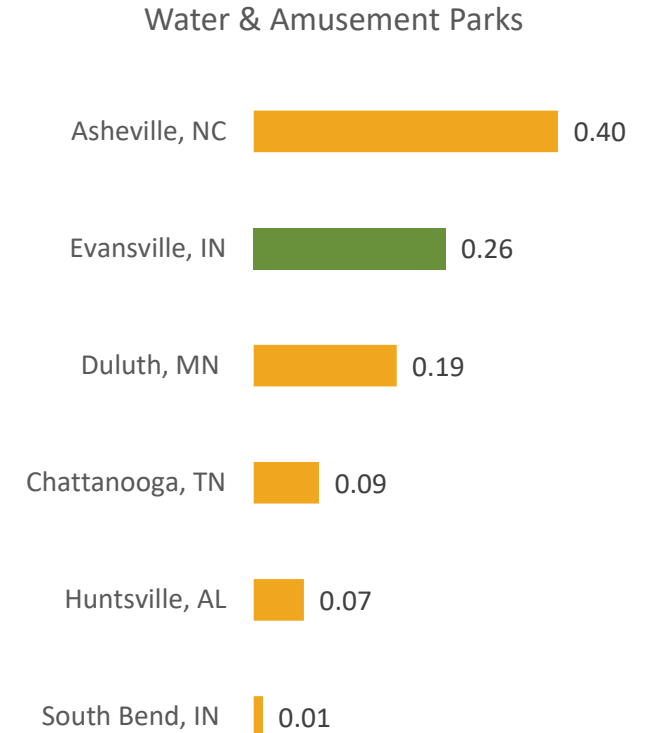
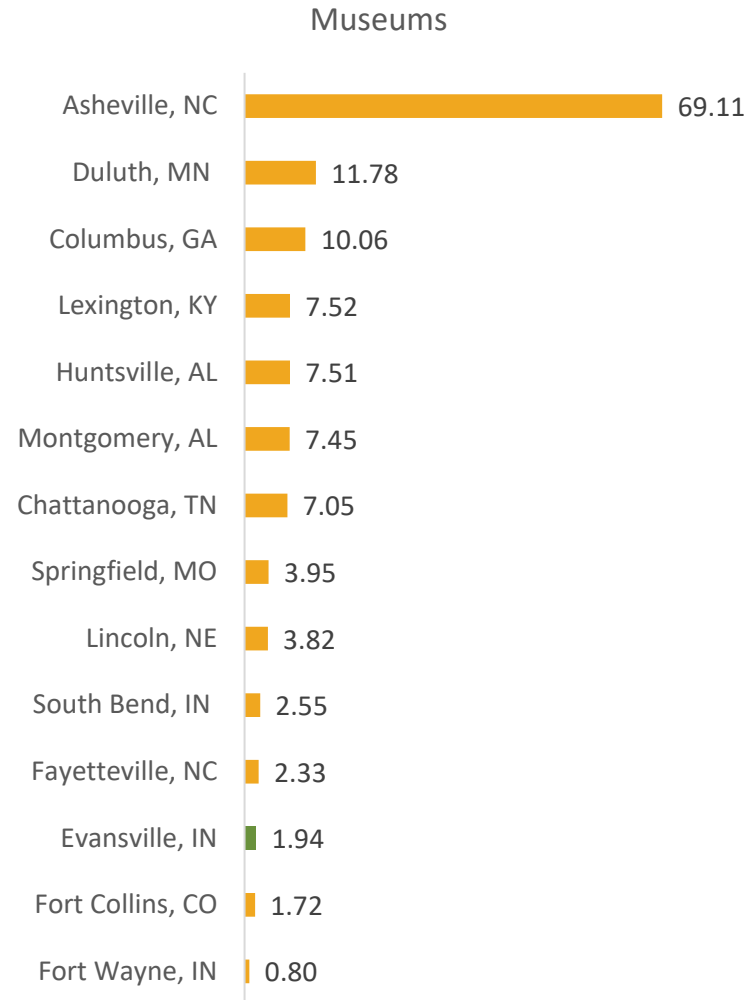


3. Benchmarking: Research Summary

Another important component to attracting a broad variety of tourists is the number of quality museums in a destination. The most popular museums on TripAdvisor are the USS LST Ship Memorial, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History & Science, and the Children’s Museum of Evansville.

Destinations such as water and amusement parks will also increase tourism, especially from the young family segment. Burdette Park is very highly rated, and accounts for all of the positive reviews on TripAdvisor.

As shown, Evansville ranks 12th of the 14 comparable CBSAs in terms of museums, and 2nd in water & amusement parks. It should be noted that seven of the 14 comparable CBSAs do not have an amusement park and have not been included in the analysis.



3. Benchmarking: Destination Asset Comparison Recap

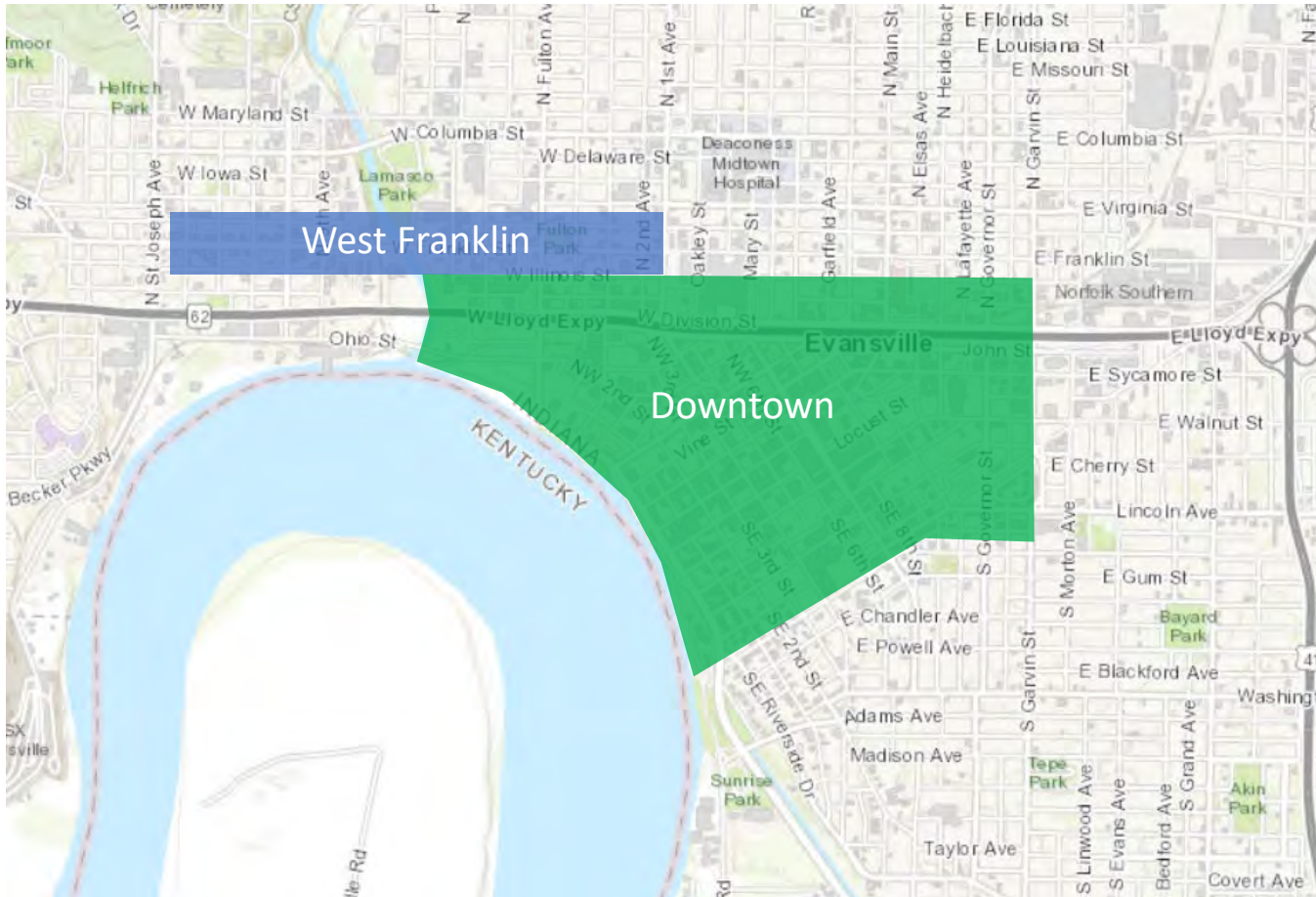
The table to the right provides a summary of the comparative analysis of arts and culture-related venues, attractions and experiences in the markets, sightseeing attractions and landmarks, and opportunities for outdoor adventures. As shown, there is room for improvement in the “Adventure and Sightseeing”, “Culture”, and “Culinary” categories.

Evansville ranks 10th out of 13 markets for its Adventure and Culture options, and last in Culinary options. It should be noted that the comparison set was chosen according to population size, and several of the markets identified are established, nationally acclaimed tourist destinations. Evansville’s low rankings are generally indicative of an underdeveloped leisure identity.

Individual categories that represent relatively stronger areas for Evansville include “Water and Amusement Parks”, and “Nightlife”. It will be important to build on these strengths, as well as address shortcomings through tourism-related development initiatives described later in the TMP.

Category	Quality Experiences	Ranking out of 14	QE per 100k Population	Ranking out of 14
Fun & Games	462	10	1.45	11
Outdoor Activities	298	13	0.94	13
Water & Amusement Parks	277	7	0.87	2
Sights & Landmarks	237	14	0.75	13
Adventure and Sightseeing	1,274	10	4.01	10
Museums	616	13	1.94	12
Nightlife	114	9	0.36	7
Culture	730	10	2.30	10
Restaurants	2,703	14	8.51	13
Culinary	2,703	13	8.51	13

3. Benchmarking: Downtown Comparisons



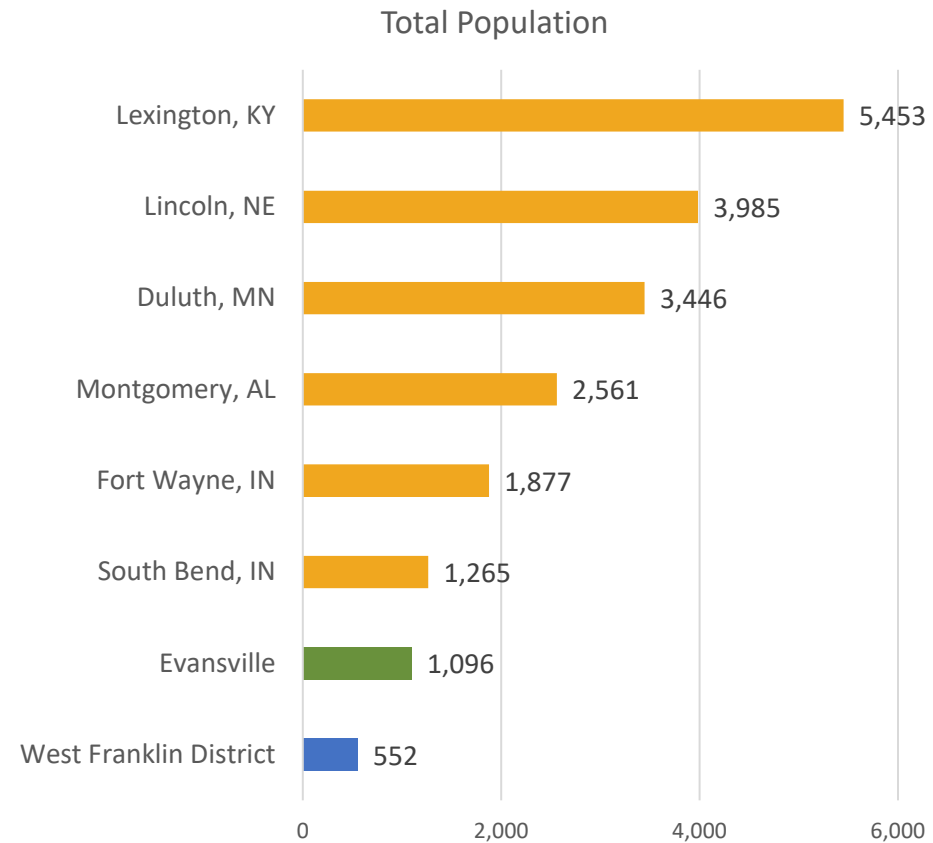
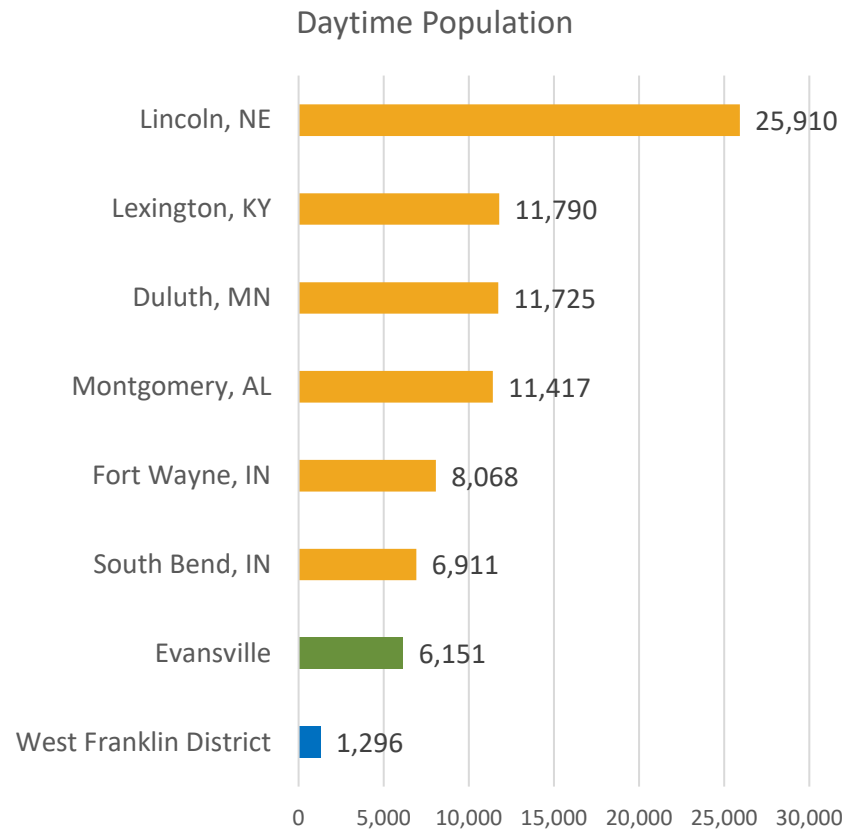
We have also prepared a more focused benchmark analysis of several comparable downtowns nationally. As part of this exercise, downtown Evansville and West Franklin are included due to both areas featuring concentrations of restaurants and other hospitality businesses.

The following pages show where Evansville ranks with respect to comparable downtown areas in terms of resident population, daytime population, total eating/drinking sales, total retail sales, eating/drinking sales per square mile, and retail sales per square mile.



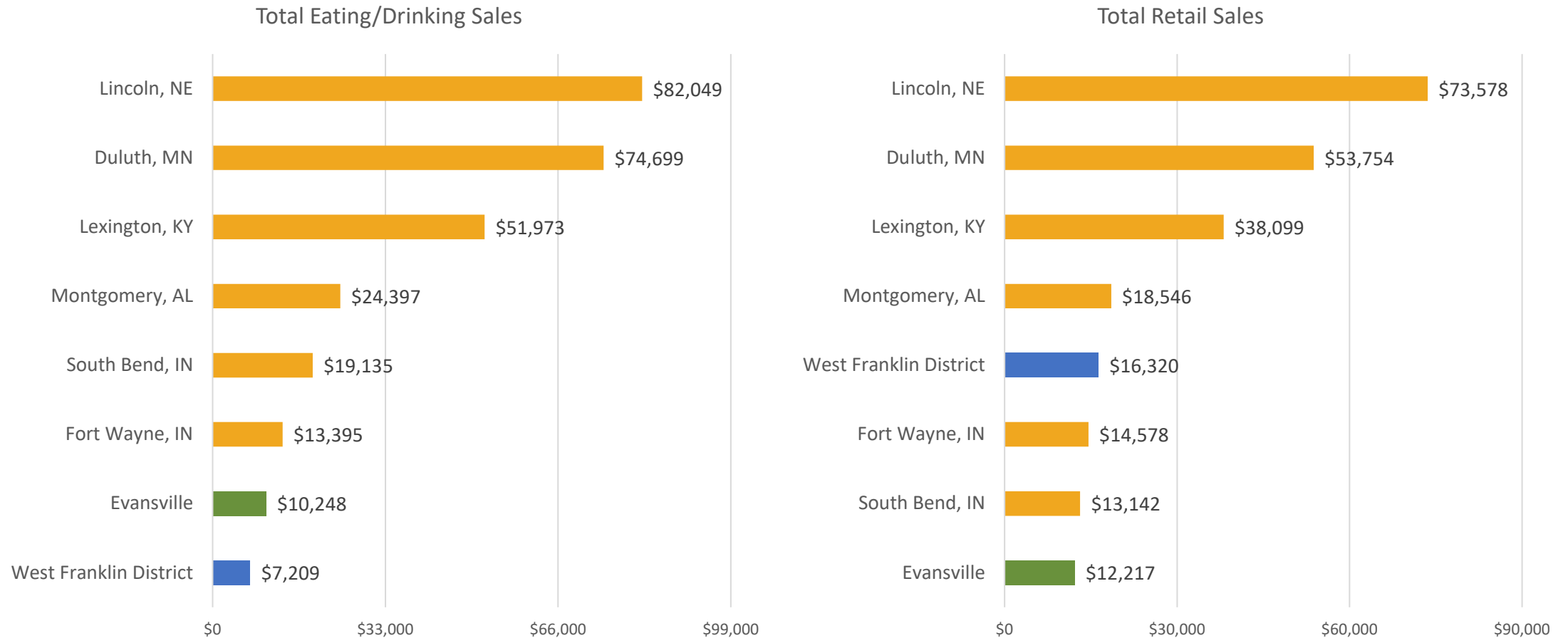
3. Benchmarking: Downtown Population

As shown in the charts below, Evansville ranks second to last among identified comparable CBSAs in both daytime population and total population. The West Franklin District ranks last among all comparable markets in these categories; however, it is also the smallest area in terms of square mileage. Combining the downtown and West Franklin areas into a single score still places the Evansville market at or near the bottom of markets reviewed in terms of population measures.



3. Benchmarking: Dining and Retail Sales

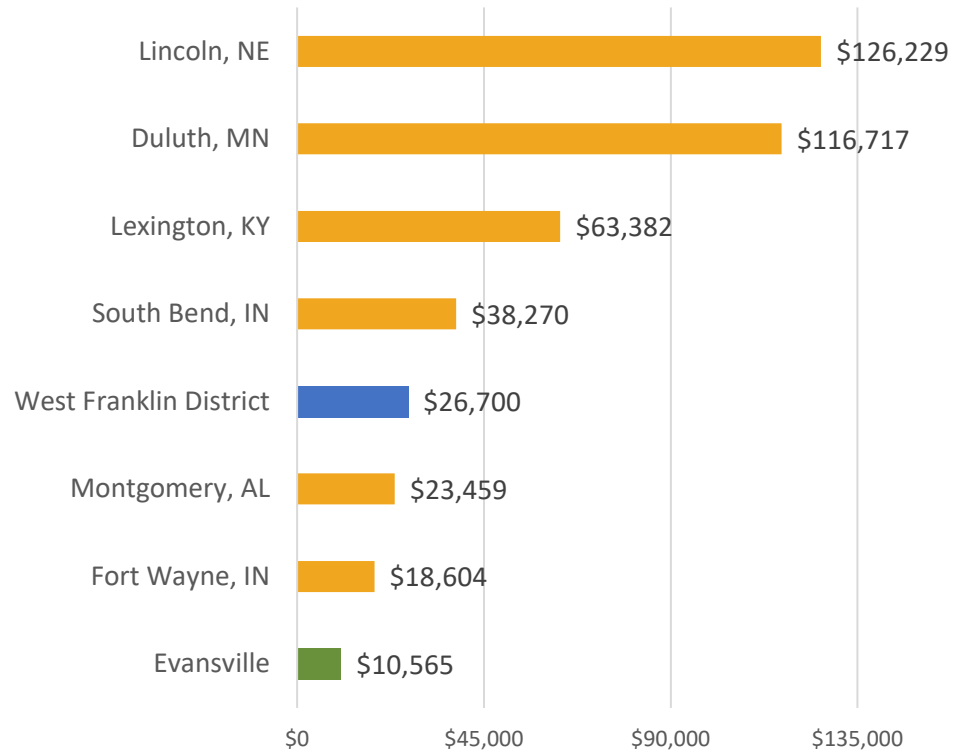
As shown in the charts below, Evansville ranks second to last among identified comparable CBSAs in terms of total eating and drinking sales, while ranking last in total retail sales. While the West Franklin District ranks last in total eating/drinking sales, they rank fourth in total retail sales.



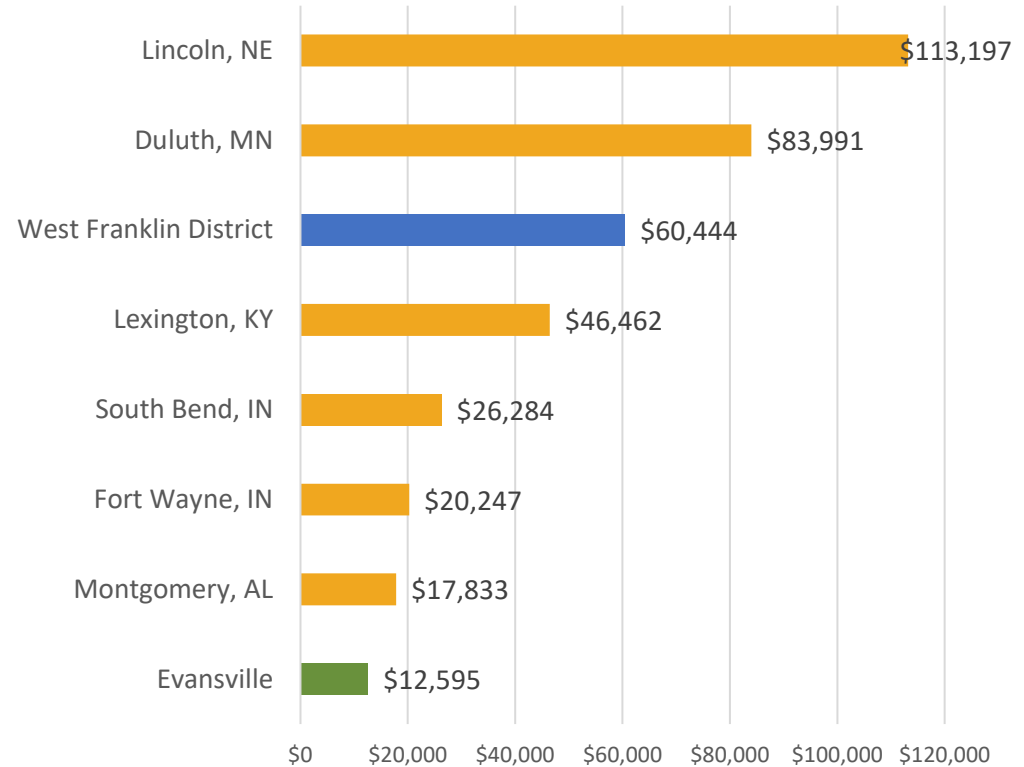
3. Benchmarking: Dining and Retail Sales per Square Mile

Downtown Evansville ranks last in eating and drinking per square mile, as well as retail per square mile. Meanwhile, West Franklin ranks fifth in eating and drinking per square mile and third in retail per square mile.

Eating/Drinking per Square Mile



Retail per Square Mile



3. Benchmarking: Downtown Comparison Recap

The table below summarizes the data presented in the previous slides. As shown, Evansville ranks near the bottom across the board, despite having the second largest downtown in terms of square miles (0.97), which is nearly 30 percent larger than the average (0.70). The West Franklin District, despite being significantly smaller (0.27 square miles) than the average of the comparable downtown areas, ranks highly in terms of eating/drinking per square mile and retail sales per square mile, ranking 5th and 3rd out of 8, respectively.

Though much smaller in area than downtown Evansville, the West Franklin District represents the area’s highest concentration of dining and retail. To better compete with other successful mid-sized leisure destinations, enhancement of the hospitality-related sector in downtown should be prioritized. Initial and lasting impressions of a destination are substantially influenced by the quality of its downtown, particularly among the convention and entertainment visitor segments.

Location	Square Miles	Daytime Population	Total Population	Eating/Drinking Sales	Retail Sales	Eating/Drinking per Square Mile	Retail per Square Mile
Montgomery, AL	1.04	11,417	2,561	\$24,397	\$18,546	\$23,459	\$17,833
Evansville, IN	0.97	6,151	1,096	\$10,248	\$12,217	\$10,565	\$12,595
Lexington, KY	0.82	11,790	5,453	\$51,973	\$38,099	\$63,382	\$46,462
Fort Wayne, IN	0.72	8,068	1,877	\$13,395	\$14,578	\$18,604	\$20,247
Lincoln, NE	0.65	25,910	3,985	\$82,049	\$73,578	\$126,229	\$113,197
Duluth, MN	0.64	11,725	3,446	\$74,699	\$53,754	\$116,717	\$83,991
South Bend, IN	0.50	6,911	1,265	\$19,135	\$13,142	\$38,270	\$26,284
West Franklin District	0.27	1,296	552	\$7,209	\$16,320	\$26,700	\$60,444
Average	0.70	10,409	2,529	\$35,388	\$30,029	\$52,991	\$47,632
DT Evansville Rank (out of 8)	2	7	7	7	8	8	8

3. Benchmarking: Talent 2025 Overview

As previously noted, the Evansville Regional Business Committee recently led a review of peer and aspirational destinations nationally as part of the 2025 Initiative that compared various demographic and socioeconomic data with those of Evansville. The six peer destinations and four aspirational destinations included in this analysis are presented to the right.

As part of this comparative exercise, Chmura Economics & Analytics included analyses of population growth, population by age, minority population, employment by sector, educational attainment, and overall health, among other criteria. These reviews showed several strengths of the Evansville population and economy, as well as several key challenges facing the community.

Three of these challenges reflect conditions that could potentially be improved with tourism-related investment in the region. In essence, potential exists to invest in placemaking, events and attractions that would make Evansville a better place to visit, as well as a better place to live and work. These three conditions are listed below and discussed further on the following pages:

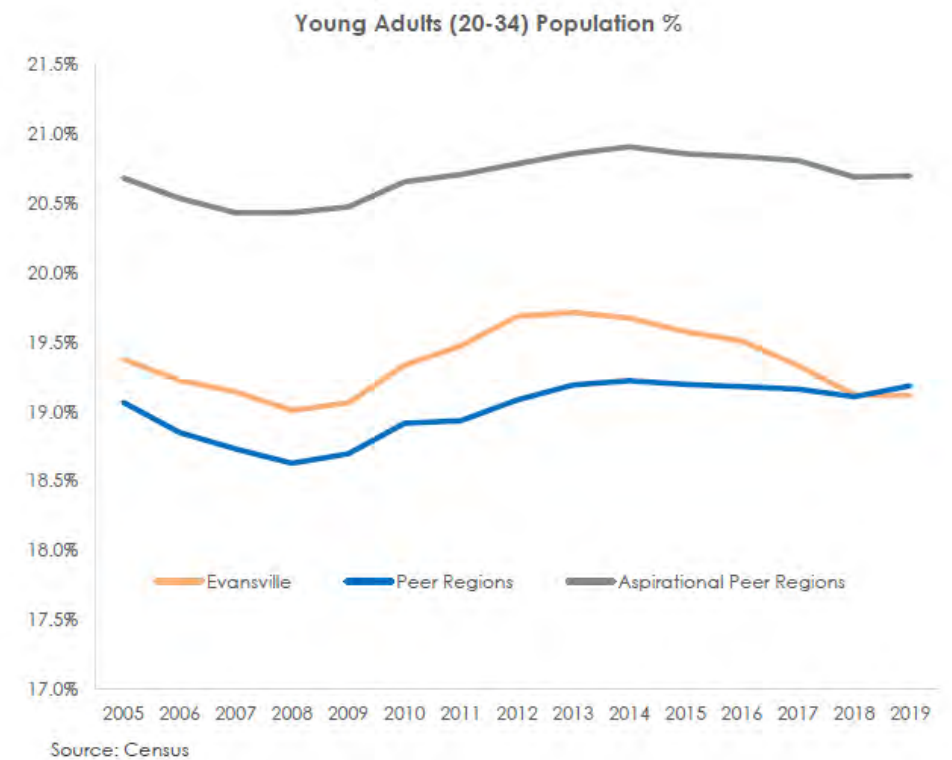
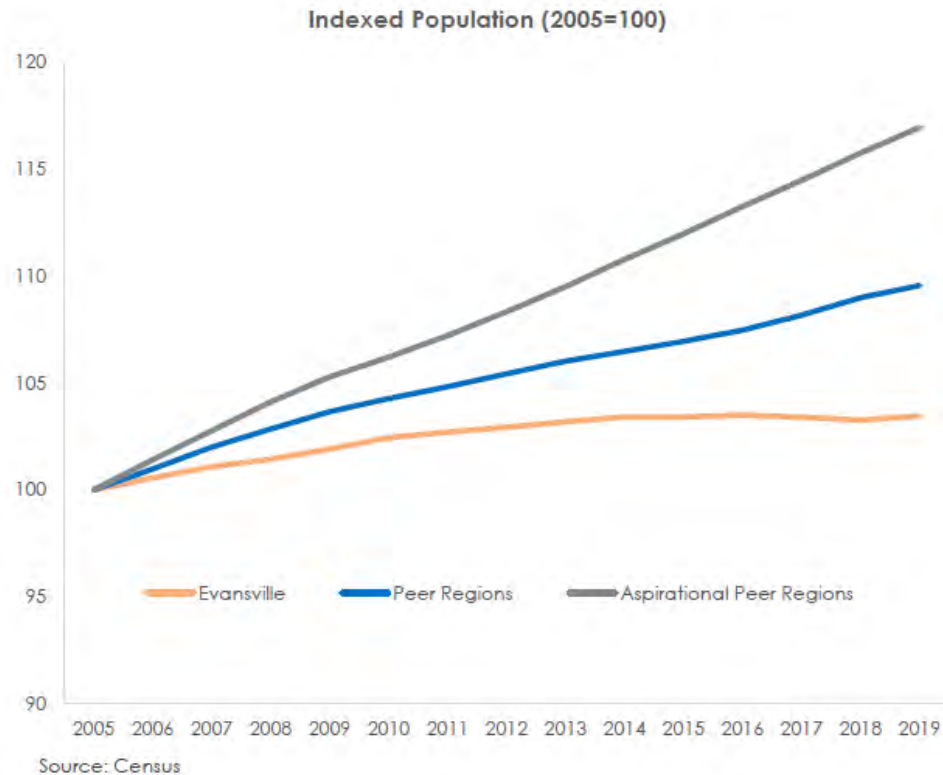
- Population growth;
- Young person (20-34) population; and,
- Overall health index.

Compared Destinations

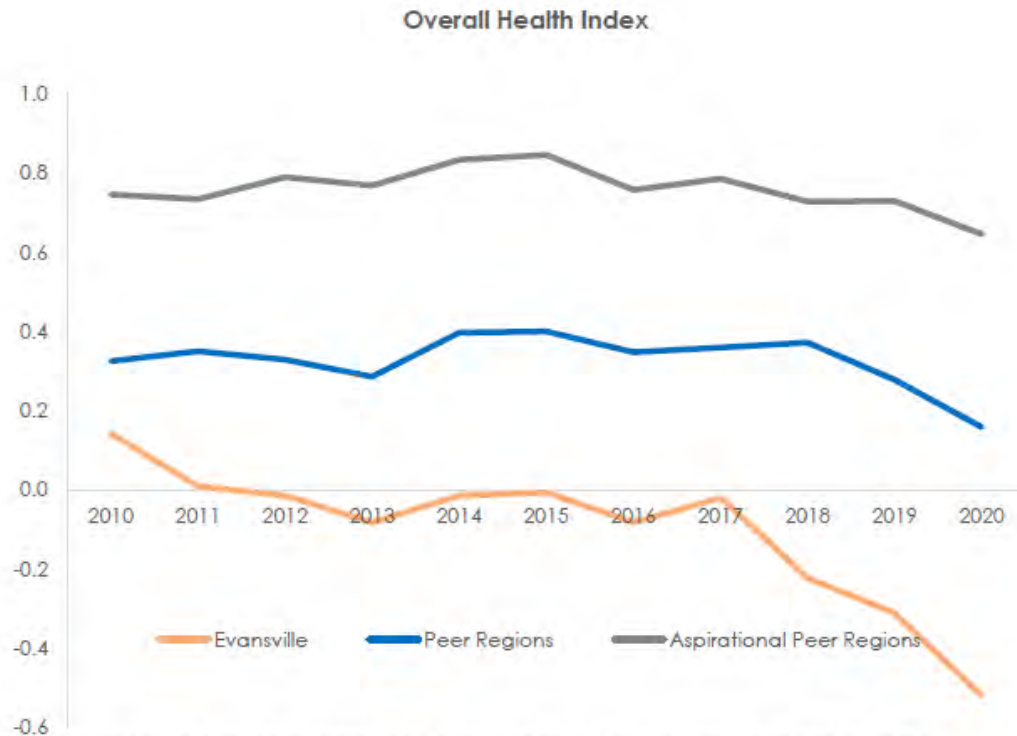
Metro Area	Region Type
Chattanooga	Peer
Davenport	Peer
Fort Wayne	Peer
Green Bay	Peer
Roanoke	Peer
Spartanburg	Peer
Grand Rapids	Aspirational
Greenville	Aspirational
Huntsville	Aspirational
Omaha	Aspirational

3. Benchmarking: Population Comparisons

The charts below compare the population levels and the percentage of population between 20 and 34 over the last fifteen years in Evansville, with the averages of its peer and aspirational destinations. As shown, the growth of Evansville's population has plateaued in recent years, and the percentage of young people in the area has decreased steadily since 2013. Peer and aspirational regions, meanwhile, continue to steadily grow their populations and have higher percentages of young people relative to Evansville. In the past, Evansville had a moderate lead over peer regions in terms of its young person population but has been overtaken in the last two years. This Tourism Master Plan provides several initiatives that would help attract young professionals to the region, both as visitors and future residents.



3. Benchmarking: Health Index Comparison



Note: The Year in this chart represent the year where index was computed, not when the data occurred. An index value larger than 0 implies better than national average.
Source: County Health Ranking, and Chmura

Chmura also reviewed the fluctuations in the Overall Health Index of Evansville and the compared communities between 2010 and 2020. This Index considers a variety of data sources to measure overall health and wellness in a given market, including quality of healthcare, access to healthcare, social and economic factors, diet and exercise behaviors, tobacco use, alcohol use, housing, transit, and environmental quality, among other elements.

After closely aligning with the national average for much of this timeline, Evansville has fallen significantly in its scoring since 2017. Peer and aspirational regions have also both dropped during this timeframe but remain above the national average. It should be noted that this index represents a ranking, as opposed to the overall health of the community. It is likely that other communities have established more proactive health and fitness initiatives that Evansville could aspire toward.

Healthy and active populations can be indicative of vibrant destinations with strong economies, substantial parks and green spaces, and clean environments. As a result, the same initiatives that could improve this Index in Evansville could also make it a more appealing place to travelers.

Many of the recommendations presented herein are designed to address this falling Health Index score through the development of outdoor adventure centers, bike trails, expanded nature centers, and a more vibrant and walkable downtown.

An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena at dusk. The arena's facade is illuminated with a warm, golden light, and the name "Ford FORD CENTER" is visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of the arena. In the background, several other city buildings are visible under a cloudy sky with a sunset glow. The text "4 COMMUNITY SURVEY" is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

4 COMMUNITY SURVEY

4. Community Survey: Overview

Working with Visit Evansville, Downtown Evansville, and Gray Loon Marketing, Inc., CSL distributed a questionnaire via email and social media to residents within the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area focusing on Evansville's tourism industry. A link to the survey was provided on the social media platforms managed by Gray Loon Marketing and Downtown Evansville, and emails were distributed to a list of those who had previously participated in the recent survey for Evansville's "E is for Everyone" initiative.

In all, over 1,000 area residents responded to the survey. The survey had a participation rate of over 95 percent, meaning that nearly all respondents took the time to fully answer the ten-minute survey, a positive sign of interest in, and support for, potential tourism initiatives. Their input is useful in informing TMP recommendations, as many of these residents often host family or friends in the region and hear firsthand about Evansville's strengths and weaknesses as a destination.

To provide context for the profiles of respondents, residents were first asked to indicate their age and the number of years they have lived in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area. The survey sample skews slightly young, with 18 percent of respondents over the age of 55, 34 percent between 35 and 55, and just over 48 percent under 35. Seventy-six percent of respondents have lived in Evansville-Vanderburgh County for over ten years, while only nine percent have lived in the area for less than five years. Five percent of respondents do not live in the area, with many of these respondents having recently moved from the area.

The quantitative and qualitative data generated by this survey outreach is presented and analyzed on the following pages.

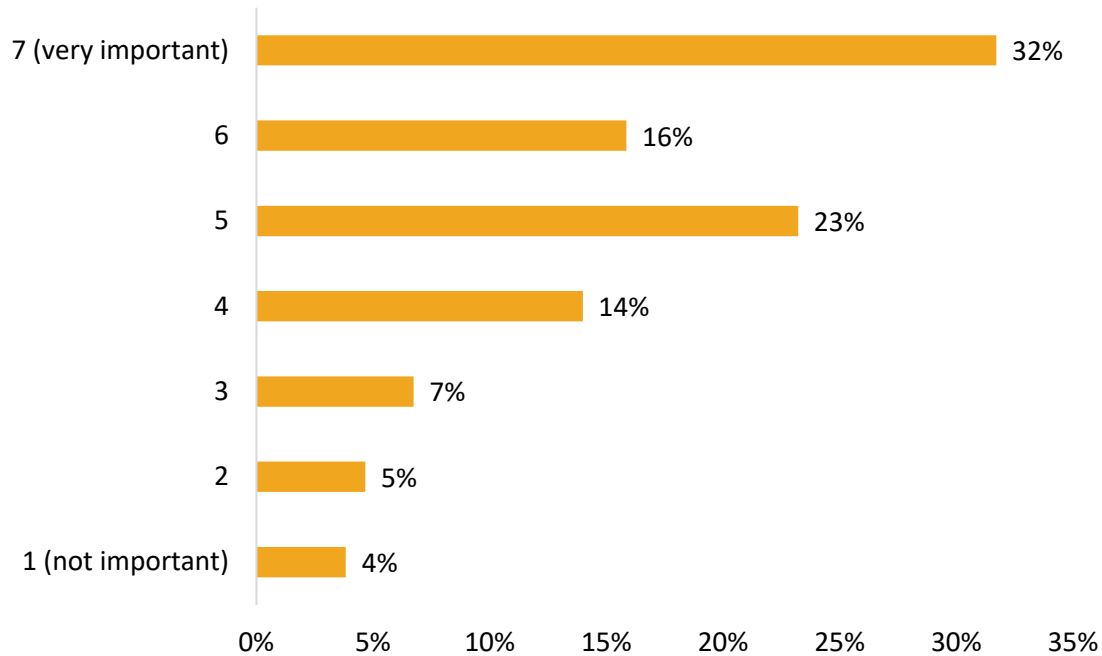


4. Community Survey: Tourism in Evansville

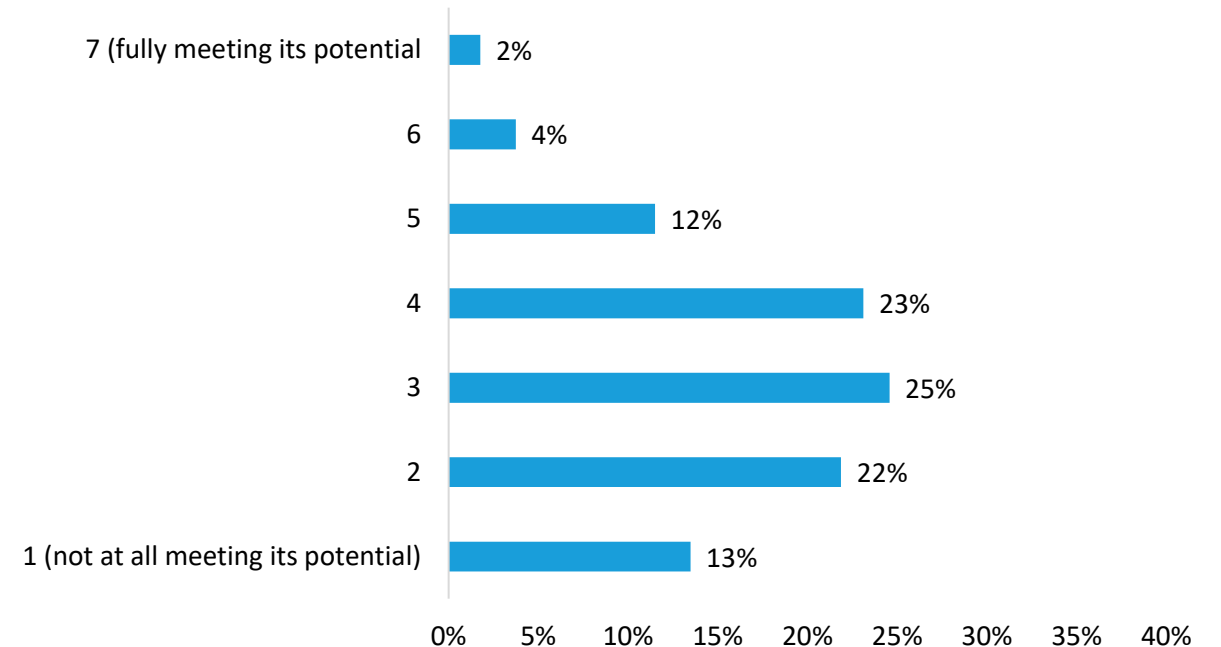
Residents were first asked to score the importance of the tourism industry for the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area and to what extent it is fulfilling its potential as a tourism destination on ascending scales of one to seven. Their ratings are summarized in the exhibits below. The data exhibited in the chart on the left reflects a community that is highly supportive of the Evansville tourism industry. Over 70 percent of respondents gave a score of five or higher to describe the importance of tourism to Evansville.

At the same time, when asked to score the destination's fulfillment of its tourism potential, 60 percent of respondents gave a score of three or lower. These low scores were often accompanied with comments that while Evansville is a quality place to live and raise a family, it lacks the unique attractions and entertainment of traditional leisure destinations. Clearly, residents see an opportunity for destination development to support increases in visitation, and improvement to local quality of life. Specific concepts that they expressed interest in are presented and analyzed on the following pages.

Importance of Tourism to Evansville



"To what extent do you feel that Evansville is meeting its potential as a tourism destination?"



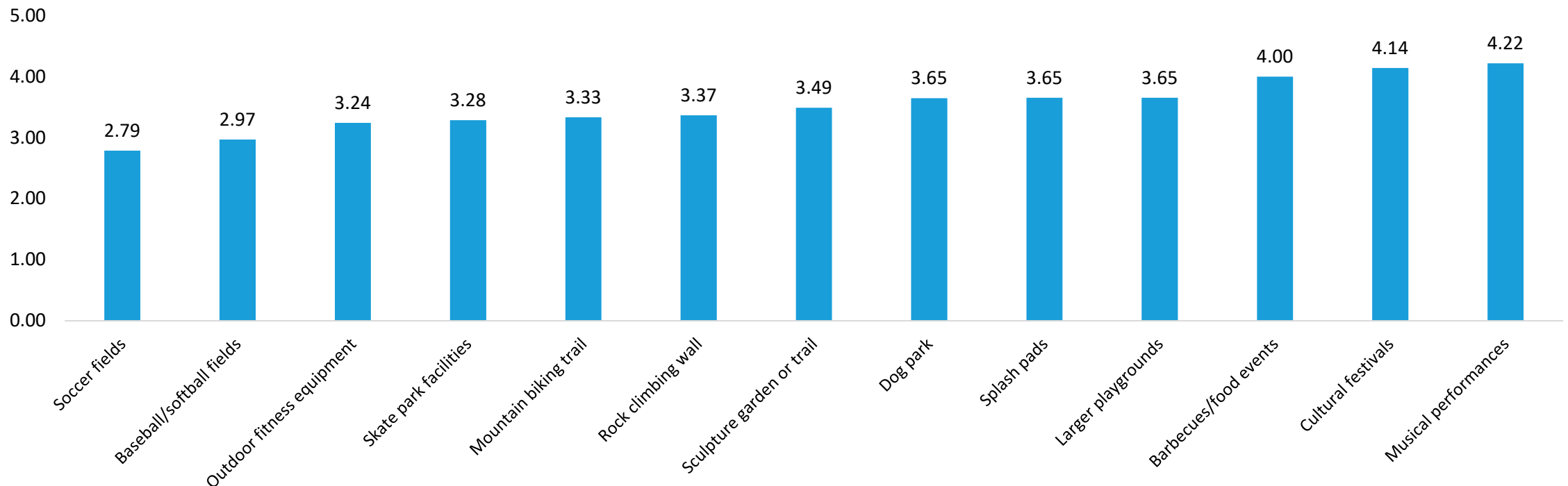
4. Community Survey: Park Concept Ratings

Surveyed residents were first prompted with a list of various attractions, programming, and other amenities that could be developed at area parks, green spaces, and other public areas, and were asked to score each concept on an ascending scale of one to five. This exercise helped generate sentiment regarding how Evansville could be improved with quality-of-life initiatives that would make the area a more appealing place to live and visit.

As shown below, concepts related to events, festivals, and programming received the highest ratings. This approval is considered as part of the Events and Festivals chapter later herein. Hard-built concepts that received high marks include larger playgrounds, splash pads, and dog parks.

Somewhat unsurprisingly, soccer fields and baseball/softball fields which tend to cater to a defined segment of the population, received the lowest marks.

Average Ratings per Concept



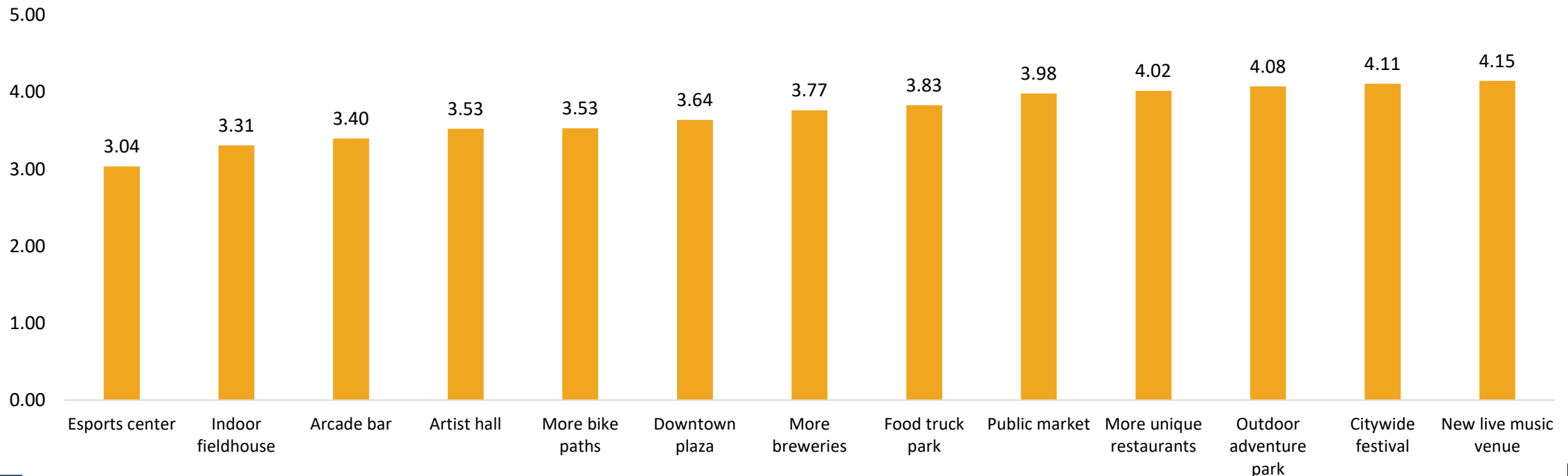
4. Community Survey: Attraction Concept Ratings

Residents were then asked to rate more tourism-related concepts, again on an ascending scale of one to five. They generally indicated interest in live music, food & beverage establishments and districts, and spaces for outdoor activities.

A new live music venue and citywide festival (again, music- and event-related concepts) received the two highest marks on the list. More unique restaurants and an outdoor adventure park also received scores higher than four out of five. Each of these top four concepts play prominent roles in the TMP's subsequent recommendation chapters. Other food and beverage-related concepts that scored relatively well and are considered later herein include a public market, food truck park, and additional breweries.

The esports center and indoor fieldhouse concepts received the lowest marks, though still averaged above a three out of five. As with sports complexes, these facilities would be positioned for more niche user bases, and unsurprisingly appeal less to the broader public.

Average Ratings per Concept



4. Community Survey: Open Ended Feedback – Attraction Ideas

Respondents were given the option to provide their own creative ideas and suggestions for attraction development in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area. A sampling of quotes representative of several common themes is presented in the adjacent exhibit.

Approximately 20 of respondents commented on the exciting potential of the downtown riverfront. Specific suggestions for the area included waterfront dining, family entertainment, and live music. Well known waterfronts ranging from Owensboro, KY, to Chicago, IL, were noted by respondents as examples to emulate.

Just over 10 percent of respondents suggested unique restaurants, while eight percent want to see more art-focused retail. Specific suggestions included food halls, public markets, artist murals, and eclectic shopping districts. Continued development of the NoCo Makers District would address this demand, in addition to a potential new food hall located in the downtown area.

Other entertainment and “things to do” recommendations related to creating a true entertainment district downtown, developing boat tours along the Ohio River, expanding and otherwise investing in Mesker Park Zoo, and the addition of an aquarium to the market.

Events, festivals, and live music were also mentioned by a significant number of respondents. Eighteen percent would like more opportunities for live music, while an additional seven percent want more events and festivals. Specific recommendations included events that would celebrate global arts and cuisine, Evansville's history and cultural heritage, as well as more beer fairs, food festivals, food contests, and wine and spirit tastings. More focused event and festival comments are presented within the Events and Festivals chapter later herein.

“A nicer **riverfront** similar to Owensboro with family-friendly activities and **waterfront dining** experiences with a river view and a place for **live music** along the river.”

“Farmer’s **market** selling produce, meats, cheeses, baked goods, flowers, and prepared foods, as well as more **artist murals** with **unique shops** in the downtown.”

“More focus on **local history** and the many **different cultures** that make up the area today.”

“Put more money into the **zoo, an aquarium, a large amphitheater**, and a more attractive and interactive river front. “

“Formation of a true **entertainment district**.”

“Since we are on the river, I think **boat tours**, boat rides to surrounding cities, or attracting riverboats to our area to drop off tourists would be **unique and special**, also occupy downtown hotels/rentals.”

“**Breweries, beer tasting, food festivals, food contests** (BBQ, German, pizza, wings, etc.), wine/spirit tasting, outdoor concerts, drag strip.”

An aerial photograph of a city street at dusk. The sky is filled with soft, orange and grey clouds. In the foreground, a wide street with a red-paved crosswalk and crosswalk markings is visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and in the street. To the left, a large, modern arena with a curved, metallic facade and a large glass window is prominent. The arena has "RECORD CENTER" visible on its side. To the right, several multi-story brick and concrete buildings are visible, including a tall, modern glass skyscraper. The overall scene is a vibrant urban setting during the "blue hour" of sunset.

Interlude | Recommendations

Tourism Master Plan Recommendations



The recommendations presented herein are based on the extensive research conducted as part of the Tourism Master Plan for the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area. They focus on areas of product development and policy that are designed to increase market share for the local and regional visitor economy.

We have developed recommendations for six key initiatives for growing leisure and group visitation to the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area, as summarized in the adjacent graphic.

Areas of focus that research suggests can positively impact visitation include **continued sports tourism growth**, **long-term planning for convention product improvement**, **CVB initiatives and resources**, **placemaking investments in downtown Evansville**, **transformational enhancement of outdoor attractions**, and **citywide event and festival strategies**.

This Plan will serve as a valuable tool in helping to shape a vision for future development and identifying opportunities to distinguish and elevate the Evansville-Vanderburgh County within the visitor industry.

It is important to note that the recommendations presented herein cannot be implemented by a single entity or agency. In fact, participation from a variety of public and private sector entities will be necessary to realize the potential of Evansville in the visitor industry economy. This Plan can serve as a roadmap for the diverse organizations that will be relied on to help implement key recommendations.

An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Detroit, Michigan, taken at dusk. The arena's distinctive circular, metallic facade is illuminated by the setting sun. The text "Ford FORD CENTER" is visible on the building's exterior. In the foreground, a busy street intersection is shown with cars and a large crowd of people gathered on the sidewalks. The sky is filled with soft, orange and grey clouds. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "5 AMATEUR SPORTS" in a large, white, sans-serif font.

5 AMATEUR SPORTS



5. Amateur Sports: Introduction

As described by Northstar Travel Group, sporting groups help de-commoditize the travel industry, provide higher profit margins for their host market relative to other travel sectors, and display a high degree of loyalty and likelihood of becoming long-term repeat customers. Hosting sports tournaments can create lasting impressions of a destination for the families attending and young athletes participating, leading to future visitation or re-location to a host market in the future.

The amateur sports industry has also been the fastest growing travel segment in the country since the turn of the century. According to Tourism Economics, the 180 million people traveling for sporting events generated \$103.3 billion in total economic benefits in 2019, supporting 740,000 jobs. According to a survey by Longwoods International of more than 4,000 consumers nationally, 51 percent of American agrees that hosting youth and amateur sports events improves the quality of life in their communities. This figure is even higher in the Midwest, where 57 percent of respondents agree.

At the same time, as a market with significant drive-in attendance and event facilities that can often already accommodate social distancing audiences, many experts predict a swifter post-COVID rebound relative to other sectors. A destination like Evansville, with its amateur sports facilities, affordable hotel inventory, and family-friendly attractions, is well positioned to benefit from this continued growth of national and regional sports tourism.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into two sections, as described below:

1. **Analysis** – Consists of a summary of existing and soon to be open amateur sports facilities in the local market, a review of competitive facility offerings within a 5-hour drive of Evansville, as well as a summary of findings derived from interviews with more than 20 amateur sports tournament organizers.
2. **Recommendations** – Presents a time-based list of priorities for amateur sports investment, including a near-term expansion and improvement of Deaconess Sports Park, the development of a new fieldhouse facility, and a long-term expansion and improvement of Goebel Soccer Complex. These recommendations are presented along with case study examples of similar developments nationally.





5. Amateur Sports: Existing Facilities

We begin with an overview of Evansville’s current primary sports facilities that are not exclusively reserved for local schools. Arenas and stadiums include the 11,000-seat Ford Center, the 5,200-seat Bosse Field, and the 10,000-seat Reitz Bowl. These venues host a mix of collegiate, high school, and professional programming, as well as some amateur sports events. Swonder Ice Arena is occasionally used for hockey tournaments in addition to local practices and league play.

Key community and amateur sports facilities include the eight-field Deaconess Sports Park and nine-field Goebel Soccer Complex, both of which are managed by Visit Evansville. The soon to be completed Deaconess Aquatic Center will add three pools to the community, and will be used for competitions, local club and high school practices, as well as community programming.

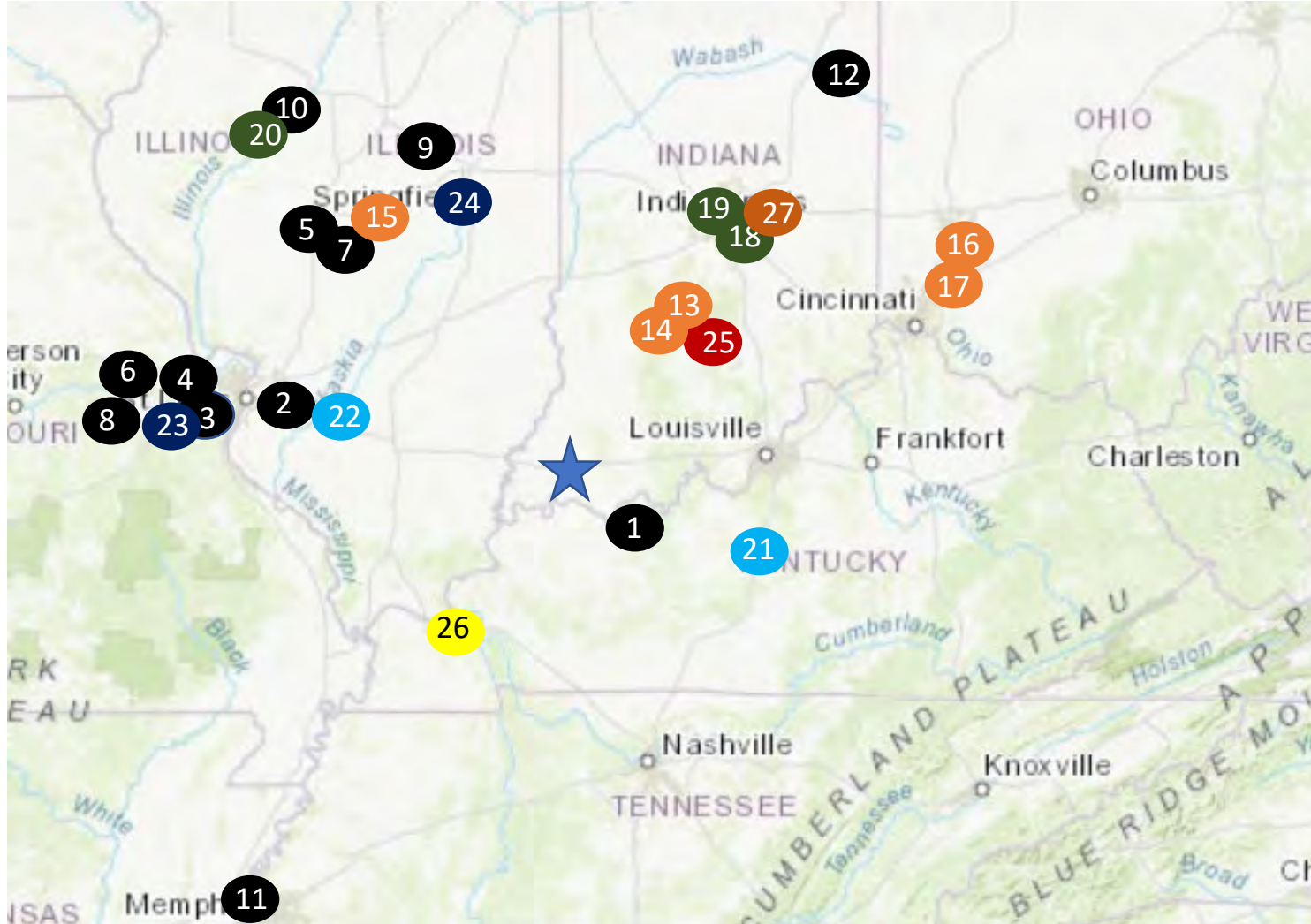
In terms of overall facility inventory, Evansville has 12 tournament-quality soccer fields, eight tournament-quality baseball fields (nine including Bosse Field), and only three basketball courts.

The following page presents a map and facility summaries of competitive amateur sports facilities within a 250-mile drive of Evansville. The assessments highlights a noticeable shortage of court facilities, with the closest indoor facility option offering four or more courts at one site at the Paducah Convention Center just over two hours to the southwest. The opportunity to develop a facility with a larger concentration of basketball courts is explored further herein.

Facility Name	Year Opened	Capacity	Fields	Courts/Rinks	Track	Pools
Arenas and Stadiums						
Ford Center	2011	11,000	--	1	--	--
Bosse Field	1915	5,181	1	--	--	--
Screaming Eagles Arena	2019	4,800	--	1	--	--
Swonder Ice Arena	2002	1,500	--	2	--	--
Charles H Braun Stadium	1999	1,200	1	--	--	--
Cooper Stadium	2002	650	1	--	--	--
USI Baseball Field	1974	500	1	--	--	--
Romain Stadium	2011	3,500	1	--	1	--
Reitz Bowl	1921	10,000	1	--	1	--
Total			6	4	2	--
Community Facilities						
CK Newsome Comm. Center	1971	n/a	--	1	--	--
Deaconess Aquatic Center	2021 (est.)	960	--	--	--	3
Deaconess Sports Park	2015	n/a	8	--	--	--
EVSC Soccer Complex	n/a	n/a	3	--	--	--
Goebel Soccer Complex	2004	n/a	9	--	--	--
Metro Sports Center	2010	n/a	--	3	--	--
Evansville Basketball Academy	1999	n/a	--	2	--	--
Total			20	6	0	3

Source: Visit Evansville, 2021.

5. Amateur Sports: Regional Facilities



Source: Sport commission websites, CVB websites, Google maps, 2021.

Type of Complex	Location	Courts / Fields	Distance from Evansville
Soccer Only Complexes			
1 Thompson-Berry Soccer Complex	Owensboro, KY	11	30
2 Reiniger Memorial Soccer Park	Caseyville, IL	8	135
3 Lou Fusz Soccer Complex	St Louis, MO	10	150
4 Creve Coeur Soccer Complex	St Louis, MO	14	150
5 SASA Soccer Complex	Springfield, IL	20	170
6 SLYSA Soccer Complex	St Charles, MO	17	170
7 UIS YMCA Soccer Fields	Springfield, IL	13	170
8 Sportport International	Maryland Hts, MO	12	170
9 PCSL Soccer Complex	Bloomington, IL	20	190
10 FC Peorgia MW Sports Complex	Peoria, IL	20	220
11 Mike Rose Soccer Complex	Memphis, TN	17	240
12 Hefner Fields	Fort Wayne, IN	15	250
Baseball/Softball Only Complexes			
13 Winslow Sports Complex	Bloomington, IN	4	100
14 Lower Cascades Ballfields	Bloomington, IN	2	100
15 Champion Fields	Normal, IL	8	185
16 Action Sports Center	Dayton, OH	8	220
17 City of Moraine	Moraine, OH	8	220
Basketball/Volleyball, Baseball/Softball & Soccer Complexes			
18 Midwest Sports & Social Complex	Indianapolis, IN	18	200
19 Grand Park Sports Campus	Indianapolis, IN	65	200
20 Louisville Slugger Sports Park	Peoria, IL	16	220
Baseball/Softball & Soccer Complexes			
21 Elizabethtown Sports Park	Elizabethtown, KY	24	95
22 O'Fallon Sports Park	O'Fallon, MO	22	160
Basketball/Volleyball & Soccer Complexes			
23 Center St Louis	St Louis, MO	9	150
24 Dodds Park	Champaign, IL	18	155
Basketball/Volleyball, Baseball/Softball & Soccer Complexes			
25 Twin Lakes	Bloomington, IN	11	100
Basketball/Volleyball Only Complexes			
26 Paducah Convention Center	Paducah, KY	4	128
Baseball/Softball & Volleyball Complexes			
27 Indianapolis Sports Park	Indianapolis, IN	11	200



5. Amateur Sports: Outreach

To further assess potential sports facility development concepts that could enhance Evansville’s standing in the regional and national sports tourism industry, in-depth telephone interviews were completed with sports league and tournament organizers for a variety of sport types. The survey is used to assess tournament organizers’ current and past usage of facilities in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area as well as to measure their interest in using potential new/enhanced facilities if they were developed. Planners were asked to provide their overall impressions of the Evansville destination, the market’s current sports facility offerings, and quantities of fields/courts/etc. that need to be developed in order for the region to accommodate large events. A full listing of the groups that were contacted is presented in the adjacent exhibit.

The input collected from these organizations was used to help form the framework for a preliminary facility program and usage estimates of new/enhanced facilities in Evansville.

The following pages summarize the feedback provided by these interviewed organizations, with particular focus on the opportunity for soccer, baseball, softball, basketball, and volleyball segments. We begin with an in-depth summary of the input provided by the various diamond field user groups, followed by soccer groups and basketball/volleyball groups, respectively.

Interviewed Amateur Sports Organizations

AAU Basketball	Legacy Elite
AAU Volleyball	NHS Showcase
Evansville Basketball Academy	OHRV World Series
Evansville Sports Corps	SFA
Indiana Elite	SWISA Soccer
IHSA	USBA Hoops
Junior Volleyball Association	USSSA
Hoosier Region Volleyball	USSSA – 3 Up 3 Down



5. Amateur Sports: Outdoor – Baseball / Softball

20-30

number of tournaments represented by interviewed organizations

2.5

average spectators per participant

12 - 16

maximum fields to support market demand

Interviews were conducted with local and regional baseball and softball organizations. The information below and in the following pages summarizes these findings.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Most organizations currently hold some dates each year at Deaconess. Bosse Field has also been utilized to hold several tournaments in the past.
- The concept of an expanded Deaconess was attractive to organizations; however, price was a big factor for softball.
- All organizations have been pleased with maintenance and experience at Deaconess thus far.
- Youth baseball organizers enjoy using Deaconess, but its lack of full-sized baseball fields make it impossible to host high school age groups as part of large hotel room-night generating tournaments.
- Turf fields would be a plus and would eliminate cancellations due to poor weather and could encourage more teams to travel from larger cities such as Indianapolis.
- Adding attractions and other things to do – such as a playground, an arcade, or more covered hospitality areas nearby, would make the location more attractive for large tournaments.
- All respondents emphasized the need for concessions, with some recommending access to food trucks for larger events to give attendees more options.





5. Amateur Sports: Outdoor - Soccer

12

average number of club teams represented

60 - 100

average number of teams per tournament

6 - 8

maximum number of turf fields to meet demand

Interviews were conducted with local and regional soccer organizations. The information below and in the following pages summarizes these findings.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Goebel does not open turf fields until May 1, which makes the March and April tournaments challenging.
- Six to eight fields converted to turf would help Goebel attract tournament activity during the early spring and late fall months.
- Some groups commented on Goebel's lack of lights as a challenge for hosting tournaments in the early spring. Added light inventory would ensure safe play longer into the night, allowing for more games to be played and teams to be invited.
- Other organizers recommended the addition of more concessions, more restrooms, a locker room, and bleacher seating.
- A significant portion of state soccer tournaments are currently run at Grand Park in Indianapolis. In recent years, there have been frustrations working with management there, as well as some date availability issues. Some organizers indicated that a share of this Indiana market could be retained by an expanded Goebel Soccer Complex.





5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility

30 - 40

number of tournaments represented among interviewed organizations

70 - 100

average number of teams per tournament

30

average spectators per team

8 - 12

number of courts desired among respondents

Interviews were conducted with local and regional basketball, volleyball, and cheer/dance organizations. The information below and in the following pages summarizes these findings.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- A potential new indoor facility in Evansville is particularly attractive for regional and national basketball organizations such as AAU and USBA, as well as regional volleyball organizations.
- Organizers have been interested in the Evansville market in the past, noting its central location between three separate states and one day's driving distance from multiple major metro areas as key selling points.
- Basketball tournaments require eight to 12 courts to run large-scale basketball tournaments, with hardwood being the required surface.
- Multiple basketball organizations indicated they would hold tournaments at a new facility in Evansville multiple weeks per month during the fall, winter, and early spring months.
- Large national volleyball tournaments are typically played at convention centers with more than 40 courts and would be unlikely to be attracted to Evansville. However local club teams and more regional invitational events would potentially have use of a new facility.
- All respondents emphasized the need for spectator seating and concessions to properly run a medium to large sized tournament.
- Significant opportunities to host camps and clinics.
- Moderate potential to host cheer and dance competitions, consumer shows and community events during down periods.





5. Amateur Sports: Enhancement and Expansion of Deaconess Sports Park

As indicated by interviewed sports tournament organizers, Deaconess Sports Park has served well as a quality, well managed baseball and softball facility since its opening in 2015. The facility has hosted events with 300+ contracted room nights on a consistent basis over the last several years due to the proactive efforts of Visit Evansville and the Evansville Sports Corporation.

Opportunity exists to further grow these event and hotel room night generation levels through added investment in the Park. Recommended initiatives are presented below and on the following page.

Recommendation 1: Deaconess Upgrades (Turf and Hospitality)

Visit Evansville is currently proposing a bond refinancing of Deaconess that would provide approximately \$1.9 million for upgrades to the facility. Facility upgrades included as part of this investment may include the following:

- new turf infields
- extension of base paths to 80 ft to allow for hosting of 13u tournaments
- new onsite batting cages
- new press box on field four to enable attraction of collegiate tournaments
- additional covered areas for gatherings and meals
- public art installations with viral social media potential

The Tourism Master Plan reflects support for these initiatives, which are set to begin by November 2021. Should near-term funding only cover turf and batting cage investments, then plans and additional funding sources should be sought to ensure the completion of the more hospitality-related investments. In order to maintain a competitive edge in a quickly evolving and highly competitive industry, adopting these features to make Deaconess a more complete day-long experience should be prioritized.



Recommendation	Deaconess Upgrades
Detail	Turf infields, batting cages, public art installations, and indoor activity center.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 years – turf and batting cages • 3-4 years – other initiatives
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Vanderburgh County
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2m to \$3m



5. Amateur Sports: Enhancement and Expansion of Deaconess Sports

Park

Recommendation 2: Deaconess Expansion

Opportunity exists to attract larger baseball and softball tournaments on a more consistent basis through the addition of baseball and/or multipurpose softball fields to Deaconess Park.

Based on suggestions provided by interviewed organizers, sports tourism industry trends and CSL’s past experience with similar projects throughout the country, there is an opportunity for the development of four to six more diamond fields over time with the following characteristics.

- Four (4) baseball fields with adjustable base lengths (including 60’, 65’, 70’, 80’ and 90’ bases) and fences (up to 320’ fences with available portable fencing), synthetic turf, and seating for 500 to 600 spectators at each field.
- Two (2) to four (4) flexible softball/youth baseball fields with portable mounds available and adjustable base lengths (including 60’, 65’, 70’ and 80’ bases) and fences (200 to 300’ fences with available portable fencing), synthetic turf, and portable mounds.

It is estimated that a site for a potential new diamond field complex would require between 3.5 and 4.0 acres per field. Some additional parking, circulation space, and other support facilities would likely be needed as well. Therefore, 20 to 40 acres would likely be needed to accommodate the Phase 1 and Phase 2 expansion scenarios.

Visit Evansville is undertaking efforts to secure land adjacent to the existing complex for the possibility of a future expansion. Regardless of the timing or scope of future field expansion, this would be a very strategically advantageous purchase. As shown in the adjacent graphic, four new full-sized baseball fields could be well accommodated by a portion of the site.



Recommendation	Deaconess Expansion
Detail	4 new full-sized baseball fields and 2 to 4 youth/multipurpose fields
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 year – land acquisition • 2-4 years – 4 new full-sized fields • 5-6 years- 2 to 4 new youth/multipurpose fields
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Vanderburgh County
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$6m to \$10m



5. Amateur Sports: Enhancement and Expansion of Goebel Soccer Complex

Past users of Goebel Soccer Complex such as SWISA Soccer, National Homeschool Soccer Showcase, and IHSAA lauded the Goebel Soccer Complex as a quality facility for mid-sized tournaments during the peak spring and fall months of play. To grow this existing market capture, however, several facility investments will be needed. As with Deaconess Sports Park, recommendations are segmented by enhancements and expansion below.

Recommendation 3: Goebel Enhancements (Turf, Lights, Lockers, and Seats)

With nine existing fields, two of which feature turf surfaces, the Goebel Soccer Complex could undergo several enhancements in order to be better positioned as a tournament-quality amateur sports venue.

Organizers recommended more turf and lights be developed to accommodate more games during April, May, September, and October (months with more inclement weather and limited daylight). At the same time, Visit Evansville and Evansville Sports Corps representatives have expressed interest in hosting some collegiate and high school championship soccer events. Organizers from these segments typically require at least one venue with fixed seating and locker room facilities to host championship play. Organizers would also like more than the one modest sized visitor center, which is a sizable distance away from some of the northern fields.

As such, the following investments are recommended as a mid-term priority for Goebel Soccer Complex:

- Conversion of two (2) to four (4) existing natural grass fields into turf fields.
- Addition of lights on all fields to support playing past 5:00pm during early spring and late fall months.
- Development of a 600- to 1,000-seat grandstand, with an indoor locker room and restroom facility underneath. This would preferably be located at Field 1.



Recommendation	Goebel Enhancements
Detail	Turf, lights, locker room, fixed seating
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Vanderburgh County • Indiana Fire
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2m to \$4m

5. Amateur Sports: Enhancement and Expansion of Goebel Soccer Complex

Recommendation 4: Goebel Expansion

According to interviewed tournament organizers, an expansion of Goebel’s soccer field inventory would qualify the venue for a number of 150+ team tournaments. We recommend beginning exploratory planning on a phased expansion of the Complex that would potentially add two to six fields over the next ten years. In aligning with industry standards, these fields should include the following elements:

- Nearly all turf surfaces, with potentially one natural grass surface.
- Mobile device-controlled overhead lights.
- Walking/running paths connecting to Deaconess Sports Park to the southwest.
- Bleacher seating for 100 to 200 at each field.

It should be noted that a more focused feasibility study will likely be needed at some point to further investigate market opportunities for an expanded Goebel.



Recommendation	Goebel Expansion
Detail	Development of two to six new full-sized fields.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5-7 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Vanderburgh County • Indiana Fire
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2m to \$6m



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Opportunities

Interviews with local sports industry stakeholders, national facility operators, and tournament organizers, suggest a significant opportunity exists to increase the sports tourism impact in Evansville through the development of up to two new indoor sports centers at Evansville Sports Complex, or elsewhere in the destination. Soccer, baseball, and softball user group demand suggests the need for a year-round indoor training center, while a new hardwood-floored fieldhouse facility would likely generate thousands of hotel room nights per year by hosting 100+ team basketball and volleyball tournaments on a consistent basis.

More detail regarding both these project opportunities is presented below.

Recommendation 5: Indoor Turf Facility

A local private entity has recently approached Visit Evansville and Vanderburgh County with a proposal to lease a portion of Deaconess Sports Park to develop and operate an indoor year-round training facility for soccer and baseball groups.

The proposed 40,000-square foot facility would require approximately five acres and would feature a nearly full-sized turf multipurpose field that could host youth soccer, youth lacrosse, and indoor softball games. Retractable nets would be deployable from the ceiling to accommodate batting cages for baseball/softball practices. This facility would be built, owned and managed by a local based group.

According to stakeholders and tournament organizers, this indoor facility could host practices and warm-ups during a multi-day tournament and could potentially even host planned tournament matches during rainouts. Similar privately developed facility models have been successfully operating in comparable communities throughout the region. We recommend this project be supported by Visit Evansville and other stakeholders for near-term development, as lease revenues paid by the private entity could in turn be used to fund other investments at Deaconess Sports Park.



Recommendation	Indoor Turf Facility
Detail	40,000-square foot indoor turf facility
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit Evansville Vanderburgh County Private Entity
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$4m to \$5m (privately funded)



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Opportunities

Recommendation 6: Tournament-Quality Fieldhouse

Input from AAU, USBA, JVA, and USA Volleyball suggests significant opportunity for a fieldhouse facility in Evansville. Identified demand highlights potential to host 70- to 100+- team basketball tournaments and volleyball tournaments nearly every weekend during the spring and winter months, with activities such as camps, clinics and special showcase tournaments taking place during the summer. The facility could also be used for wrestling, cheer and dance, pickleball, futsal, gymnastics, martial arts, and non-sporting activity such as consumer shows and social events.

In aligning with preferences suggested by these organizers, such a facility should, at a minimum, include the following elements:

- 125,000 to 175,000-square foot footprint.
- Eight (8) full-sized basketball courts, preferably hardwood surfaces.
- Court conversion capability into sixteen (16) hardwood volleyball courts.
- Retractable curtains to divide courts.
- Scoreboards, buzzers, PA's, and streaming technologies, preferably all wireless.
- In-house chairs or bleacher seating for approximately 100 attendees per court.
- Full-service concessions and/or small café or restaurant.

Due to existing parking, highway access, established brand identity, and proven owner/operator model, the site to the north of Deaconess Sports Park should be considered as a primary option for such a facility.

When considering needed space for storage, locker rooms, pre-function, and various back of house facilities, an eight-court facility will likely have at least a 125,000-square foot footprint. Further, to host large tournaments with significant drive-in attendance, a surface parking lot with capacity between 600 to 800 vehicles will be required. A graphic showing the potential fit of these areas within the land adjacent to the existing Evansville Sports Complex is shown on the following page.



Recommendation	Fieldhouse
Detail	8 full-sized basketball courts
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Vanderburgh County
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$25m to \$40m



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Opportunities

As shown below, the 50-acre site just north of the existing Deaconess Sports Park could accommodate a 125,000-square foot fieldhouse, in addition to 280,000 square feet for 800 parking spaces. Case studies of comparable fieldhouse projects, inclusive of some cost information, are presented on the following pages.





5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Case Studies



FACILITY:	Fieldhouse USA - Frisco
City, State:	Frisco, Texas
Owner:	City of Frisco
Operator:	Fieldhouse USA (FHUSA)
Key Facility Components:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• \$17.5 million for the hardwood court facility component• 144,600 square foot facility opened in March 2009• Part of the over \$100 million, 62-acre complex Sports Village USA• 12 Full-size hardwood basketball and volleyball courts• Indoor Turf Field• Fitness Center• 10,000sf Athletes' Performance training center• 13,2000sf of retail space, food and beverage, court and several rooms
Development:	P3 project for which the City issued bonds to fund construction of the \$17.5 million facility. FHUSA operates via a long-term lease with the City; initial lease term of 22 years plus two 10-year extensions. \$12.5 million funded by the City of Frisco allocated towards construction costs Remaining \$5 million came from the 14 acres of land and investments donated by Sports Village Holdings, LLC.
Tenants:	EXOS, Baylor Urgent Care, Frisco Soccer Association, NTA Taekwondo, Tumble and Stunt
Financial Ops:	Annual Revenue before City lease payment (2017): \$3.8 million Annual Expenses before City lease payment (2017): \$2.0 million Total operating profit before City lease payment (2017): \$1.8 million
Annual Events:	Volleyball: Host approximately five annual tournaments with an average of 100 teams and 1,200 spectators. Basketball: Host approximately 25 tournaments annually with an average of 80 teams and 1,000 spectators Rental Rates: \$60 per court/hour for both volleyball and basketball, \$150 per Turf court/hour



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Case Studies



FACILITY: Hammond Sportsplex
City, State: Hammond, Indiana
Owner: City of Hammond
Operator: City of Hammond
Key Facility Components: 2 indoor regulation-sized turf soccer fields
 6 basketball courts that can be converted to 10 volleyball courts
 6 batting cages

Development: The Hammond Sportsplex officially opened in September 2018 with a community ribbon-cutting ceremony. The 135,000-square foot facility boasts two regulation-size indoor turf soccer fields that can be utilized as a full-size baseball/softball field, six basketball courts that can be converted into ten volleyball courts, six batting cages, an upper level quarter-mile track open free to the community, a community room, concessions, and restrooms and changing rooms.

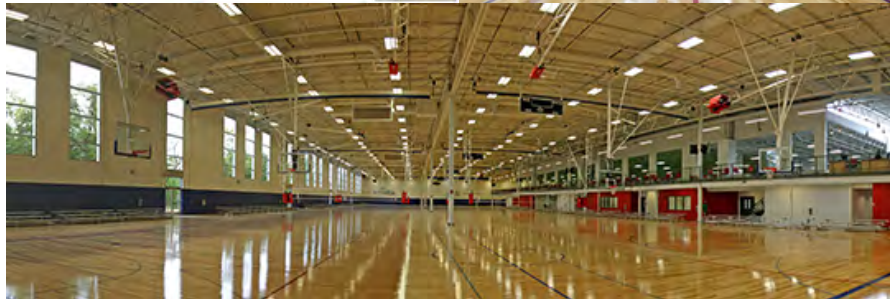
The \$17 million facility was constructed by Madison Construction in partnership with the City of Hammond. The Sportsplex sits on the old site of the Woodmar Mall on Indianapolis Boulevard; centrally located in Hammond, yet easily accessible for traveling teams and non-local guests.

The facility was funded by a \$9 million loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in conjunction with a tax-increment financing district (TIF) that covered the additional \$8 million needed.

Tenants: Kennedy Avenue Chiropractic
 Velocity 219 Volleyball Club
 Various youth volleyball and basketball leagues and camps



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Case Studies



FACILITY:

Sports Pavilion Lawrence

City, State:

Lawrence, Kansas

Owner:

City of Lawrence

Operator:

City of Lawrence

Key Facility Components:

181,000 sf facility
 8 regulation size basketball courts/16 volleyball courts
 Additional amenities include, indoor turf facility, 1/8 mile indoor track, cardio and aerobic fitness area, gymnastics area, two party rooms and a future 7,000 sf wellness area
 9 full-time and 15-18 part-time/seasonal staff members
 Concession stands are operated by the Clinton Parkway Hy-Vee and regulated by the Parks and Rec nutritional standards

Development:

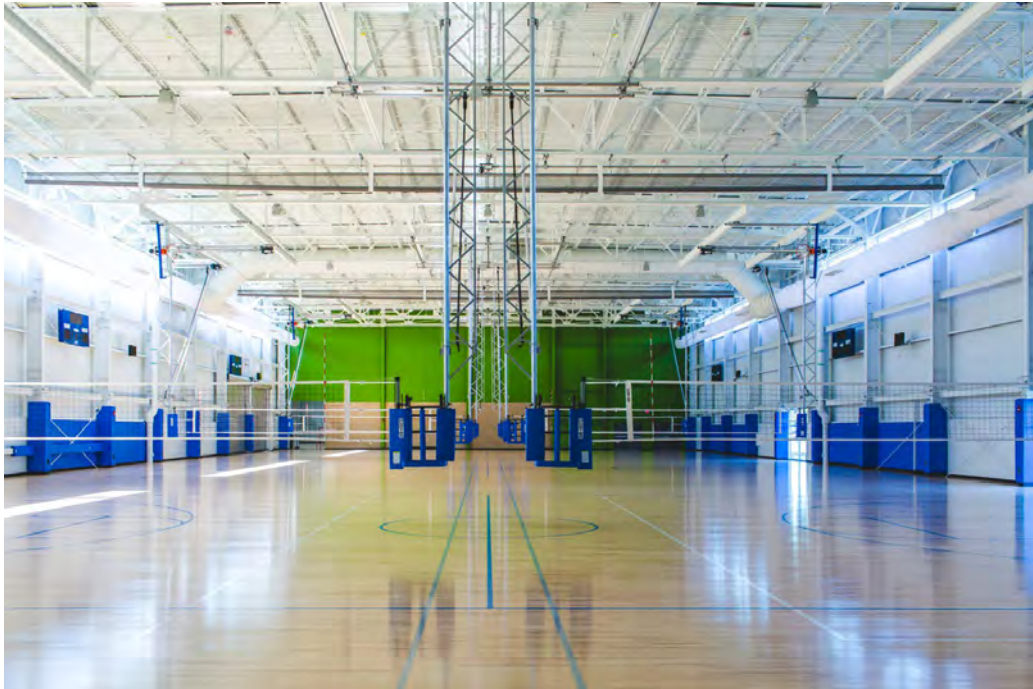
Opened in September 2014 at a total cost of \$24.5 million (plus \$39 million for the University of Kansas facilities)

Annual Events:

Tournaments are primarily run January through July with little to no utilization in August and September.
 In a recent year, the facility hosted a total of 37 major events including: 22 Basketball (16 tournaments; 6 camps); 13 Volleyball (All Tournaments); 1 Futsal (Tournaments), and, 1 other event.
 Recently, the facility held the Sunflower Showcase: features up to 150 travel boys basketball teams 15U-17U division; national tournament.
 Monthly attendance spiked to over 80,000 during a high demand period.
 When the gym is not being rented out, the gyms are open to the public.
 Nearly 17,000 card holders which are free to residents and \$5 daily, \$20 monthly, \$45 90-day and \$150 annual pass for non-residents.
 Funding: \$22.5 million from the City of Lawrence, \$2 million donation, \$39 million from the University of Kansas for their student-oriented portion of the complex.
 The Pavilion generates approximately \$794,000 in annual revenue with annual expenses approximating \$990,000.



5. Amateur Sports: Indoor Facility Case Studies



FACILITY: UW Health Sports Factory

City, State: Rockford, Illinois

Owner: City of Rockford

Operator: Rockford Park District

Key Facility Components:

- 108,000 sf facility
- 8 regulation size basketball courts/16 volleyball courts with a total of 96,000sf of total Maplewood hard court space
- Championship court with spectator capacity of 450
- Offers approximately 430 parking spaces total

Development: Construction on the \$25 million facility began in February of 2015 and the facility officially opened in May of 2016 at a cost of \$24.4 million. It is estimated that approximately 125 jobs were created during the construction phase.

Operations:

- Intended to be used by local residents while appealing and drawing non-local overnight visitors
- Pickleball courts full mornings 3-4 days a week
- Hosted 30 tournaments in 2017 including basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, wrestling, table tennis and wheelchair rugby
- Operational deficit of \$281,800 in 2016 and \$367,300 in 2017

Other Notes: Total annual facility attendance approximates 500,000. Complex generates approximately \$627,000 in annual revenue and \$831,000 in annual expenses.



5. Amateur Sports: Timeline for Future Development

Amateur sports represents both an existing room night generator and opportune growth segment for the Evansville-Vanderburgh County destination. With added investment in facilities for baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse, basketball and volleyball, opportunity exists to develop Evansville into a more nationally recognized amateur sports hub.

Further, new outreach efforts will be required to market the soon to be completed Deaconess Aquatic Center, which will be able to host high school, collegiate and USA Swimming competitions. Aggressive promotion of the new facility should be underway even prior to its opening, and event, attendance, and room night goals should be created for event activity specific to the property.

In terms of prioritization, we recommend the following timeline.

1 to 3 years:

- Complete Deaconess enhancements and begin planning for expansion.
- Complete expansion of Deaconess.
- Develop new turf fieldhouse.
- Begin site selection and planning for new hardwood fieldhouse.
- Create event, attendance, and room night targets for Deaconess Aquatic Center.

4 to 6 years:

- Develop new hardwood fieldhouse.
- Initiate planning for additional private development along Green River Road such as hotels and restaurants should the proposed additions to the Evansville Sports Park take place.
- Complete enhancements of Goebel and evaluate potential expansion of the facility.

It is important to note that Visit Evansville will need to continue to promote these assets. With added field inventory and a new fieldhouse, outreach efforts to more national tournament organizers will need to be made.

1 – Deaconess Enhancements



2 – Deaconess Expansion



3 – Indoor Turf Facility



4 – Hardwood Fieldhouse



5 – Goebel Enhancements



6 – Goebel Expansion



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center in Detroit, Michigan, taken at dusk. The building's facade is illuminated with a warm, golden light, and its name 'Ford FORD CENTER' is visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalk in front of the building. The surrounding cityscape includes several other buildings, some with 'GERMAN' signs, and a street with cars and trees. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds from the setting sun.

6 CONVENTION INDUSTRY

6. Convention Industry: ONEP

The Old National Event Plaza (ONEP) opened in 1999 and is owned by the Evansville-Vanderburgh County Building Authority. The ONEP is a complex of spaces, including a 2,500-seat auditorium, a 38,000-square-foot exhibit hall, a 14,000-square foot ballroom and 12 flexible 1,000-square foot meeting rooms.

The diversity of spaces allows for accommodating events ranging from concerts, Broadway, orchestra, banquets, receptions, conferences, conventions, trade events, consumer shows and numerous other functions. The Event Plaza is the primary host of non-local events for the market, helping to generate room nights and new economic impact for the region.

The ONEP is connected via skywalk to the Ford Center and to the newly constructed 241-room DoubleTree Hotel, which is the only hotel within a half mile of the convention center. The COVID pandemic has interrupted the synergy between the DoubleTree and ONEP with respect to attracting larger non-local conventions. Even pre-COVID, there were limitations on the availability of rooms at the DoubleTree for mid-week convention business due to strong demand from the corporate sector at relatively high room rates.

Post-COVID, it will be important to secure significant room blocks from the DoubleTree in order to accommodate events with significant room night requirements. Long term, added walkable hotel inventory will be needed to support efforts to attract significantly more high impact non-local events, and to support any future ONEP expansion.



6. Convention Industry: ONEP

Based on our review of existing conditions with respect to the venue, hotel, access and surrounding hospitality conditions, and considering conversations with selected past ONEP convention customers, we have developed the following summary of product strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- The developing campus setting inclusive of the ONEP, DoubleTree and Ford Center creates a critical mass of public assembly and hospitality infrastructure.
- Organizations interviewed have found the staff helpful and accommodating during the event.
- In recent years, organizations have had a good experience in the event planning process, which has increased their desire to return.
- The central regional location can help attract non-local events with a large drive-in audience.
- There are opportunities to use the green space across Locust Street for outdoor functions, addressing an increasing interest in such space by meeting planners.
- ONEP management have developed relationships with local contractors to provide enhanced event production capabilities. This could be very beneficial for planners that may want to stream portions of their event to a virtual audience.
- The auditorium can be a useful space for hosting general sessions, eliminating the need to use flat floor space.
- There is significant potential for enhanced walkability towards Main Street, particularly as the area develops with added restaurant and nightlife amenities.

Weaknesses

- The lack of convention quality, committable hotel rooms near the ONEP limits the ability to attract non-local events.
- The location of the auditorium between the exhibit space and ballroom can create logistical challenges, particularly when hosting multiple overlapping events.
- Similarly, the pre-function space fronting the exhibit, auditorium and meeting/ballroom space is somewhat limited, restricting pedestrian flow. Future expansion planning should consider the closing of Locust Street to traffic to allow for added pre-function space.
- Airlift into the market can be limited for larger non-local events. This is somewhat mitigated by the potential for significant drive-in attendance.
- The large majority of venues similar to ONEP are named with the phrase “Convention Center”, including those with naming rights agreements. The Event Plaza title requires explanation to potential convention planners not familiar with the market.

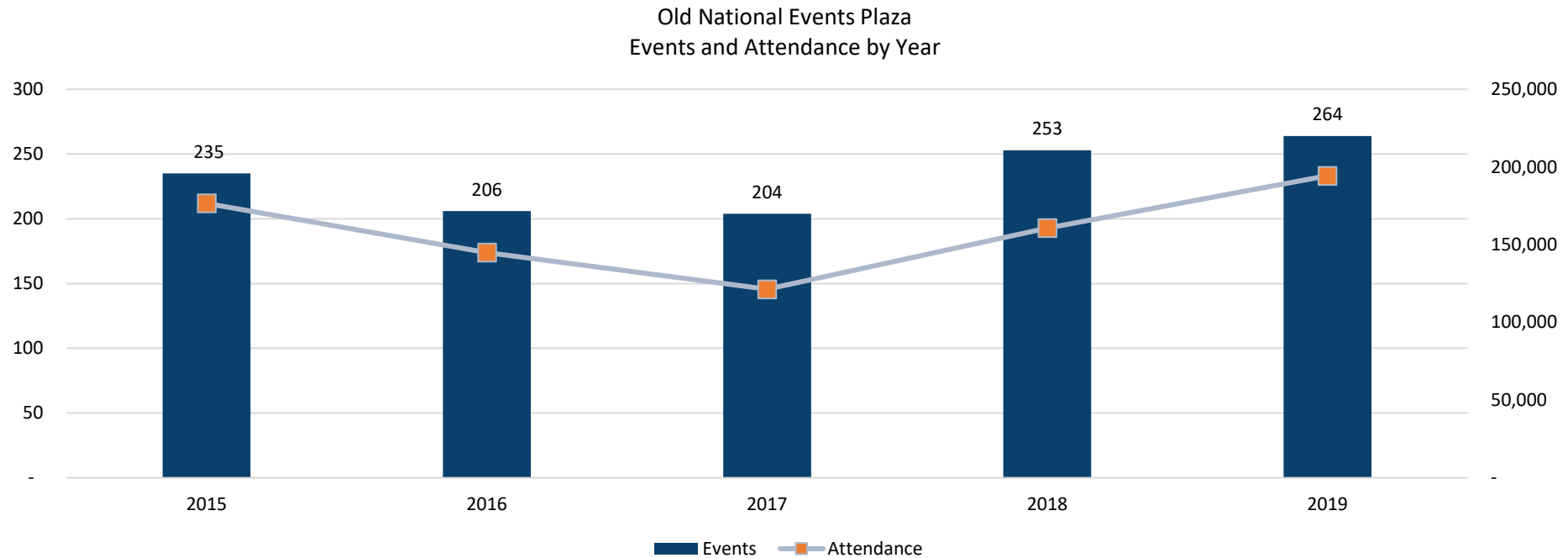
The primary strengths and weaknesses described above are considered later in this section to help develop recommendations to maintain and enhance overall market capture of non-local room night generating events.



6. Convention Industry: ONEP

The total event and attendance activity for ONEP venue is summarized in the chart below for the five year-period spanning 2015 to 2019. As shown, attendance and event levels dropped slightly between 2016 and 2017. A rebound took place in 2018 and 2019, attributable to hosting of a large weekly religious service, and potentially tied to the opening of the DoubleTree Hotel. The increase in event activity was interrupted by the COVID pandemic, however pent-up demand for hosting and attending events will likely lead to a rebound in growth over the next several years.

The 264 events and 194,000 attendees hosted at ONEP in 2019 represent important activity for downtown businesses, and community wide economic and tax impact from non-local event attendees. These events also represent important entertainment options for local residents, ranging from music and cultural events at the Auditorium, to local consumer shows such as home shows, food shows, technology fairs and bridal fairs.



Source: Facility Management, 2021.

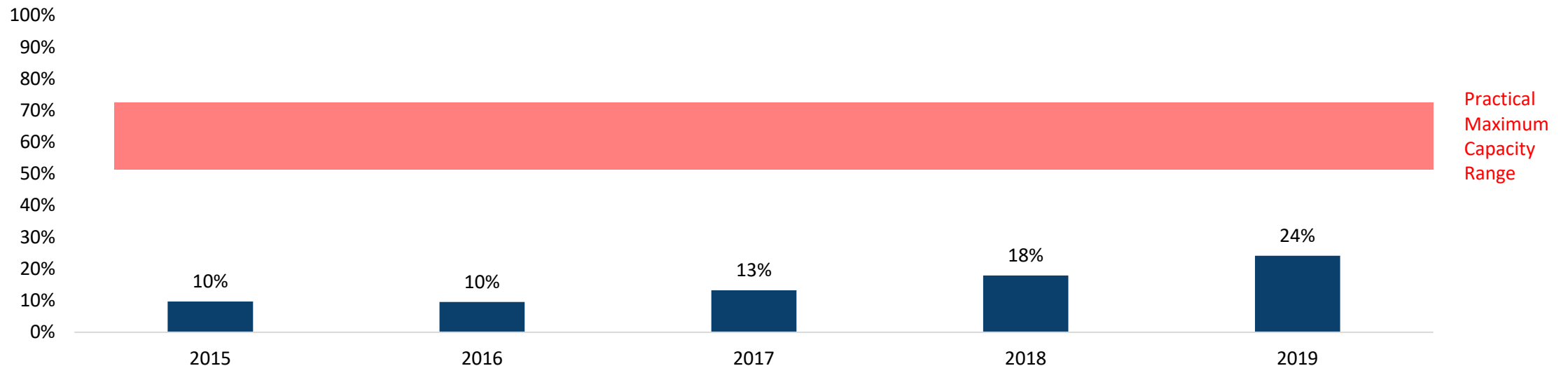
6. Convention Industry: ONEP

The chart below illustrates the occupancy percentages of ONEP exhibit space for the five year-period spanning 2015 to 2019. The occupancy of a facility is determined to be within a practical maximum capacity range when the actual occupied space in a facility reaches a level of 50 percent of total sellable capacity. Above 70 percent occupancy, a facility has exceeded “practical maximum capacity” and may be turning away significant business. These assumptions account for the reality that a portion of the facility’s total capacity is un-sellable due to holidays, maintenance days, and inherent booking inefficacies that result when events cannot be scheduled immediately back-to-back.

As shown, ONEP exhibit hall has operated at occupancy levels significantly below the desired capacity range. These data strongly indicate that insufficient demand has been captured to support any large-scale near-term expansion.

Note that the uptick in 2019 prior to COVID suggests that the addition of the DoubleTree Hotel may have started to facilitate the attraction of added convention events with exhibit space needs. Continued increase post-COVID may materialize, particularly as improvements to the downtown area described in the recent Downtown Master Plan are implemented.

Old National Event Plaza
Exhibit Hall Occupancy by Year

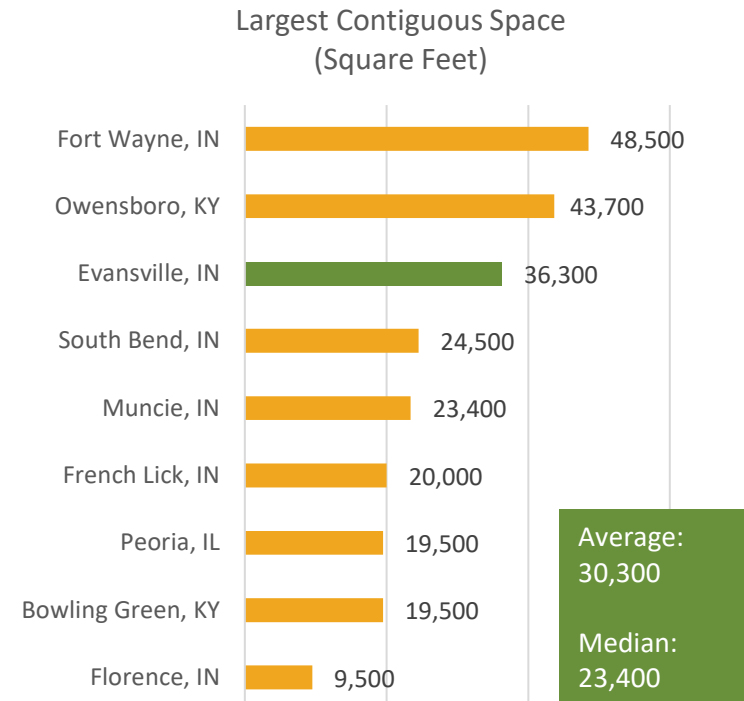
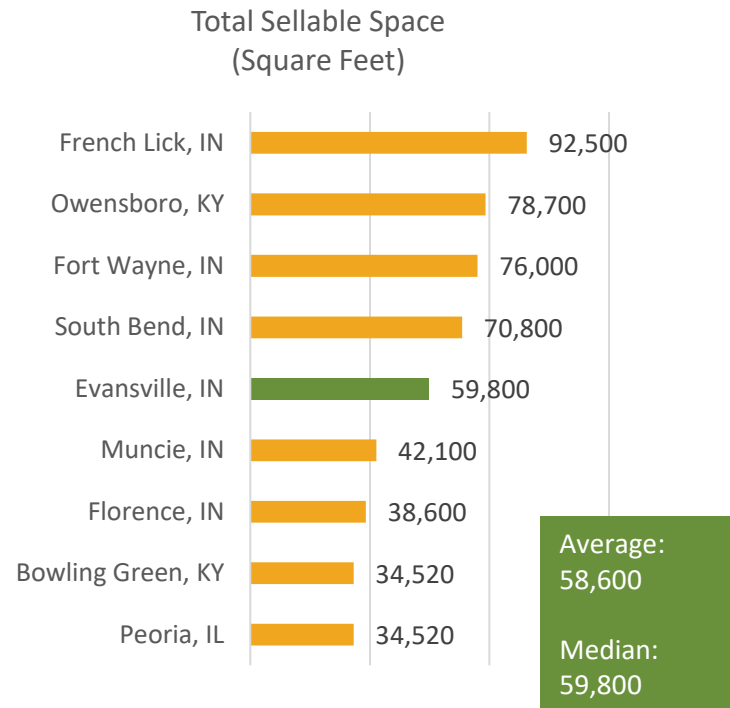


Source: Facility Management, 2021.

6. Convention Industry: Regional Competitors

ONEP includes approximately 59,800 square feet of sellable space, inclusive of exhibit, meeting and ballroom space. When considering other convention venues within the region, this space can be considered “average or near the median” in comparison. Venues in French Lick, Owensboro and Fort Wayne provide 10,000 to 30,000 more sellable square feet, while venues in Muncie, Florence and Bowling Green provide significantly less space.

It is important to consider largest contiguous space among regional competitive and comparable venues. As noted below, the 36,300 ballroom at ONEP ranks relatively high. These venue figures suggest that there is limited need for added exhibit or other sellable space in order to maintain a competitive position with regional venues.

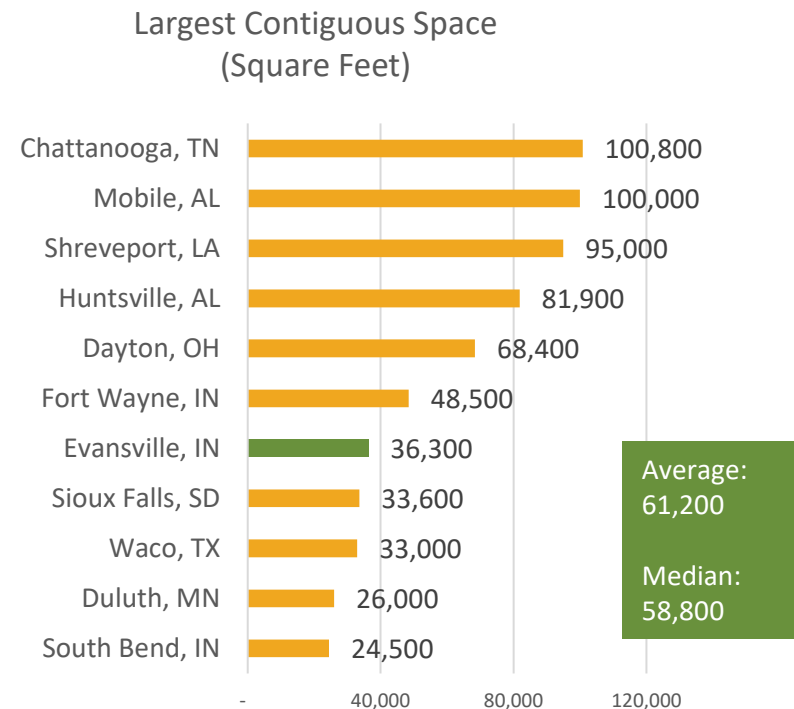
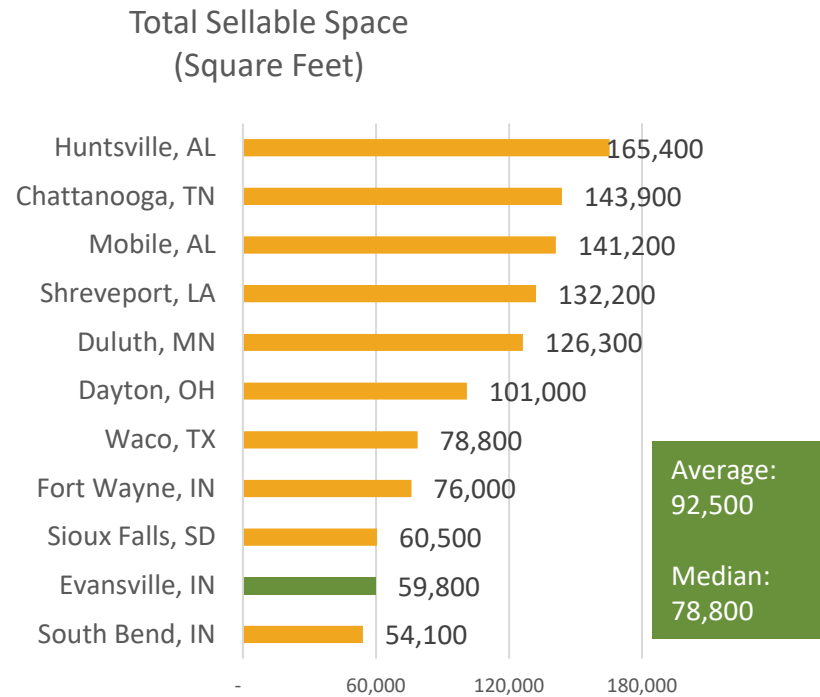


6. Convention Industry: National Comparables

It is also important to consider more nationally comparable centers in the context of existing ONEP space. Post COVID, and with the addition of the DoubleTree Hotel, there may be opportunities to attract select national and regional events from segments including hobby, social, military, educational and fraternal.

As noted below, the sellable space at ONEP ranks comparatively low, well behind the median space of 78,800 square feet. Centers in similar sized markets such as Waco, Dayton, Duluth, Shreveport and others offer significantly more sellable space within their convention centers.

Similarly, the total contiguous space at ONEP ranks well below the median square footage of 58,800. While not a direct indication of market support for significant ONEP expansion, these data do suggest that over a longer period of time, and with potential increases in ONEP exhibit space occupancy, an expansion could be considered. Feasibility planning for such an expansion would need to take place once demand conditions are warranted.



Sources: Convention center websites

6. Convention Industry: National Comparables

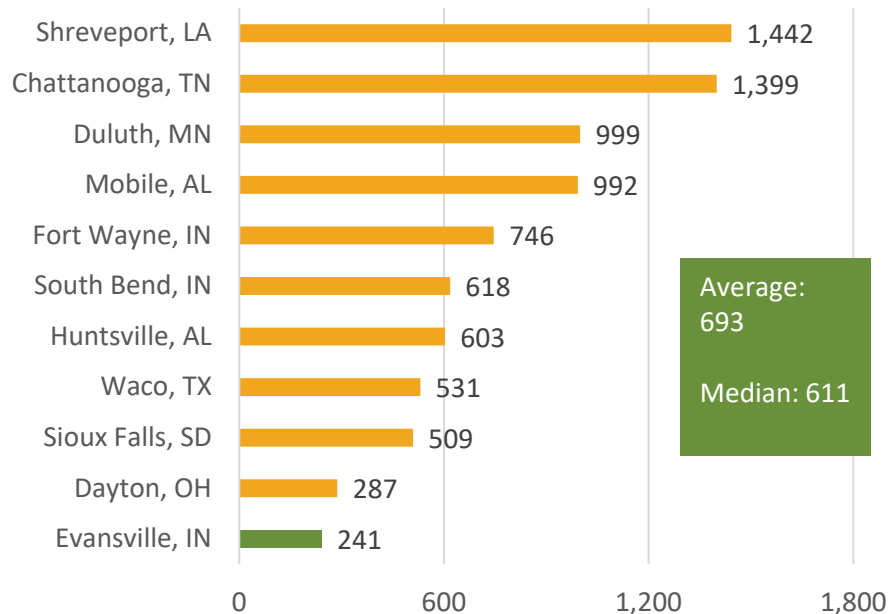
In order to capture added market share in the non-local convention and conference sector, it is critical for a market to offer hotel inventory that is highly committable, convention quality, and in close proximity to the host facility. In Evansville, the development of the 241-room DoubleTree hotel can be considered a necessary factor in attracting non-local events.

At the same time, the room count at the DoubleTree (the only existing hotel within one-half mile of the Plaza) is comparatively low. The comparable set of national venues reviewed are surrounded by a median hotel room count of 611, significantly higher than in Evansville

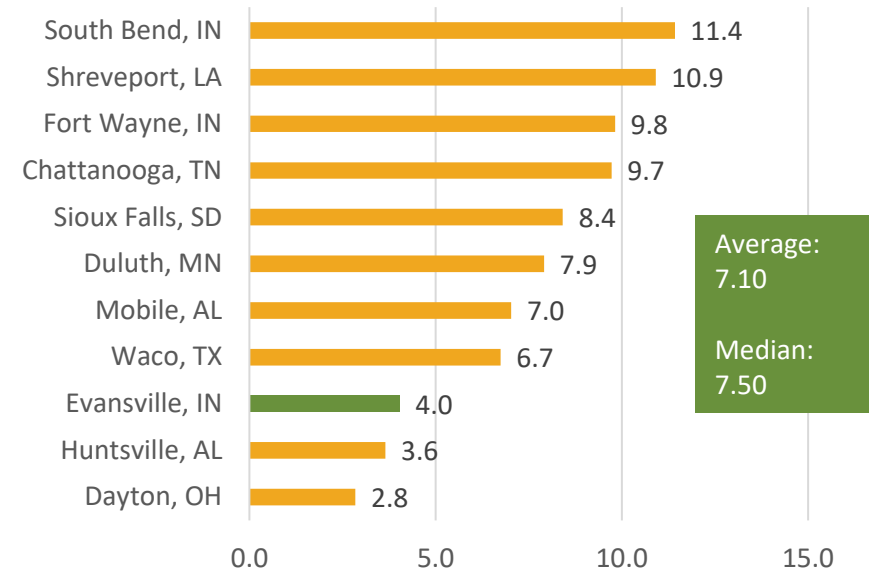
On a state and regional basis, Fort Wayne and South Bend offer significantly higher hotel room counts near their convention centers. We have also considered nearby hotel inventory in relation to convention center sellable space. The ranking for Evansville improves somewhat but is still well below the median ratio of rooms per 1,000 square feet of sellable space.

These data clearly indicate that any future long-term expansion of ONEP convention space will require significantly expanded nearby hotel room inventory.

1/2 Mile Hotel Room Inventory



Ratio of 1/2 Mile Hotel Rooms per 1,000 SF of Sellable Space



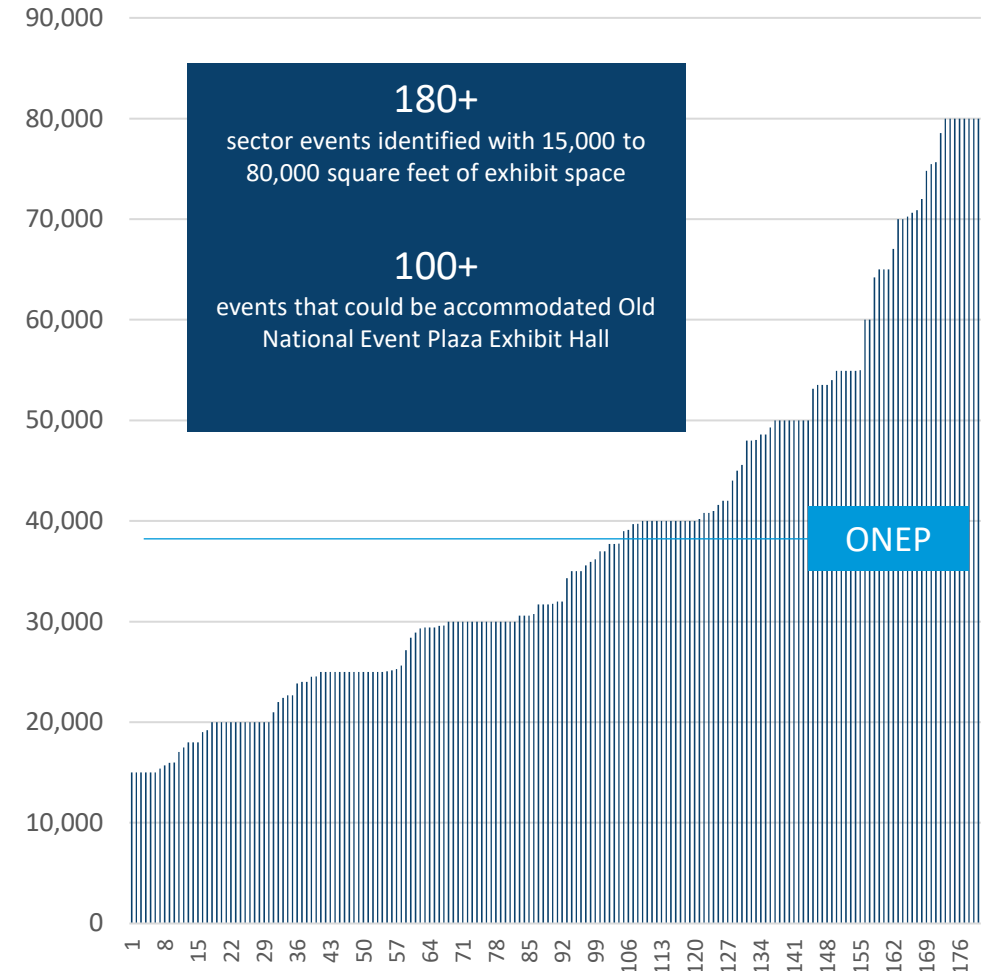
6. Convention Industry: Regional/National Events

As previously noted, the opening of the DoubleTree Hotel provided an opportunity to attract more non-local conventions and conferences to Evansville. The COVID pandemic has stalled efforts to reach a broader event market, however potential exists over the next several years to continue to focus on greater non-local event market capture.

We have reviewed the database of national and regional events maintained by Destinations International. As noted in the adjacent exhibit, there are approximately 180 events in targeted industries such as healthcare, agriculture, insurance, medical, and pharmaceutical, as well as military, fraternal and hobbyist events, that require between 15,000 and 80,000 square feet of exhibit space. One-hundred of these could be accommodated with the Plaza exhibit space. Given the market size, air access and geographic location, the Evansville market will likely be most successful in targeted national/regional markets including hobby, social, military, educational, religious and fraternal.

Specific examples of national and regional events hosted at various comparable national venues, reflective of the type of event that could be suitable for the Evansville market, could include the following.

- North American Brass Band Association
- Federation of Genealogical Societies - National Conference
- Outdoor Writers Association of America Conference
- National Society of Black Engineers - Region IV Regional Leadership Conference
- Annual National Conference on Professional Nursing Education and Development
- Tri-State Dairy Nutrition Conference
- Meijer Pharmacy Trade Show
- Full Gospel Fellowship of America
- Youth For Christ - Go MAD Conference
- The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association
- National Fishing Lure Collectors Club
- Mid-American Global Education Council
- Living Water Ministries/The Gathering
- Mid-American Global Education Council
- NALP National Collegiate Landscape Competition
- National Antique Oldsmobile Club
- Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists
- Dancemasters
- Midwest Residential Energy Conference

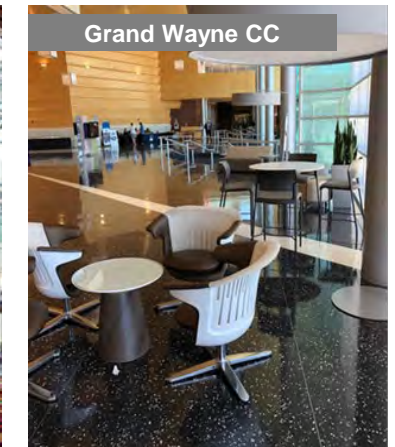
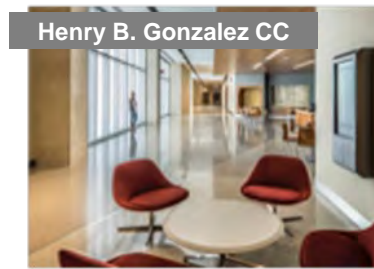


6. Convention Industry: Addressing Trends

Even though a large-scale expansion of ONEP space is not warranted in the near to mid-term, event planners are increasingly exploring new ways to use venue spaces, indoor and outdoor. In general, the past profile of a convention event encompassed somewhat distinct uses of exhibit halls for exhibits, meeting rooms for breakout sessions, and ballrooms for food functions and general sessions. In recent years, the distinct nature of this space has begun to blur, with the exhibit hall becoming more of an active multi-use area with speaker presentations, food functions sponsor events and other functions designed to maintain attendee vibrancy in the exhibit areas. We refer to this trend as “creating a village” on the exhibit hall floor that encompasses numerous aspects of an event, rather than just exhibits.

The traditional classroom meeting setup has also begun to evolve, with a great deal of furniture, lighting, configuration, room design and other innovation taking place. The pre-function space in a center, traditionally only used for registration and circulation, is increasingly seen as formal and informal gathering and presentation space. A typical convention center has offered a single, large ballroom, while today, architects are designing multiple, multi-use spaces that can be used for food functions, general sessions, light exhibits and other uses.

Targeted investment in addressing these trends could be considered a near to mid-term priority for Evansville. A number of specific concepts discussed with planners as part of our on-going industry research are summarized on the following pages. Future ONEP investment should begin to address these trends.

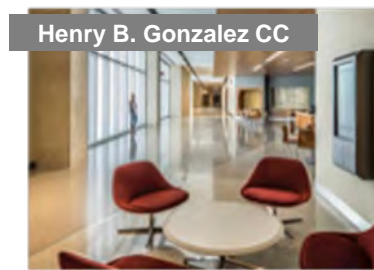


6. Convention Industry: Addressing Trends

- **Open Space Learning** – The Open Space Learning (OSL) concept challenges the traditional lecture or seminar-based formats and instead provides unique and creative learning environments that can be constructed in lobbies, pre-function areas, exhibit halls, ballrooms, etc. Facilities such as the Grand Wayne Convention Center in Fort Wayne have invested in portable and versatile furniture to create environments for small meetings and lectures in large public areas.
- **Video Walls or Monitors** – Convention facilities in San Antonio and Montreal feature pre-function space with wall-mounted monitors with attached HDMI cables that can be used for impromptu presentations or activated by sponsors or exhibitors.
- **Casual Furniture** – Sofas, recliners, and coffee tables give attendees opportunities to network, take calls or answer emails on their own time, elements that Millennial and Gen-Z attendee bases tend to appreciate.
- **Three-Wall Stations for Pop-Up Retailers/Food & Beverage** – Planners and management from interviewed facilities recommended providing permanent countertop stations that can be activated by sponsors or used by locally owned restaurants, food truck companies, breweries, distilleries, and other food & beverage providers.
- **“Dialogue Dens”** – Planners described small enclave areas, nooks, or “pods” where attendees can have very small group or one on one conversations.
- **Silent Speaker Stations** – A growing number of events feature “silent” presentations wherein attendees wear headphones and listen to a speaker in a format similar to podcasting. This allows attendees to feel like they have the option to attend a seminar without feeling like they are locked in a confined meeting room environment, and at the same time the headphones help block out external noise in the surrounding pre-function area.



Memphis CC



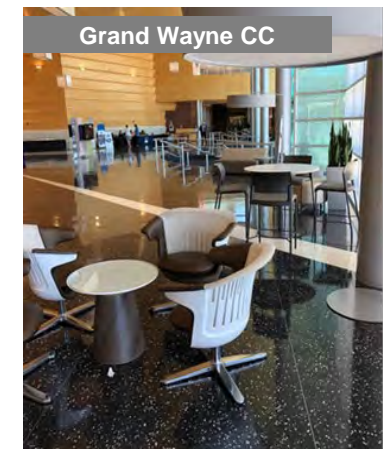
Henry B. Gonzalez CC



Vancouver CC



Indiana CC



Grand Wayne CC

6. Convention Industry: Addressing Trends

- **Streaming** – Numerous large convention facilities have invested in full production broadcast studios to stream and broadcast major events at the facility. For ONEP, this type of investment is not likely warranted. We also note that ONEP management has partnered with qualified vendors to provide necessary equipment to event planners that allow for streaming event content. Management should work with the vendor to develop a partnership plan with event organizers that would help share cost and revenue generated by streaming content to virtual event attendees.
- **LAN Centers/Cyber Cafes** – Many planners desire more than just a business center and suggested a local area network or cyber café to allow for individual streaming, group work sessions, or even competitive “esports” events. Recent renovation of underused space at the Century Center in South Bend included installation of LAN centers, helping to create a partnership with a local university to house an esports program.
- **Local/Authentic Food & Beverage** - Recent trends in the food and beverage sector are more reflective of changing demographics and how conventions and meetings are being produced. The balance between standard sit-down banquets and more formal food options may be shifting towards the informal, and the ability of a center to offer more convenient “grab & go” or “pop-up” dining opportunities with locally sourced offerings will likely become more important in the future.
- **Unique Outdoor Space** - Outdoor event space provides attendees with the opportunity to connect with the culture and feeling of a destination in a unique event setting while creating an additional selling point and source of revenue for centers. Opportunities should be explored to utilize the green space across Locust Street from the ONEP’s main entrance, including potentially relandscaping the area to better allow for tented event activities.
- **Signature/Interactive Public Art** - Incorporating public art that is reflective of a city or county can create iconic elements within a convention facility, for relatively limited cost. Convention centers throughout the country are commissioning the work of artists to create iconic pieces of art placed around and throughout facilities.



6. Convention Industry: Sales & Marketing

The lead paragraph in the current Visit Evansville Sales & Marketing Guide states:

As the tourism industry navigates unprecedented losses from the global pandemic, it is imperative that Visit Evansville, through the leadership of its staff and board of directors becomes the regional pacesetter to ensure that the Evansville hospitality industry thrives going forward. The Visit Evansville team has taken the necessary steps to revise our 2020-2021 sales and marketing plan to include new strategies that will facilitate growth and development in the meetings and convention market.

The pre-COVID Initiatives undertaken by Visit Evansville to help achieve higher impact goals have been sidelined by the pandemic. However, based on our review of these initiatives, and discussions with local visitor industry stakeholders, we recommend that the aggressive sales and marketing efforts structured by Visit Evansville be re-launched as the convention industry rebounds post-pandemic. Actual results with respect to new non-local events and associated room nights should be assessed within the next 24 months.

In addition to a Tourism Recovery & Contingency Plan targeting recovery from the pandemic, the Visit Evansville Sales and Marketing Plan includes the following types of initiatives.

- *Segmenting sales staff by industry sector, targeting areas that blend well with venue assets, cost structure and other aspects of the Evansville destination.*
- *Targeting state events and events within the region surrounding Indiana.*
- *Schedule quarterly events in regional feeder cities to develop new planner relationships and extend existing relationships.*

- *Further developing the South Bend/Evansville state-wide partnership to encourage planners to take advantage of the incentives offered by adding Evansville and South Bend to their conference rotation.*
- *Partnering with ASM Global to gain traction with national meeting and convention prospects through the ASM Global Co-Op events and SITEPAS leads.*
- *Developing an incentive program based on overall event room nights to drive regional and state planners to book in Evansville.*
- *Undertaking an aggressive approach to attending travel and trade events that have high value in attracting room nights to Evansville.*
- *Scheduling convention client events in regional feeder cities.*
- *Partnering with Cvent to increase planner awareness of Evansville and the total number of RFPs received through the Cvent tiered marketing opportunities.*
- *Travel to national and regional appointment-based tradeshow and conventions to increase RFP obtainment and develop relationships with planners.*
- *Host 2-3 annual FAM tours to encourage planners to explore Evansville.*
- *Further develop partnerships with area hotels to improve city-wide sleeping room inventory.*
- *Develop a database of national and regional third-party meeting planners to send email blasts, e-newsletter and potential incentive programs.*
- *Take an active leadership role within state and regional organizations like ISAE, Indiana Meeting Planners International (IMPI), and others to increase brand awareness, gain educational value, develop industry partnerships, and focus on planner relationships.*

These initiatives represent an aggressive, targeted and significantly updated approach to generating increases in group business and room nights, and should be aggressively pursued.

6. Convention Industry: Recommendation Summary

The near, mid and long-term investment opportunities in ONEP space, sales and marketing have been discussed within this section. The adjacent charts lists these initiatives by timeframe, along with the entities and agencies that should be involved in the planning efforts.

As noted, near- and mid-term initiatives should focus on modest investment tied to emerging industry trends. The sales and marketing initiatives developed by Visit Evansville pre-COVID should be continued, allowing 24 months to evaluate the success of these initiatives.

Over a longer timeframe, convention market demand may eventually support future ONEP expansion that could add exhibit, meeting, ballroom and pre-function space. This expansion would require increases to hotel supply within close walking distance of the Center.



Recommendation	Near/Mid Term ONEP Enhancements
Detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trend-forward improvements (outdoor space, open space learning, public art, authentic f&b, etc.) Consider modified venue name. Continue with sales and marketing efforts.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASM Global Visit Evansville Vanderburgh County
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undetermined



Recommendation	Long Term ONEP Enhancements
Detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct feasibility research for future ONEP expansion. Consider closing Locust Street to traffic to allow for added prefunction space. Develop funding plan. Support needed nearby hotel inventory development. Retain architectural team.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 -10 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASM Global Visit Evansville Vanderburgh County
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undetermined

An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Detroit, Michigan, taken at dusk. The arena's facade is illuminated with a grid pattern, and the "Ford FORD CENTER" logo is visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of the arena. In the background, several other city buildings are visible under a cloudy sky with a warm sunset glow. The text "7 CVB RESOURCES AND INITIATIVES" is overlaid in large white font across the center of the image.

7 CVB RESOURCES AND INITIATIVES



7. CVB: Introduction

The Evansville Convention & Visitors Bureau (ECVB), also known as Visit Evansville, serves as the official tourism organization for Evansville and Vanderburgh County. Governed by a Board of seven Commissioners appointed by County Council, County Commissioners and the Mayor, Visit Evansville is funded by a 2.5-percent tax on all hotel stays in Vanderburgh County. These funds are used to pay for staff; sports tourism marketing; state, regional, and national convention marketing; leisure marketing; online and social media marketing; and, the management of the Evansville Sports Complex.

The role of a CVB or Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) encompasses more than purely marketing of the destination. Rather, today's DMO's have expanded their role in supporting and advocating for tourism infrastructure development, brand stewardship and event promotion. Many DMO's now also support in-market brand ambassador and marketing programs to educate the local population as to the opportunities for and benefits of tourism development.

In Evansville, recent leadership changes have given the destination an opportunity to reassess the role of the DMO and to support product development and programs for the betterment of the destination. To do so, new funding resources may be required to support future initiatives designed to retain more convention industry market capture and enhance the awareness of tourism in the community.

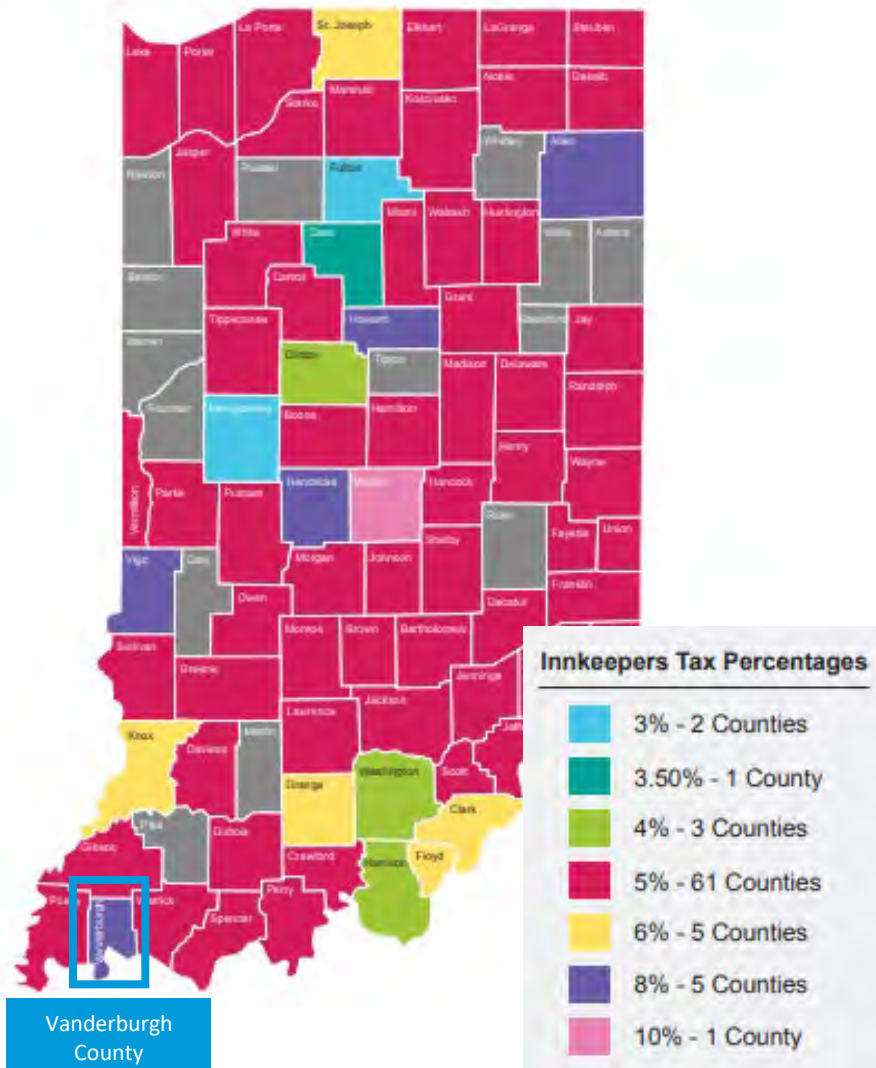
The remainder of this chapter includes an analysis of the CVB's current budget and resources, opportunities to grow these resources, as well as other initiatives that Visit Evansville could lead to positively influence the tourism industry in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area.





7. CVB: Hotel Tax Rate by County in Indiana

Indiana Map of Innkeepers Tax



Most tourism marketing entities in Indiana rely on innkeeper's taxes applied by their respective county governments to fund their operations. The adjacent map shows the innkeeper's tax rates for each county throughout the state. As shown, Vanderburgh County is one of only six counties that has an innkeeper's tax rate of eight percent or higher (Marion County, for which Indianapolis serves as the seat, is the only county with a hotel tax rate of ten percent).

Most counties (61 of the 78) assess a tax rate of five percent on hotel room stays, of which 100 percent typically goes toward tourism marketing.

For the five counties with eight percent tax rates (including Vanderburgh County), the use of these funds widely vary. The breakdown of their various innkeeper's tax allocations are listed below:

- **Allen County** – all collections go through the Allen County Capital Improvement Board, with various allocations being spent for Visit Fort Wayne operations and Grand Wayne Convention Center debt service.
- **Hendricks County** – six percent of the eight percent rate goes toward CVB operations, while one percent goes to County parks, and a separate one percent goes to the County fairgrounds.
- **Vanderburgh County** - 2.5 percent of the innkeeper's tax rate goes toward CVB operations, while 2.0 percent goes toward Old National Events Plaza operations and capital improvements, and 3.5 percent goes to Tourism Capital Improvement.

Though their County's innkeeper's tax rate is among the highest in the state, Visit Evansville receives less than a third of overall collections. In effect, Visit Evansville receives a small share of the County's innkeeper's tax collections relative to other DMO's in Indiana. This results in a comparatively modest budget, as shown on the following page.

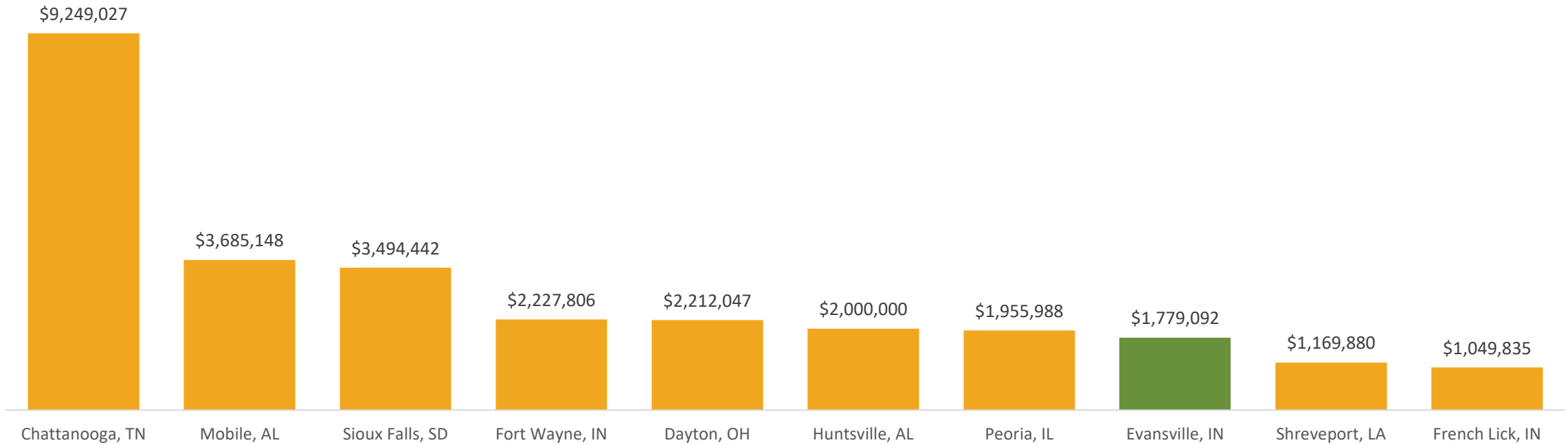


7. CVB: Comparable DMO Budgets

Recent year budgetary data for nine comparable DMO's were assembled and analyzed. As shown below, of the ten total DMO budgets reviewed, Visit Evansville's \$1.8 million total operations budget ranks eighth. DMO's in competitive destinations such as Fort Wayne, Dayton, and Peoria work with greater annual budgets that may in some instances give them a competitive edge in sales and marketing geared towards leisure, sports and the meeting and convention market especially in offering incentives to attract new business. It should also be noted that, though it is the third largest city in the state of Indiana, Visit Evansville only has the tenth largest DMO budget.

To better position the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area for the highly-competitive visitor industry, it may be critical for County leadership to consider a budget increase for the organization. The multiple means for funding an increase are presented on the following page.

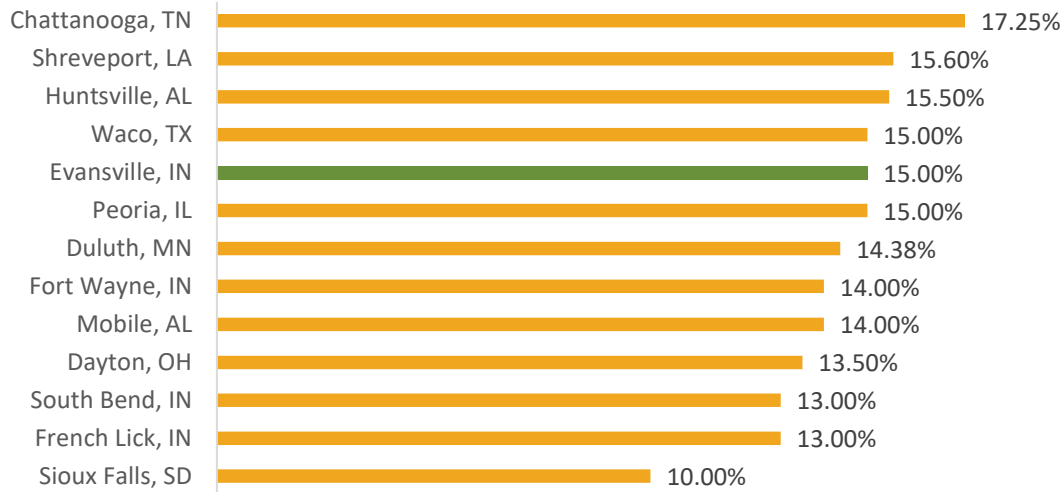
Comparable DMO Budgets





7. CVB: Increasing Visit Evansville's Budget

Comparable Hotel Tax Rates



Recommendation	Visit Evansville Budget Increase
Detail	\$300,000 to \$600,000 annual budget increase
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit Evansville Vanderburgh County Local Hotel Community
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a

CVB Recommendation 1: Visit Evansville Budget Increase

A Visit Evansville budget increase could be achieved by several means. Three primary methods are considered below:

- Hotel tax increase** – as shown on the adjacent chart, Evansville’s total hotel tax of 15 percent (inclusive of sales tax) is just above the median of the comparison set. A modest increase of 0.5 percent or 1.0 percent would elevate the market to near the top of the set, but not by a significant margin. Convention and meeting planners often consider hotel tax rates when comparing the value of compared destinations. Remaining within one or two percentage points of most of the comparison set would not likely have a material impact on attracting group business. It is estimated that a one percent increase would generate approximately \$650,000 in annual funds during a non-pandemic year of operations.
- Hotel tax allocation increase** – reallocation of a portion of the existing 3.5 percent innkeepers tax that goes to the Capital Improvement Fund is a long-term option, but we aren’t recommending that at this time as those resources are needed to cover the Deaconess Sports Park Bonds and will be needed to further incentivize future tourism related development.
- Hotel assessment** – hoteliers in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area could elect to administer a self-assessed rate or flat fee on rooms, which could be given to Visit Evansville. Many destinations nationally have set up this structure as part of tourism improvement districts (TID’s), geographic-based zones wherein hotels contribute to a pooled fund for convention marketing efforts. Preliminary discussions are being held at the state level about establishing legislation to allow for these types of districts to be formed in Indiana.

Ultimately, an expanded budget totaling between \$2.0 million and \$2.5 million would be beneficial in maintaining a competitive position with other regional DMO’s. Potential uses of these added operational funds are discussed on the following page.



7. CVB: Expanding Visit Evansville’s Role

CVB Recommendation 2: Enhanced Visit Evansville Initiatives

With added financial resources, Visit Evansville will be able to expand its operations and prioritize several new areas of focus, including local marketing and increased support for attracting national and regional events. Several initiatives that should be prioritized are described below, followed by brief case study examples on the following page.

- **Local Tourism Programs** – Many DMO’s nationally have developed tourism awareness campaigns in their destinations designed to promote the positive benefits of tourism, encourage local patronage of area attractions and businesses, and recruit residents to serve as advocates for the destinations to visiting friends, family, and strangers. Visit Evansville should develop this type of “Tourist In Your Own Town” initiative similar to the program created by the Greater Lansing CVB.
- **Industry Awards** – Successful and innovative tourism-related businesses in Evansville should be celebrated. Visit Evansville could produce an annual tourism awards banquet that would incentivize businesses such as hotels, restaurants, bars, museums, breweries, and distilleries to develop promotions, product, or facilities with tourism draws.
- **Self-Produced Events** – Visit Evansville could also work with the Old National Events Plaza and local stakeholders to develop a number of smaller self-produced events that would appeal to a broad demographic of residents and visitors. The Owensboro Convention Center, for instance, hosts an array of unique dining functions such as murder mystery dinners, costume contests, game nights and other functions that both generate revenue for the building and raise awareness of Owensboro tourism and convention industry initiatives.
- **Economic Impact Studies** – Visit Evansville could also commission annual or semi-annual economic impact studies of tourism in the area. Many CVB’s conduct these studies to create quantifiable goals, track tourism industry progress, and support fundraising.
- **Destination Development** – A new Visit Evansville staff person could lead the implementation of projects recommended in this plan, in addition to other future tourism initiatives. Visit Augusta (GA) relies on this position to lead the extensive and time consuming efforts to implement their Tourism Destination Plan and other product initiatives. In Evansville, this individual would focus on the development of tourism product and would therefore communicate extensively with area economic development officials, hoteliers, politicians, attraction management and other visitor industry stakeholders to coordinate and gather support for important tourism-related developments. This person could also lead collaborative efforts with other DMO’s near the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area to establish cross-regional product such as brewery trails, farm to table trails, and historic site trails.
- **Targeted National/Regional Marketing** – With added funds, Visit Evansville sales staff could become more aggressive in the national and regional convention industry. Related efforts could include currently planned attendance at more industry tradeshow, marketing materials for this segment, and creative social media marketing.

Recommendation	Enhanced Visit Evansville Initiatives
Detail	Local PR efforts, national convention outreach, and destination development
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • Local Tourism Stakeholders • Local Businesses and Corporations
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$300k to \$600k



7. CVB: Case Studies

To help guide implementation of the expanded Visit Evansville initiatives detailed on the previous page, several case studies exemplifying potential CVB extensions of services are presented below.



Tourist In Your Hometown – Lansing, MI

To encourage exploration of area attractions and local restaurants and retail, the Greater Lansing CVB created the Tourism in Your Hometown campaign that ran from 2018 through 2020. For \$1, residents could purchase a passport that granted them admission into a list of 100 attractions and businesses for free. The program costs approximately \$40,000 to run, but raises \$26,000 from community grants and passport sponsorships and sales, limiting net costs to approximately \$14,000. 12,000 attendees participate per year, and the CVB partners with local transit to provide 50 cent rides all day.



Tourism Awards – Green Bay, WI

Each year, the Greater Green Bay CVB hosts its fall tourism luncheon to bring together and honor tourism partners throughout the destination. Awards are given to recipients in three categories: Business Partner in Tourism, Event of the Year, and the Tim Quigley Tourism Award. These events help raise awareness of the special impacts of tourism on the community and encourage local partners to engage in creative and impactful tourism initiatives.



Murder Mystery Nights – Owensboro, KY

To help expose the local community to the unique and authentic environment at the Owensboro Convention Center, facility management has self-produced a series of entertainment and dining events that range from mystery murder thrillers, to costume parties, to date night auctions. Tickets can range from \$40 to \$80 per person.



Southern Tier Tourism and Business Development – Chenango County, NY

The Southern Tier Economic Development Corporation of New York recently created a work group consisting of multiple CVB CEO's, hoteliers, restaurateurs, vineyard owners, brewery owners, and others to help guide long-term tourism development projects in the region. This work group has been involved with planning and implementation of brewery trails, bicycle trails, and waterway trails. The entity has also issued surveys to the tourism community (i.e., hotels, restaurants, etc.) to gather creative ideas for enhancing tourism in the area.



7. CVB: New Downtown Visitor/Experience Center

CVB Recommendation 3: New Downtown Visitor/Experience Center

The CVB is in the process of planning for a new visitor center in the downtown area. The Pagoda building has been serviceable over the last several years, but the building is removed from existing foot traffic in downtown and many stakeholders thought that it could be better used by another organization or business.

As such, a new and improved downtown visitor center could provide Visit Evansville with a facility solution that would achieve two key objectives: provide visitors with a unique and engaging visitor center and give Visit Evansville a highly visible brick and mortar platform to promote tourism to visitors and the local community.

Nationally, the notion of the classic visitor center with brochures, hard copy maps, and other functions is fading. Given the ability of a visitor to access information online, many communities have limited their traditional visitor-dissemination functions, closing their bricks and mortar facilities.

On the other hand, some DMO’s are increasingly rethinking the concept of “visitor center” – considering concepts that serve to fully introduce the experiences of the destination to the visitor. The model used in Lexington, Kentucky offers interactive video screens, photo opportunities with local icons and elements that reflect the uniqueness of the destination such as an authentic bourbon still and portions of an historic horse stall.

For Visit Evansville, leadership should focus on these types of unique opportunities, with emphasis on point of sale for unique and local products, space for local musicians to perform, photo opportunities that can create social media exposure, opportunities to “sample” unique destination experiences, public art components, high-tech video technology, a virtual reality component and other features. More detailed explanations of these concepts are presented on the following page.



Recommendation	New Downtown Visitor/Experience Center
Detail	Downtown visitor/experience center that would feature retail, event space, and attraction elements.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate to Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit Evansville Vanderburgh County Downtown Evansville
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$3m to \$5m buildout



7. CVB: New Downtown Visitor Center

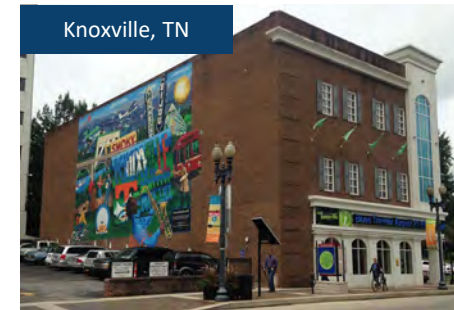
Storefront Location - To ensure visibility and steady foot traffic, visitor centers such as those in Denton, Texas (pictured) are located between area bars, restaurants, and other popular businesses. The Evansville visitor center could select a similar site near the downtown's Main Street, and, like the Denton Visitor Center, include an appealing storefront façade.

Point of Sale for Unique and Local Products – A new visitor center should be a one-of-a-kind store that encapsulates the authentic history and culture of the destination. This could entail selling items from locally owned shops, galleries, restaurants, cafes, bakeries and other unique establishments. It will be important to establish partnerships with local businesses and artists to procure this type of inventory. For example, the Augusta Visitor Center (pictured) and Denton Visitor Center sell locally made honeys, woodwork and candles.

Event, Gathering, and/or Performance Space – Visitor centers in Augusta and Knoxville have built-in performance areas that often host local musical acts on a weekly basis. The Augusta Visitor Center also features a small bar area for small gatherings, while the Knoxville Visitor Center has a digital marquee on its storefront that advertises events happening in the destination. The potential new center in Evansville should include these elements, including a small stage area or gathering area that could showcase local talent, which would complement efforts to gradually build a local music scene.

Photo Opportunities and Social Media Impact – The new center could include a unique photo opportunity with iconic imagery, symbols, historical figures, or celebrities from the Evansville area. For example, visitors in Louisville, Kentucky can take a photo with Colonel Sanders, the famous founder of Kentucky Fried Chicken, in the Louisville Visitor Center (pictured). These features can significantly increase social media exposure for destination.

Design and Décor – A visitor center should be inviting and intriguing to attract visitors inside the facility. The Visit Knoxville Visitors Center in Knoxville, (TN) features a three-story mural on the side of its building that ties to themes and stories unique to the city, a digital sign spanning the front of the building that advertises upcoming events in Knoxville, and a map kiosk that illustrates the downtown area surrounding the Center. Likewise, the Lexington Visitor Center (pictured) features an LED wall that showcases events and attractions throughout the area.





7. CVB: Recap

To better compete regionally and nationally, Visit Evansville requires a moderate amount of additional financial resources. New or increased funding mechanisms for the organization would support added services we recommend the CVB employ, in addition to operations at the recommended downtown visitor center.

In terms of prioritization, we recommend the following initiatives be taken in the next one to three years:

- Review and select expanded funding mechanism for Visit Evansville. This could include increased innkeeper’s tax, noting that a half-percent could generate \$300,000 annually. A one percent increase positions Evansville behind Indianapolis which currently has a hotel bed tax of 17% and Louisville at 16.07%. It should not have an adverse effect on booking future business as there are many other destinations around the country currently at 16% or higher.
- Reallocation of a portion of the existing 3.5 percent innkeepers tax that goes to the Capital Improvement Fund is a long-term option, for funding but we aren’t recommending that at this time as those resources are needed to cover the Deaconess Sports Park Bonds and will be needed to further incentivize future tourism related development.
- Target a new annual budget of approximately \$2.5 million.
- Initiate local marketing efforts, including tourism awards, Be A Tourist In Your Own Town, and self-produced events.
- Select a site for new downtown visitor center.
- Plan, design and build out new visitor center.

1 – CVB Budget Increase

2 – Enhanced CVB Initiatives



3 – Downtown Visitor Center



An aerial photograph of a city downtown and riverfront at dusk. The sky is filled with soft, orange and grey clouds. In the foreground, a large, modern arena with a curved, metallic facade is visible. The arena's name, "Ford FORD CENTER", is partially visible on its side. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalk in front of the arena. To the right, several multi-story brick and concrete buildings are visible, including a prominent tall, modern glass skyscraper. The street below is busy with cars and pedestrians. The overall scene is a vibrant urban landscape.

8 DOWNTOWN AND RIVERFRONT

8. Downtown: Developing Downtown for Residents & Visitors

The research presented earlier in this Plan highlights the importance of a vibrant downtown, and the opportunities that exist to significantly enhance and, in some cases, transform areas of downtown Evansville. Such initiatives would enhance quality of life for residents, help attract visitors and support broader economic development initiatives for the region.

The Evansville Downtown Master Plan completed in 2016 focused on critical district development initiatives along the Riverfront, the creation of a Makers District and overall development of the public domain through green space, wayfinding, landscaping and other initiatives.

Other studies such as the 2019 Downtown Market Analysis focused on opportunities to grow foot traffic with added residential and hospitality development.

Studies such as the 2020 Evansville Economic Development Indicators and the Talent 2025 Initiative highlighted the importance of these types of initiatives to developing a more vibrant, diverse and successful economy.

Our independent research has highlighted the types of opportunities that should be further explored in developing downtown Evansville for visitors, residents and workers. Within this section many of the ideas and concepts that have been suggested in past studies, as well as a variety of new initiatives are incorporated.

A THRIVING MAIN STREET

AFTER IMAGE OF 4TH & MAIN STREET PARK



NOCO MAKERS DISTRICT



*Graphics created by Jessica Will

Evansville makes **LINGUINE**
 Evansville makes **STATEMENTS**
 Evansville makes **TECH**
 Evansville makes **SPECTACLES**
 Evansville makes **FASHION**
 Evansville makes **CRAFTS**
 Evansville makes **HISTORY**
 Evansville makes **SUSHI**
 Evansville makes **ROCK 'N' ROLL**
 Evansville makes **ART**
 Evansville makes **A DIFFERENCE**



AN ACTIVE RIVERFRONT

AFTER IMAGE OF RIVERSIDE PROMENADE IMPROVEMENTS



PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

AFTER IMAGE OF POST OFFICE PARK DEVELOPMENT



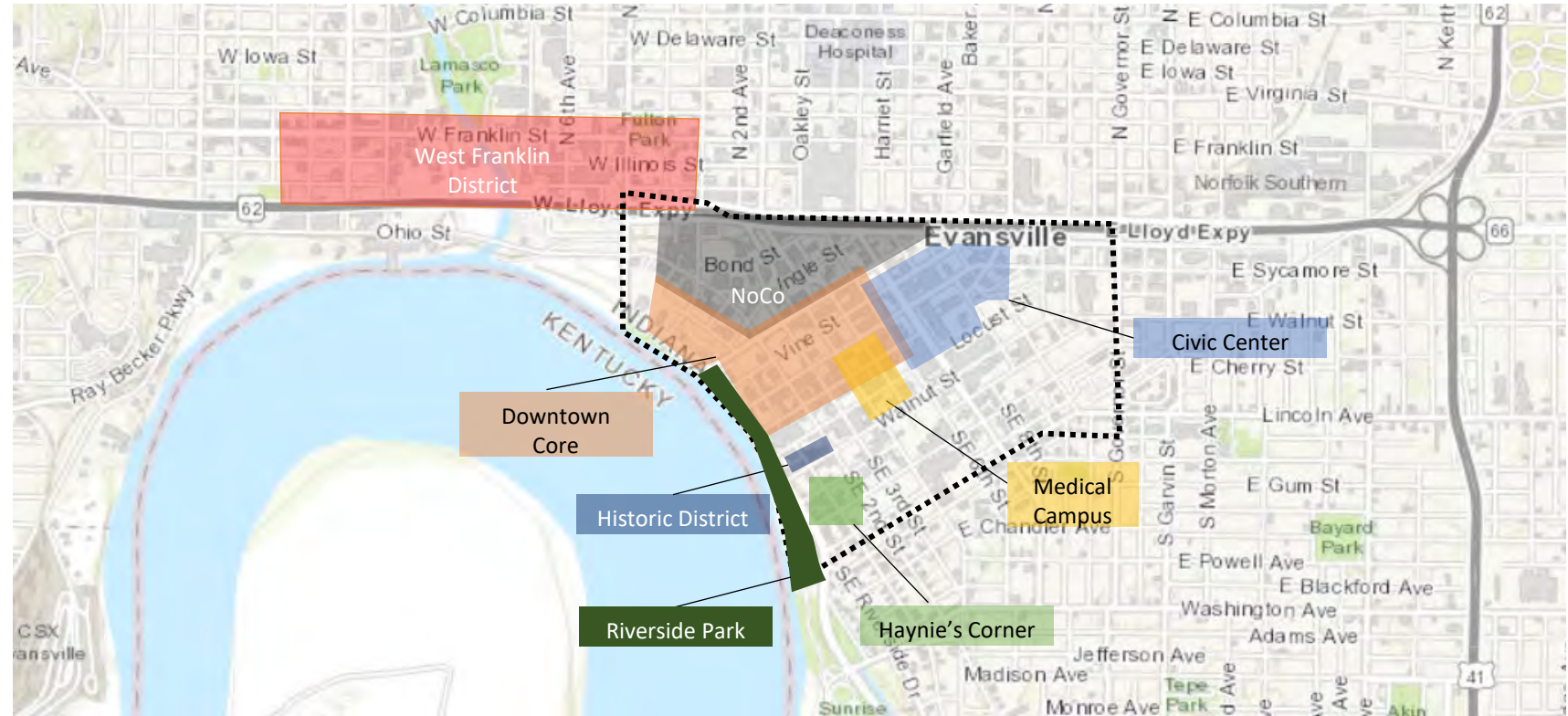
8. Downtown: District by District Strategies

The Tourism Master Plan recommendations are presented on a district-by-district basis. Existing districts in various stages of development and with unique development opportunities include the downtown core, the Civic Center, NoCo, West Franklin, Historic District, Haynie's Corner, the new Medical Campus and Riverside Park.

Areas of focus for development within several of these districts include the types of assets listed below.

- More unique restaurants
- Unique hospitality businesses including food hall/markets, a brewery/distillery district, virtual/arcade bars, and unique locally owned restaurants.
- Unique immersive art, cultural and entertainment experiences.
- Large gathering spaces with significant public art.
- Biking and other outdoor amenities, tied to existing and developing regional bike trails.
- More housing and office space to create vibrancy and to support added restaurant, nightlife and retail businesses.
- More office space to create a significant daytime pedestrian presence.

Within the remainder of this section, detailed descriptions of these types of initiatives are presented.



8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT - Indoor / Outdoor Leisure

The Evansville Riverfront already provides a desirable pedestrian experience, with assets including the Tropicana Evansville Hotel & Casino, the USS LST Memorial, the Evansville Museum & Planetarium, Mickey's Kingdom Park, and walking and biking paths.

There are numerous opportunities to expand on these assets, including those outlined in the Downtown Master Plan, as restated from the Plan below.

- *Extending existing park space with cantilevered shelves over existing piers along the river.*
- *Enhancing park design including landscape, lighting, monuments and play equipment.*
- *Adding new park features – swings, shade structures and furnishings.*
- *Making it easier and safer to cross Riverside Drive to access the Riverwalk and Greenway.*
- *Slowing vehicular traffic to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and enjoyment.*
- *Separating pedestrian activity from vehicular traffic with landscaping and other treatments.*
- *Creating a small destination area for dogs and pet caretakers.*
- *Physical improvements such as landscaping, parking enhancements, streetscape or other enhancements along Main Street, between 2nd and Riverside Drive to establish a stronger connection between the downtown core and the Riverfront.*
- *Creating visual connections from Main Street and other key locations to the river via design elements and features such as fountains, lights, and signage.*

As part of this ten-year Tourism Master Plan, we have conducted numerous case studies of other riverfront and entertainment districts in markets throughout the U.S., conducted site visits and walking tours throughout the downtown area, conducted surveys of over 1,000 area residents to gauge interest in potential new downtown assets, and interviewed over 55 local and regional stakeholders. This research has been used to prepare recommendations for specific elements of Riverfront development that could be added to current planning, or in some cases provide further detail to previously identified initiatives. The following pages begin this process by summarizing case studies of riverfront and entertainment district development in five comparable markets.



8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT/ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS – Case Studies

Chattanooga Riverwalk Chattanooga, TN



Spanning just over 16 miles on the southern banks of the Tennessee River, the Chattanooga Riverwalk stretches from the Tennessee Aquarium to the TVA Dam and out to the Moccasin Bend National Archaeological District. Along its downtown portion, the Riverwalk offers a wide array of food, activities and amenities. Over its 30 years of existence, approximately \$200 million in public and private funds have been invested in development along the Riverwalk.

The Riverwalk has two boat ramps for launching on the river, with boats available to rent. Other popular activities include the Bluff View Art District, providing a secluded and scenic view of the river, the Hunter Museum of American Art, the Walnut Street Bridge, and the Bluff View Sculpture Garden.

Popular eating establishments along the Riverwalk cafes, pizza shops, ice cream shops, bars, and sit-down restaurants. Bike stations are located along the Riverwalk to provide bike rentals, as well as a variety of other walking trails to provide views of downtown Chattanooga. A second-story rock climbing wall is also located just off the River.

Riverfront Fort Wayne Fort Wayne, IN



The idea of an expanded and enhanced riverfront in Fort Wayne began in 2011 with the establishment of Legacy Fort Wayne to guide spending of nearly \$75 million to infrastructure projects, which included the riverfront. After overwhelming public support, the first phase was completed shortly after conceptual plans were created in 2015. Today, the Riverfront spans nearly 2.5 miles along the St. Mary's River and features numerous attractions and amenities. Future plans include a 225-unit residential complex, 30,000-square feet of office, and 15,000-square feet of retail

The newest attraction along the Riverfront is Promenade Park, which opened in 2019. The park features a playground for children, as well as other kids' activities, a tree canopy trail, and an amphitheater. Public funding of an additional \$20 million was used to develop this area.

In addition to Promenade Park, kayaks and canoes are available for rent along the Riverfront, and scenic views of downtown Fort Wayne available on the Wells Street Bridge. Dining is also available at Trubble Riverside Café and Tap.

8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT/ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS – Case Studies

West Haymarket Lincoln, NE

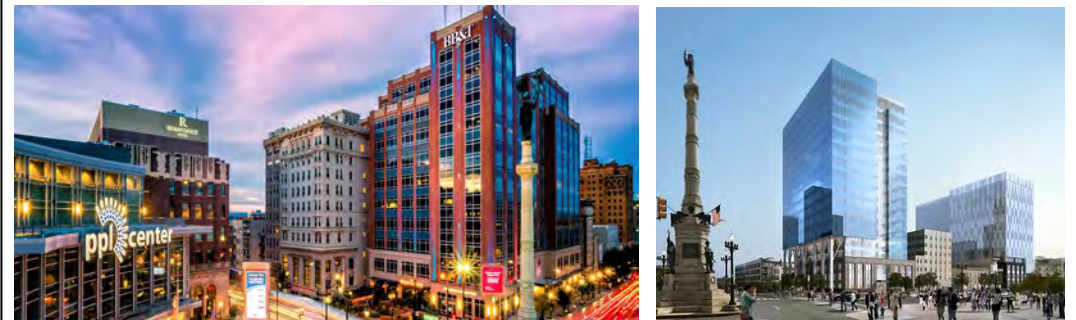


West Haymarket is a mixed-use development that is part of a long-term revitalization initiative in downtown Lincoln, Nebraska. The goal of the eight-block West Haymarket district was to strengthen the economic viability of downtown Lincoln, attract visitors, residents, and businesses, and retain college graduates. The 400-acre district has generated approximately \$375 million in public and private sector development.

In addition to the 16,600-seat Pinnacle Bank Arena, the surrounding development of the West Haymarket neighborhood includes:

- 100,000-square feet of office space.
- 100,000-square feet of retail space.
- Multiple hotels.
- Public parks and open spaces.
- The Railyard on Canopy Street; an entertainment district featuring restaurants, bars, markets, and apartments.

City Center Allentown, PA



In 2014, the City of Allentown developed a 128-acre downtown redevelopment project, now known as City Center. The project included the PPL Center, an 8,500-seat arena. It is estimated that City Center includes more than \$600 million in public and private development to date.

In addition to PPL Center, the City Center development includes:

- 1.8 million square feet of retail and office space.
- Over 25 restaurants, bars, and cafés.
- Connectivity of entertainment district through the Artswalk pedestrian walkway.
- Over 450 apartment and condo units.
- The Renaissance Allentown, a 170-room hotel with 11,000 square feet of meeting space.
- 1.5 acres of open green space and walking paths.
- More than 6,000 parking spaces.



8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT/ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS – Case Studies

Waterside District Norfolk, VA



Opened in May of 2017, Waterside District in Norfolk, VA, is a \$40 million overhaul and rebranding of Norfolk's 140,000-square foot Waterside Festival Marketplace. City officials estimate that 500,000 people visited Waterside during its first 90 days in business. Located along the Elizabeth River waterfront of downtown Norfolk, the Waterside District offers residents and visitors entertainment, a full range of culinary options, nightlife and activities for all ages, including live music, festivals and other community events.

The District is anchored by The Market, an eclectic and vibrant food hall featuring “pop up” versions of popular local and regional restaurants, as well as national chains such as Guy Fieri's Smokehouse, Blue Moon TapHouse, PBR Norfolk, The Fudgery, Chipotle and Stripers Waterside. The District is located across the street from the Waterside Marriott, the city's primary event space for meetings and conventions.

The site also includes the Skystar Observation Wheel, a 136-foot Ferris wheel with 36 enclosed climate-controlled gondolas that overlook the Elizabeth River.

District Case Study Takeaways

The “lessons learned” with respect to the case studies presented herein, and our experience in other markets throughout the country, provide support for a variety of riverfront elements that should be considered as part of ongoing planning in Evansville. These include the following.

- Popular eating establishments along the Riverwalk that focus on the traditional (coffee, pizza, sandwiches, etc.), as well as more unique and specialized outlets focusing on food and beverage particular to the area.
- Ample bike stations and walking experiences that engage with the river, and that support a downtown residential and workforce lifestyle.
- Informal music and entertainment spaces that allow for concerts, festivals, rallies, health/wellness events and other community functions.
- Public arts installations and arts trails.
- Spaces with high traffic and energy, balanced by quieter, more secluded and scenic areas.
- A concerted effort to focus on housing and office development on parcels adjacent to the river, helping to create pedestrian density and resulting support for hospitality businesses.
- Ample open green space for pedestrian use.
- Versatile spaces that allow for unique, locally oriented and often temporary food outlets.
- Larger scale attractions that in the case of Evansville could include outdoor adventure elements such as climbing walls, public art inspired fitness elements and an outdoor entertainment pavilion.

These riverfront and entertainment district features are considered for inclusion in the recommendations presented throughout the remainder of this section.

Sources: Local CVB, online research



8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT – Ideas for Future Development

As planning for future Riverfront development takes place, there are several near- and long-term recommendations that can best address the prospect of attracting added visitation to the destination. These recommendations can also be leveraged to create destination amenities that provide quality of life amenities for residents, and help existing and new businesses attract the next generation of workforce.

Expanding Riverfront Real Estate

The proposed Riverfront investment described in the Downtown Masterplan highlighted significant piers located at Vine Street and Walnut Street, with a more modest expansion of space near the intersection of the Riverfront with Main Street. We suggest that as a “once in a generation” opportunity for Riverfront development, the initiative to extend open space at Main should be maximized. This could form a central “organizing” node from which Riverfront development extends north and south. Maximizing the platform developed at the Main Street intersection could allow for significant public event hosting, temporary food court/beer hall venues, public gathering and festival space, and other amenities that would be located in a highly centralized and synergistic manner to the significant hospitality development potential along Main Street.

Planning and engineering efforts should carefully explore the options to maximize added real estate at this node. Additionally, the piers at Vine Street and Walnut should be explored, with the potential for public/private development in the form of food halls, music venues and other development initiatives. A Riverfront node near Walnut Street, in particular, could potentially create an entertainment district environment by synergizing with a proposed mixed-use development across Riverside Drive.

Programming Major Riverfront Events

Major public events can be a highly successful means of attracting non-local visitation. On a local and regional basis, the Fall Festival, WC Handy Blues & BBQ Festival, Frog Follies and other such events currently attract a varying number of non-local visitors. Offering a large, centrally located Riverfront space to help expand exiting events and support new large-scale events could help generate significant increases to visitation, room nights and visitor industry supported tax revenue generation. Further assessment of the potential for new large-scale events for Vanderburgh County is presented later in this Plan.

Public Domain
(Owensboro, KY)



Outdoor Food/Drink
(Norfolk, VA)



Outdoor Recreation
(Chattanooga, TN)





8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT – Ideas for Future Development

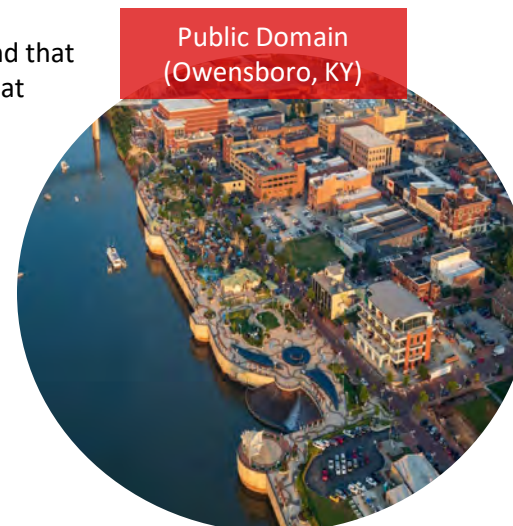
Create an Outdoor Adventure Culture

A Riverfront location is highly supportive of major adventure assets designed to market to the visitor sector, and that cater to the need of the local resident base. Today, there is a well designed and attractive bike/walking path that extends from the Riverfront in downtown Evansville to West Franklin. Plans are being implemented to extend the bike trail along Walnut Street from the River to connect to other regional bike trails.

Planning for Riverfront development in downtown Evansville should accommodate future growth in the outdoor culture, inclusive of installing bike rental stations, outdoor exploration trail heads with visitor industry wayfinding and signage that allows the visitor to access trails leading to the West Franklin area, Wesselmann Woods, and even to Newburgh. Opportunities to create climbing walls, adventure/fitness parks and other assets catering to a Millennial and younger generation should also be considered as part of future Riverfront planning.

Food and Beverage Pavilions

There is a trend in urban development that parallels the increase in downtown residential development. Highly locally oriented food courts, breweries, distilleries and other food and beverage establishments have become expected assets within a desirable downtown area, both from a visitor and resident perspective. The Distillery District adjacent to downtown Lexington exemplifies this trend. For Evansville, the proposed Riverfront pavilions near Vine Street or Walnut Street could house this type of development. Given the location of a potential bicycle trail/trail head at Walnut Street, this area could be a more desirable location to house pop-up, seasonal food and beverage outlets, largely catering to local vendors. A food truck area or designated “food truck” park concept could also be added at one more points along a redeveloped Riverfront. These parks have been highly successful in mid sized markets throughout the country. Over time, a more permanent installation of local food and beverage outlets could be considered at either the Vine or Walnut locations.





8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT – Ideas for Future Development

An Art Trail Unique to Evansville

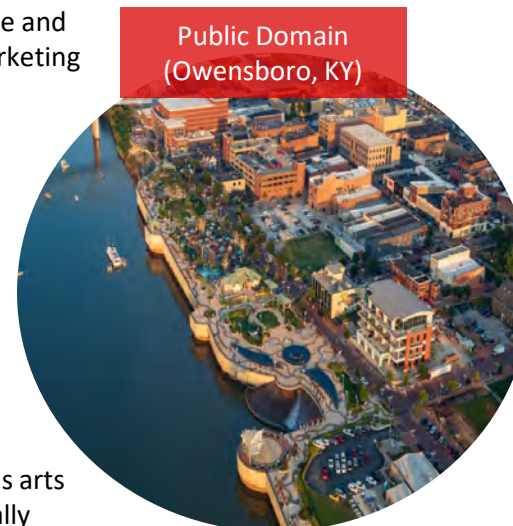
The arts and cultural community within any destination can help highlight and promote features that are unique and authentic. This helps to give clarity to the question “what defines us as a community?” From a destination marketing perspective, high-profile arts and cultural assets help to support elements that can create first-time and repeat visitation.

As modern communities continue to evolve, they face a pressure to distinguish themselves in unique ways to appeal to existing and potential future residents and visitors. Public art development represents an important opportunity to highlight a community’s unique sense of identity and character, and continued investment in its development can help create a sense of vibrancy that is conducive to retaining and attracting residents, businesses and visitors.

For Evansville, there are opportunities to link the downtown riverfront into the core of downtown, towards the West Franklin area, and south along the River with important, significant and often locally-inspired art trail installations. The development of an art “trail” or “walk” allows residents and visitors to experience Evansville’s arts and the outdoors. Such a trail would essentially be an open-air art gallery along a defined route with strategically developed sight corridors and views, and it could encourage outdoor exploration and visitation along the River and in less visited areas of the city.

Large Scale, Signature Installations

It is not uncommon for an urban riverfront to offer a significant, large scale attraction. The Skystar Observation Wheel, a 136-foot Ferris wheel along the Elizabeth River in Norfolk represents this type of monumental development. As a long-term initiative, consideration should be given to the site, engineering and financial feasibility of this type of signature development along the riverfront in Evansville.



Public Domain
(Owensboro, KY)



Outdoor Food/Drink
(Norfolk, VA)



Outdoor Recreation
(Chattanooga, TN)



8. Downtown: RIVERFRONT - Traffic Calming

Development of the Riverfront, combined with development of hospitality assets in the core of downtown, could over time create a “tension” between the two areas. Today, the pedestrian crossing from/to downtown and the Riverfront can be challenging from a visitor perspective.

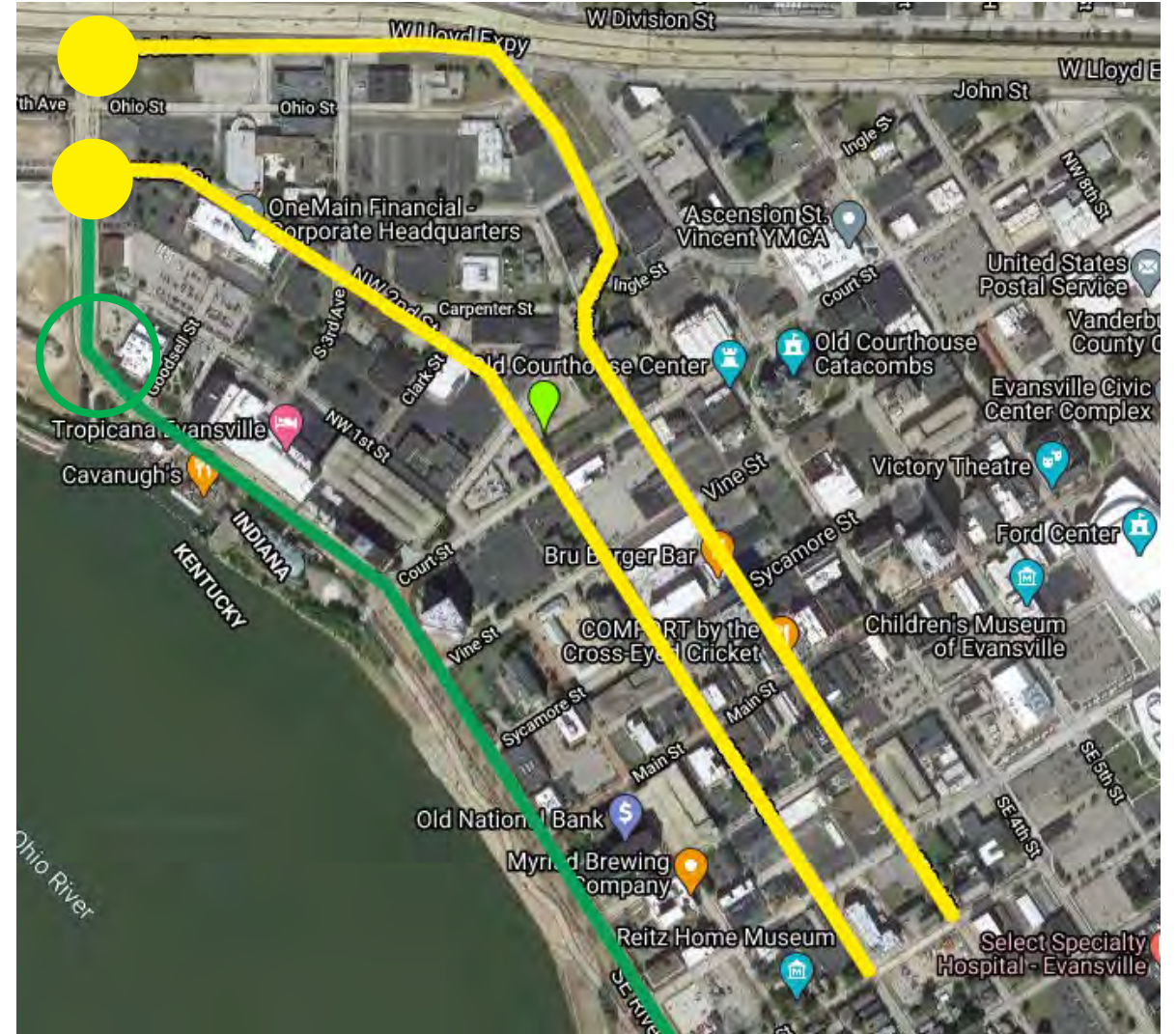
There is a relatively high traffic count along Riverside Drive, with vehicles often travelling high speeds. As the Riverfront and downtown core evolve, inclusive of added residential, office and visitor pedestrian traffic, it will be important to address the challenging pedestrian crossing to the Riverfront.

The Downtown Master Plan, as well as other assessments of downtown Evansville, clearly highlight the benefits of traffic calming along Riverside Drive, to the extent of eliminating one lane in both the east and west direction. We understand that absent alternative traffic accommodations, such a modification could create significant traffic challenges.

However, enhancements to the Lloyd Expressway at the Highway 41 interchange could help to alleviate the need for high traffic volumes along Riverside Drive in the downtown area. In addition, opportunities to direct downtown-bound traffic off the Lloyd Expressway into downtown along West John Street, 3rd Street and Northwest Second Street could also alleviate traffic demand along Riverside Drive.

Consideration could also be given to directing traffic flowing from Henderson towards Evansville away from Riverside Drive and instead north along Highway 41 to the Expressway bypassing the downtown Riverfront.

The City, County and State should explore funding options to support investment that materially alleviates traffic counts and speeds along Riverside Drive between Northwest Second Street and Shawnee Drive, thereby creating a significantly improved visitor/pedestrian connection between downtown and the riverfront.



8. Downtown: MAIN STREET

Main Street in downtown Evansville represents the primary avenue for unique local restaurants, a visitor-appealing streetscape, and pedestrian connectivity between the Civic Center district and the Riverfront.

Today, there are several, but limited, unique local establishments that can cater to the visitor industry, including leisure travelers and event attendees. Efforts are under way to increase the density of unique businesses, particularly through Downtown Evansville, a non-profit corporation dedicated to downtown development. The organization is highly qualified and motivated to advocate and plan for future downtown development that can enhance the destination from a visitor and event attendee perspective.

Initiatives that should be pursued to advance these efforts include the following.

Economic Development

- Continued use of any storefront grant programs that encourage local entrepreneurs to establish hospitality businesses on and near Main Street. Revision of codes as necessary to allow for awning, sidewalk seating and other efforts that can enhance the street level experience.
- Establishment of private sector partnerships with local and region financial lenders. These programs can help viable yet challenging business models to establish storefronts that highlight unique aspects of the Vanderburgh County and regional area.

Outdoor Dining (Covington, KY)



Unique Restaurants (Sacramento, CA)



Weekend Street Performances (Asheville, NC)



Distinct Wayfinding (Emerging Nationally)



8. Downtown: MAIN STREET

Connectivity to the River and Civic Center District

- Developed properties along Main Street tend to concentrate between Second Street and Sixth Street. There is somewhat of a disconnect between Second Street and the River that could be addressed. Large parking structures and vacant lots tend to diminish the pedestrian energy and urban vibrancy as one approaches the Riverfront.
- Downtown Evansville and City officials are aware of this, and have targeted various parcels for development that can help connect the core of downtown to the Riverfront. The Community Development Corporation concept may be a component of these efforts and should be fully supported by visitor industry and community development officials.
- Connectivity to the north, between Main Street and the Civic Center district (as shown in the picture above) can also be enhanced through signage, wayfinding and landscaping efforts. As development takes place along Main Street, the flow of attendees at ONEP and Ford Center events should be enhanced.
- Efforts to develop large-scale public art could help establish connectivity between the Convention Center District and the River. Large murals on the sides of Main Street parking structures could be commissioned. Monumental art pieces located at key points of pedestrian activity could help establish visual walking or directional queues.



Outdoor Dining (Covington, KY)



Unique Restaurants (Sacramento, CA)



Weekend Street Performances (Asheville, NC)



Distinct Wayfinding (Emerging Nationally)





8. Downtown: NoCo – Arts and Authenticity

The Evansville Downtown Master Plan update highlighted the potential for an area north of the downtown core to develop into a live/work/play district focused on the maker economy. This includes locally owned creative class and other businesses that focus on design and manufacturing in numerous product and art sectors. The Master Plan defines key elements of this North of Court or “NoCo” district as follows:

- *A mix of uses – manufacturing, production, art, fabrication, digitization.*
- *A mix of building types – industrial, residential, commercial, and mixed use.*
- *Relaxed zoning – to attract and encourage diverse uses, building styles, and materiality.*
- *Incentives to attract businesses, residents, and development, including expedited permitting, tax abatements, and others as appropriate.*
- *Unique branding, signage, wayfinding and banners.*

The current conditions in the district include numerous vacant lots, light industrial, a new restaurant and general businesses, and historic buildings including the Old Courthouse and Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

The research conducted for this Tourism Master Plan has been used to continue the discussion and concept development for the NoCo district. This research includes results from our onsite review, local stakeholder interviews, community surveys, discussions with event promoters and producers, and extensive case study research focusing on successful maker districts throughout the country. This research has been used to develop findings and recommendations that can, over a ten-year timeframe, help to transform the district into the unique and authentic destination for residents, visitors and businesses envisioned in the Downtown Master Plan.

The following pages begin this process by summarizing case studies of maker space, arts and other creative district development in five comparable markets.





8. Downtown: NoCo – Unique Arts & Culture Districts

Peppermill District Lexington, KY



Originally opened in 1869, the Pepper Mill Distillery was operational until 1958. Fifty years on, it had been neglected and fell into disrepair. In recent years, however, the distillery has undergone many redevelopment efforts, and reopened production of whiskey and beer in 2017.

The distillery is located within the Historic Pepper Mill District, a community of other renovated properties that house popular businesses such as pizza shops, cafes, restaurants, and ice cream shops. This area also hosts an array of concerts and smaller festivals and has quickly become one of the Lexington area's most popular attractions.

TIF funding financed much of the improvements of the area, with more than \$45 million provided for building redevelopments and streetscape improvements. The District will also be welcoming a new distillery in the near future, with a \$5.4 million, 34,000-square foot production facility for Fresh Bourbon Distilling Co. being built in the area.

NEON District Norfolk, VA



To revitalize a neighborhood just outside of downtown Norfolk that encompasses the Chrysler Museum of Art and the Harrison Opera House, the city of Norfolk re-zoned substantial portions of the area to encourage the development of arts-related businesses and renamed it the "NEON District" in 2013.

The city's Downtown Council, the managing entity of the downtown's Business Improvement District, also supplied a significant amount of funding to businesses that re-located to the district, offering up to \$20,000 to individual galleries and/or creative spaces that needed assistance with interior build outs.

The Neon District designates \$15,000 per year to a murals program, with an additional \$15,000 used for producing events. The murals program has helped to brand the area, with the walls of strategic "gateway" businesses on the border of the District selected for lively, large scale murals. Approximately three murals are created in the District per year, while most of the funds for events are used to pay for the NEON Festival, a four-day celebration of "energy and light."



8. Downtown: NoCo – Unique Arts & Culture Districts

Six Square Austin, TX



Six Square, located in Austin’s Black Cultural District is the first black cultural district in the state of Texas and the only cultural arts district in the city of Austin. Since its inception in 2013, Six Square has been dedicated to improving the quality of life for African American residents through preservation of historic Black spaces, artistic cultivation, and by serving as a catalyst for social and economic development.

The District features numerous museums, black-owned businesses and restaurants, public murals and historical sites. Huston-Tillotson University, a historically black college and the oldest university in Austin, is also located in the District. Some of the most popular attractions include Downs Field, which was once home of the Austin Black Senators of the Texas Negroes League, the Carver Complex which consists of the George Washington Carver Museum, the Carver Branch Library and the Carver Genealogy Center, and the Victory Grill, which has been a hub of Black nightlife and music in East Austin for decades.

Arts in The District Dubuque, IA



With an extensive inventory of vacant and underutilized industrial spaces along its Mississippi River waterfront, the city of Dubuque set out to repurpose some of this historic district’s buildings into arts- and culture-related spaces that could support the growing creative community in the area. The Arts in the District project (pictured above) included significant renovations of interiors and exteriors of three vacant buildings along the River and was co-led by the city and Dubuque Main Street (a non-profit committed to downtown area development). The team brought in experts on historic preservation, including an historic rehabilitation company Gronen Restoration, architecture firm Jeffrey Morton Associates, and Artspace, a nonprofit organization that assists communities and property owners with arts initiatives.

The District’s event venues host a wide variety of events, including string orchestras, ballets, small theatrical performances, cocktail events, and other activities. A third-party study estimated that the redevelopment of the area generates \$47.2 million in economic impact annually. As shown in the pictures above, event activity can range from quiet, intimate string orchestras to interpretive dance performances.



8. Downtown: NoCo – Unique Arts & Culture Districts

Sioux Falls Public Art Sioux Falls, SD



Currently in its 13th year, the SculptureWalk is a year-round outdoor art exhibit displayed throughout downtown Sioux Falls. The sculptures, which are from around the United States and world, represent traditional modern, abstract, and representational art.

The sculptures are owned by the artists and loaned to the exhibit for one year. From May through September, the public can vote for its favorite sculpture, which is deemed the “People’s Choice Award.” The sculpture is purchased at the end of the exhibit year for the city’s permanent collection.

All sculptures are also aggressively promoted to the public for sale. SculptureWalk receives 25 percent commission on any sculpture sold and on any commissioned sculptures, except for the People’s Choice and Best in Show sculptures. Historically, approximately 25 percent of all sculptures have been purchased.

District Case Study Take-Aways

The “lessons learned” with respect to the case studies presented herein, and our experience in other markets throughout the country, provide support for a variety of NoCo elements that should be considered as part of ongoing planning in Evansville. These include the following.

- Focus on production of elements that have a unique connection to the local community – for example, the whiskey and beer production in Lexington. These businesses can create both foot traffic, and valuable social media exposure for the district.
- Actively produce arts and maker events for the community. Consideration can be given to hosting a major community event and art sale to help fund local/district businesses.
- Consider a mural or sculpture program that adds iconic art installations on an annual basis.
- Implement purposeful efforts to support diversity and inclusion in the district. Consider Economic Improvement District support for Black, Indigenous and People of Color-owned arts, creative design, restaurant and other businesses in the district.
- Try to develop signature projects that can attract visitors – a live music/entertainment venue or large-scale artist work/gallery spaces, for example.

These art, cultural, creative and hospitality district features are considered for inclusion in the recommendations presented throughout the remainder of this section.



8. Downtown: NoCo – Ideas for Future Development

As planning for future NoCo development takes place, there are several near and long-term recommendations that can best address the prospect of attracting added visitation to the destination. These recommendations can also be leveraged to create destination amenities that provide quality of life amenities for residents, and assets that help existing and new businesses attract the next generation of workforce.

Produce Unique Arts-Themed Events & Fund Raisers

Numerous markets host highly successful art auctions and sales that create the foundation for a unique event and that support the efforts of local artists and designers. As NoCo develops, and at the point in time when a critical mass of artist and designer supported businesses locate to the district, an event such as the NoCo Makers Market could be grown into a weekend-long block party with potential to draw non-local attendance.

Economic Development Tools

As a unique district within the Evansville area, it will be important to recruit and support businesses consistent with the district themes. Public/private partnerships geared towards venue redevelopment and other business support should be considered. These efforts are not to create a public financing structure for private businesses, but rather to provide a modest, targeted support mechanism that encourages entrepreneurs well suited for the district from within the community that may not have the typical lending and investment support structures. The Community Development Corporation concept being considered and previously referenced could be a highly valuable partner in these efforts.

Develop a Live Music/Entertainment Venue in the District

The development of a signature live music/performance venue could serve as a catalyst for local restaurants, nightlife and other businesses in the district. A venue that hosts 600 to 1,000 attendees, with primarily a flat floor space, bar/restaurant amenities and other elements of a “night club” environment would be unique to the market. Existing performing arts spaces with fixed, tiered seating cater to a separate market. Future efforts that should be considered with respect to this concept are described on the following page.

Shared Space Art Galleries
(Asheville, NC)



Next Gen Arts Spaces
(Charlottesville, VA)



Public Art
(Norfolk, VA)



8. Downtown: NoCo – Nightlife Entertainment Venue

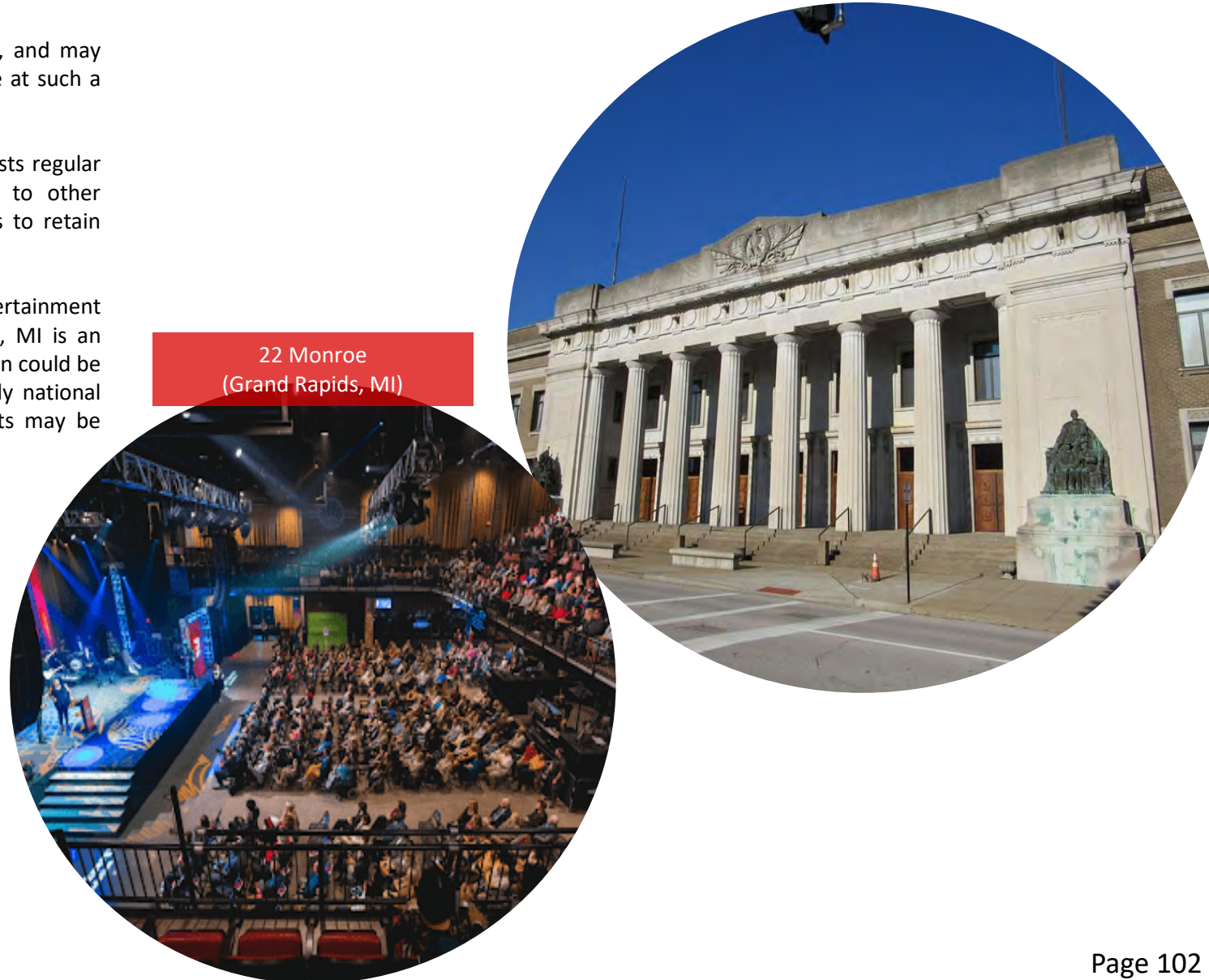
Location – The existing Memorial Coliseum is well located within the district, and may provide sufficient space to host a live music/entertainment venue. Attendance at such a venue could help accelerate the development of the NoCo district.

Current Use - The Coliseum is currently leased to the Veterans Council, and hosts regular bingo as a significant fundraising activity. The space is also rented out to other organizations to host events. With any repositioning of the Coliseum, efforts to retain these uses should be undertaken.

Funding – In many markets, redevelopment of existing space into a music/entertainment venue is led by the private sector. The 22 Monroe project in Grand Rapids, MI is an example of a largely private sector developed venue. For Evansville, consideration could be given to issuing a Request for Qualifications from local, regional and potentially national developers to explore the viability of such a repurposing. Historic tax credits may be available to help fund the project.

Event Potential – Our conversations with concert and entertainment event promoters suggests both an interest in using the venue, and a gap in the market relative to live music space. In addition to concerts, the space could be used for esports tournaments, drone racing, robotics events and other functions that represent an emerging sector of the event industry. These activities can also cater to a younger audience/workforce, helping to benefit the attraction of new businesses to the community.

Architecture and Engineering – If this type of project generates sufficient community interest, consideration should be given to retaining a qualified architectural/engineering firm to evaluate the feasibility of modifying the existing space/structure for live entertainment. This would be an initial study simply to establish physical viability.





8. Downtown: Baptisttown and Historic District

Baptisttown has been a historically Black neighborhood for generations, with significant housing development taking place in the 1930's under the New Deal Program. The area was very active with Black owned businesses, professionals and storefronts. Today the area is home to the Evansville African American Museum (EAAM), housed in the last remaining structure in the area. The Museum houses an extensive array of historical pieces, art and shopping opportunities, and houses numerous programs and events dedicated to the African American experience and contributions in Evansville, statewide and nationally.

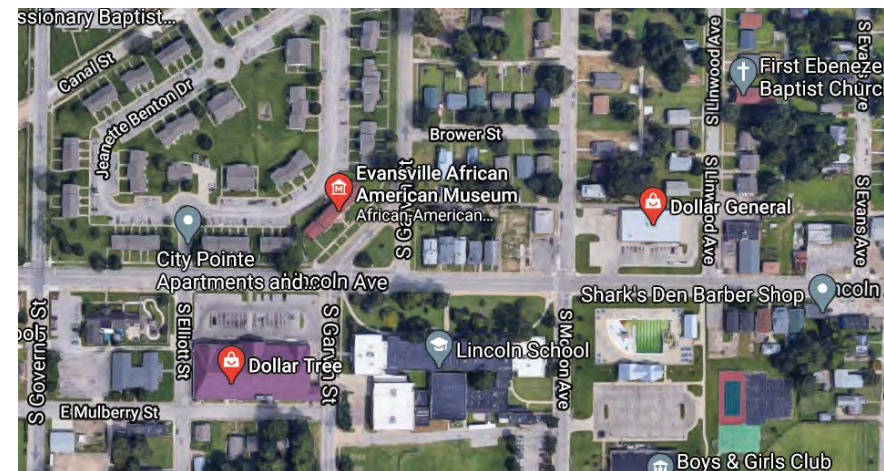
As the overall domestic visitor industry trends younger, with Millennial and Gen-Z travelers increasingly acquiring disposable income, destination assets that speak to the unique history of the area are becoming more prominent. Creative investments that enhance the diversity of the visitor experience throughout Evansville and in the Lincoln Gardens area should be considered.

Leverage Existing RAAM Expertise - With the professionalism and creativity infused in the development and management of the African American Museum, their leadership would be highly valuable to ensuring that the major elements of this Tourism Master Plan reflect diversity and inclusion. Planning bodies, implementation committees, Community Redevelopment Corporations and other existing and emerging organizations would benefit greatly from input by EAAM leadership, and other representatives in the Black, Indigenous and People of Color community.

A Technology-Based Approach – Since many structures that made up Baptisttown no longer exist, consideration should be given to securing handheld devices with augmented/virtual reality Apps that can be used to view what the area might have looked like over the generations. An example of this App used for a historic site in Manchester, UK is shown in the adjacent image.

District Exploration Through Art – Creating public art installations that evoke and explain the historical aspects of the District, working with local Black artists and crafts people. This art could be placed in the Lincoln Gardens area, as well as existing and emerging districts throughout downtown. This type of program is in place at the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History in Augusta, GA. Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, AL is an exemplary public art garden that includes emotionally powerful sculptures depicting civil rights events that took place in the city.

Augmented Reality App (Manchester, UK)



8. Downtown: West Franklin – Living and Entertainment

The West Franklin Street Corridor is a highly visited area housing unique restaurants and other businesses. The district hosts live music events and festivals ranging from small single-venue functions to large region-wide festivals. The area represents the primary concentration of nightlife and entertainment for Evansville, outpacing the downtown core area. Businesses in the Corridor tend to be unique and locally owned, which is very beneficial to attracting visitors and residents. Connectivity between the Corridor and downtown and the Riverfront has been established via Pigeon Creek Greenway Passage.

The District is spurring interest in living in the area, helping to support a broader, organically grown neighborhood. Given the unique nature of the area, future growth of the District should be guided in a way that continues to encourage local entrepreneurs. Several initiatives that have been discussed and that should continue to be pursued include the following.

- Establishment of an owner-approved Economic Improvement District, similar to the enterprise that exists in the downtown core today. Funds from the EID can help support event programming, landscaping and signage, and other needed investments.
- Continued support for second floor artist housing, helping to support creative class development in the area.
- Encouragement of unique night life, including the retainment of an arcade bar, ax throwing and other novelty bars, singer/songwriter café's and other such establishments that have been successful in other markets and districts nationally that cater to a younger audience.



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Charlotte, North Carolina, taken at dusk. The arena's distinctive circular, metallic facade is illuminated by the setting sun. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of the arena. The surrounding cityscape includes various buildings, trees, and streets. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds from the sunset.

9 FESTIVALS



9. Festivals: Introduction

Events and festivals can generate significant visitation for a destination, strengthen its brand and benefit the local resident base. The Evansville-Vanderburgh County area hosts a number of events that draw 1,000 or more attendees throughout the year, with a limited number drawing significant non-local attendance.

Surveyed residents scored the notion of a new citywide festival at an average of 4.11 out of 5, making it the second highest scored concepts behind a new live music venue. The concept was nearly tied for the top score among respondents 35 and older and scored third among those younger than 35. Further, when asked to provide ideas for other attraction concepts, 18 percent of respondents indicated they would like more live music in the destination, and 10 percent would like more family-friendly events and activities. At the same time, many stakeholders commented that though the area has a consistent calendar of special events and festivals, including the signature Fall Festival, it lacks events that draw attendees from beyond the Tri-County area.

Trends in the national event industry suggest that today's attendees are seeking authentic and immersive experiences, as well as multi-layered "destination events" that include a variety of activities and themes. These destination events engage attendees throughout multiple days of programming, and include events such as Austin's SXSW, Canal Convergence in Scottsdale (AZ), and Bottle of Lightning in San Antonio (CA), and a majority of their activities take place in a highly walkable, urban environment. Evansville could benefit from a new marquee, multi-faceted event that would showcase downtown Evansville and the region, generating a significant number of hotel room nights.

Surveyed residents and interviewed stakeholders provided various suggestions for marquee festivals with music, food, art, culture, history, downtown involvement, and outdoor recreation elements. Based on the breadth and scope shown by other special events nationally, potential exists to combine these elements into a major festival that is authentic to the Evansville brand.

The remainder of this section begins with a review of Evansville's existing annual event and festival calendar, followed by an evaluation of three citywide festival concepts that could be developed, and concludes with three smaller festivals and other event-related initiatives that could also be considered.

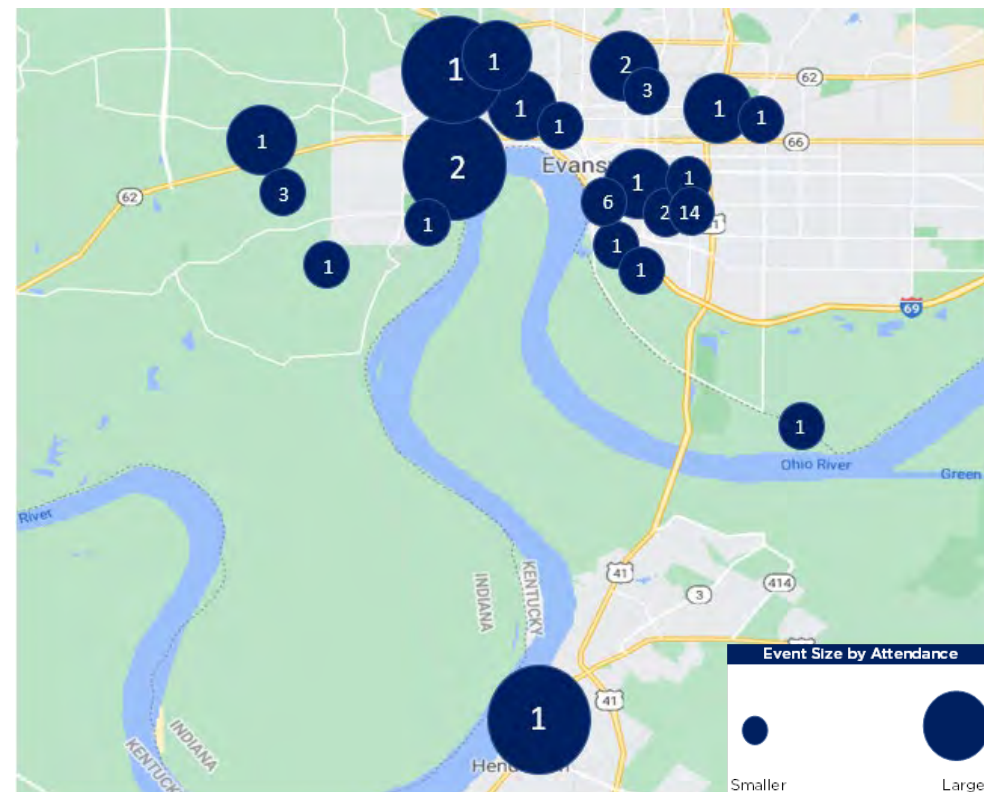
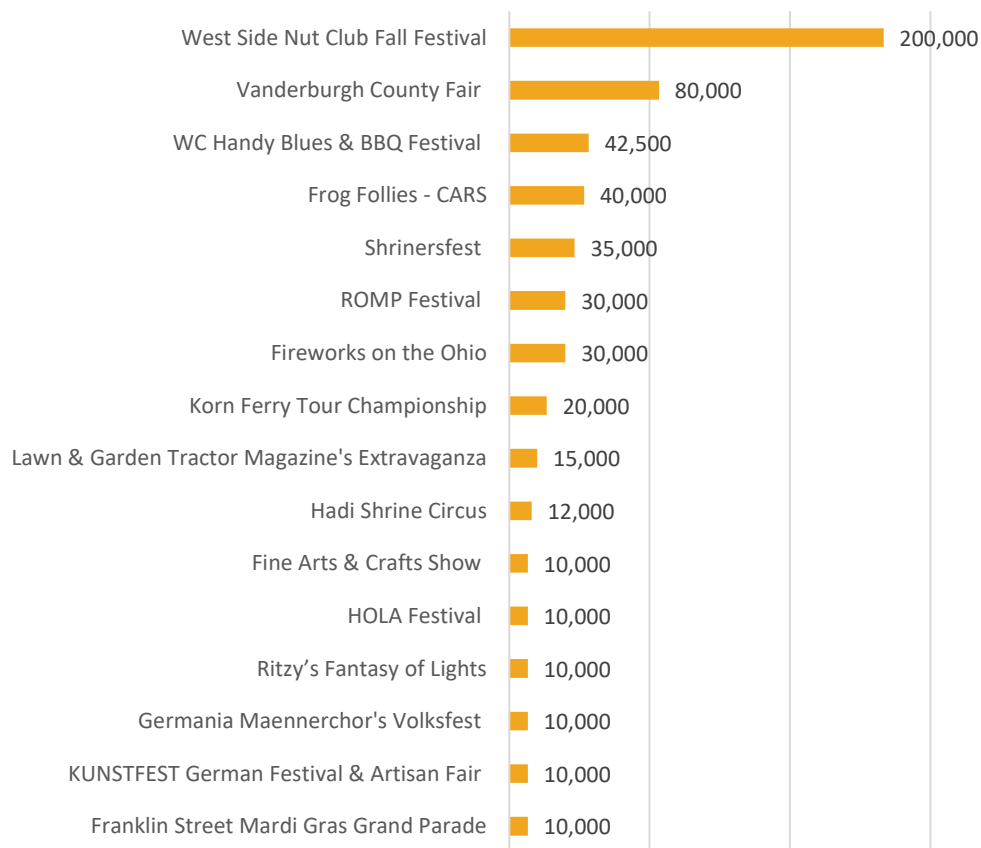




9. Festivals: Existing Festivals

The chart below shows the annually recurring festivals in the Evansville area that attract 10,000 or more attendees, while the map on the right illustrates the number of events at typical event host sites throughout the immediate area (with circles sized by attendance). As shown, Evansville has a number of popular family-oriented festivals, including the Fall Festival, the County Fair, Frog Follies, and Shrinersfest. Often-used sites include the Ford Center, Old National Events Plaza, and the Riverfront. West Franklin hosts the Fall Festival, making it one of the highest attendance generators among the sites reviewed. Its ability to successfully host major event activity is considered as part of festival recommendations herein.

To develop a major festival with a true non-local draw, opportunity may exist to grow or combine several of the events below. Alternately, an entirely new event theme could be considered.



Source: Visit Evansville, 2021.

Note: Events outside immediate Evansville area are not shown on map.



9. Festivals: Citywide Festival Development

Festivals Recommendation 1: Citywide Festival Development

A signature destination event must be able to attract a large diverse audience through a theme/concept tied to unique elements of the community, with a variety of sub-events. A new citywide event in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area must include a variety of unique and engaging components that are representative of the region and its history. This would give visitors a reason to spend multiple days engaging in programming throughout the area and would help attract a wide variety of visitors seeking different types of experiences.

Based on local stakeholder input, community survey feedback, a review of comparable destinations nationally, and analysis focused on unique citywide events throughout the country, we have developed three possible themes for Evansville to consider for citywide festival development – a family “makers” festival, a signature music festival, and a WWII-focused festival. Each concept is described in greater detail below and on the following pages.

Option 1 – Family Makers Festival

- Overall Theme – A Family Makers Festival would leverage Evansville’s family-friendly brand and combine several elements of programming to create a one-of-a-kind regional fair that would celebrate creativity and culture.
- Activity – The event would feature baking and cooking contests based on one or more simple food items (peanut butter and jelly, for example), family-friendly performances along the Riverfront, at Ford Center and/or other concert venues, food trucks at green spaces and open areas throughout downtown, parade, street performances, “open houses” at downtown museums, amateur sports tournaments at Evansville Sports Complex, and other elements.
- Locations – Event activity would mainly take place throughout downtown, including in the museums, and would require street closures to support street performances and food trucks. Concerts would mainly take place outdoors, though one or more popular acts could perform as a headliner in Ford Center or another venue. Once redeveloped, the Riverfront would be the “mainstage” for most of the event’s activity. Evansville Sports Complex could host concurrent tournament to help with non-local draw for the event.





9. Festivals: Citywide Festival Development

continued

- **Timing** – The event would take place over three days, and potentially grown to a two-weekend event after two to three years.
- **Partners** – Collaborators could include the Evansville Sports Complex, local museums, concert promoters, and organizers of local events such as Germania Maennerchor, or organizers of more regional events such as Kunstfest in New Harmony, Indiana.
- **Potential Names** – Family Fun Fair, Tri-State Fair, Peanut Butter and Jelly Festival, Fun For All Fest, The Evansville Fair, The Evansville Jolly.

Option 2 – Signature Music Festival

- **Overall Theme** – A signature music festival would support a primary Talent 2025 mission – attracting younger and more diverse audiences to Evansville. The theme of the event could be broadly celebratory of art, style, and alternative culture. The festival could center around a specific genre ranging from EDM to country, or offer acts that appeal to differing audiences. Example case studies include Blue Ox Music Festival in Eau Claire, Wisconsin; Soundset in St. Paul, Minnesota; Hinterland Festival in Des Moines, Iowa; Maha Music Festival in Omaha, Nebraska; and Upheaval in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- **Activity** – Musical acts would range from local artists to national headliners, and performances throughout the day would be complemented by food trucks parked throughout downtown, casual activities and games such as bag toss at stations along the Riverfront, and engaging installations such as “silent DJ” stations, virtual reality booths, and street performers.
- **Locations** - This event would leverage indoor and outdoor music venues throughout the destination. Smaller performances would occur at local green spaces and the (potentially) redeveloped Riverfront, and larger marquee events would take place at a temporary mainstage by the Riverfront, in Ford Center, or at a potential new amphitheater at the former Roberts Municipal Stadium site.



Recommendation	Citywide Festival Development
Detail	A major festival drawing from the history, culture, art, music, food and other elements of the region. This would be a multi-day event designed to attract residents and a non-local audience.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • City of Evansville • Downtown Evansville • Local event producers • Local event facilities
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1m to \$2m



9. Festivals: Citywide Festival Development

- **Timing** – In reviewing comparable events nationally, this would likely be a three-day event during the warmer summer months.
- **Partners** – One or more local festival/event producers could assist with planning and promoting, though a larger organization such as C3 Presents may be interested in partnering on such an event. Other involved parties should include Visit Evansville, Downtown Evansville, the City of Evansville, and the Evansville Regional Business Committee.
- **Potential Names** – E-Nights, River Dreams, Borderlines Festival, Oxbow Block Party.

Option 3 - World War II Celebration

- **Overall Theme** - An Evansville World War II event would build around the role that the Evansville area played as part of the War effort. Downtown Evansville would be transformed into a setting that reflects the food, attire, automobiles, storefronts and other downtown aspects reflective of a 1940's setting.
- **Activity** – One can imagine a crowded Main Street with music from the area playing, attendees dressed in period, big band concerts and dances taking place at the Riverfront and other celebrations reflecting the era. Storefronts would be decorated to reflect the 1940's, and menus would include food from the era. A program to use World War II ration books as coupons at restaurants and retail businesses could be established. At the same time, educational seminars and history discussions could take place at area venues, a classic car show and parade could take place in the community, and the USS LST Memorial and Evansville Wartime Museum could be active with tours, demonstrations and reenactments.





9. Festivals: Citywide Festival Development

continued

- **Locations** – Event activity would take place throughout downtown Evansville, particularly along Main Street, the Riverfront and developing Noco area, as well as West Franklin. Recommended event venues include Old National Events Plaza, Victory Theatre, the potential new Coliseum music venue, Ford Center, USS LST Memorial site, Evansville Wartime Museum, and baseball games could be held at Bosse Field (complete with 1940's uniforms).
- **Timing** – The event would take place over three days, and potentially grown to a two-weekend event after two to three years.
- **Partners** – Discussions should be had with ShrinersFest organizers to grow the event, and/or combine it with music and food & beverage events that take place throughout the year. Local veterans' groups, the Evansville Wartime Museum and USS LST Memorial should be closely involved with programming. Indiana area colleges and Universities could assist with educational content, and a festival or concert promoter could assist with music programming.
- **Potential Names** – Homefront Festival, Freedom Rings Festival, 1945 Fair.

Several case study examples of relevant historic re-enactment festivals and family festivals are provided on the following pages. These are followed by specific initiatives that will need to be led to develop either of these citywide festival concepts.





9. Festivals: Historic Re-Enactment Festivals

World War II Weekend Reading, PA



Each first full weekend of June in Reading, Pennsylvania, historic war birds circle the skies above Pennsylvania's Americana Region while Mid Atlantic Air Museum's Annual World War II Weekend brings a bygone era to life on the tarmac below.

The largest event of its kind, the weekend features living history re-enactors, vintage WWII aircraft, military vehicles and period artifacts.

Visitors can tour a French village, observe the American home front, walk through enemy encampments, witness battles, listen to 1940s radio shows, and dance to swing music.

The event draws approximately 100,000 people each year.

Deadwood Alive Deadwood, SD



Located in Deadwood, South Dakota, the town is ground zero for the Black Hills Gold Rush.

The two most popular attractions at Deadwood Alive are the Trial of Jack McCall and the Main Street shootouts. The Trial of Jack McCall has been performed in Deadwood since the mid-1920s, making it one of the nation's longest running plays. The family-friendly show selects members of the audience to participate in the performance by serving as jurors in the trial.

From May through September, three historically accurate re-enactments of shootouts of Deadwood's past take place on Main Street. In addition, the re-enactment of the shooting of Wild Bill is held inside Saloon No. 10 four times per day.

Other popular activities include daily stagecoach rides, Deadwood clothing exhibits and the evolution of pre-1899 firearms display.



9. Festivals: Historic Re-Enactment Festivals

Muster in the Mountains White Mtns, NH



Muster in the Mountains is a re-enactment that spans nearly 100 years in White Mountains, New Hampshire, starting with the French and Indian War and ending with the Mountain Man period. The three-day annual weekend also includes tomahawk throwing, copper smithing, wood carving, gun smithing, candle dipping, and a cooking competition.

This event features a colonial encampment of re-enactors representing the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and Mountain Man periods from 1750 through 1840. This gathering will take place in the fields at the base of the Mt. Washington Auto Road in beautiful Pinkham Notch in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Participants demonstrate the use of appropriate tools, clothing, and firearms from their respective time periods. This event is free and open to the general public with the hope that the education they receive here may spur them on to consider becoming a future participant.

National Silver Ball Tournament Mumford, NY



Each year, the Genesee Country Village & Museum hosts the National Silver Ball Tournament as a tribute to the birth of baseball. The event consists of a round robin baseball tournament featuring vintage clubs from across the US and Canada.

Players wear vintage woolen uniforms, double knobbed bats in an authentic 19th century stadium replica.



9. Festivals: Family Festivals

Chalk It Up! Sacramento, CA



Chalk It Up! aims to empower and support the next generation of Sacramento artists through targeted art grants for young artists and the programs which inspire them.

The free Labor Day Weekend festival at Fremont Park is the City's biggest event of the year, bringing people from all over the region to downtown Sacramento in celebration of chalk art, music, and community.

It is estimated that the event attracts 60,000 people annually.

Peanut Butter Festival New Bethlehem, PA



Spanning three days, the Peanut Putter Festival is an annual festival held in New Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The festival, typically held in late September, features stage entertainment, a mountain bike race, 5K race, parade, classic car cruise, fireworks, cooking competitions, arts and crafts, and food vendors.

The weekend festival typically draws around 50,000 attendees.

Cherry Festival Traverse City, MI



Held annually in Traverse City, Michigan, the Traverse City Cherry festival spans eight-days and attracts more than 500,000 people. The festival includes 150 events and activities, including cherry picking, pie eating contests, various rides, children's games, and a parade.

Live entertainment is offered each day, with local celebrity and dozens of vendors to showcase products using local cherries.



9. Festivals: Citywide Festival Development

To go beyond the scale of existing Evansville-Vanderburgh County events, a one-year planning process will be needed for any citywide festival concept, with seed money to fund administrative and outreach efforts. A five-year event plan should be developed, with the understanding that the first several years of the event may generate lesser attendance levels, increasing as the event matures. Several areas of focus for the planning effort should include:

First steps - An entirely new event could be formed, which would require extensive planning and brainstorming for thematic and programming content. An alternate, potentially more efficient method would involve growing or combining existing events.

Food and beverage selection – Local and regional restaurants, food trucks and/or chefs should be recruited to serve food from outdoor tents or kiosks set up in various outdoor spaces.

Advertising/marketing – Visit Evansville will need to work with regional, statewide and national media outlets to promote the event.

Permitting – City and state laws should be analyzed to identify appropriate event spaces for food trucks, outdoor performances and “open container” policies.

Volunteer coordination – Visit Evansville and the City should work together to identify local and regional non-profits and other businesses who would be willing to provide volunteer labor.

Corporate sponsorships and partnerships – This type of citywide event with significant non-local draw should be sponsored by regional and national brands. Event planners should develop a comprehensive sponsorship program targeting corporations in specific sectors.

Coordinating with travel agents and tour operators – Development of various travel packages partnering with local hotels and hospitality establishments should be considered.





9. Festivals: Additional Festival Concepts

Festivals Recommendation 2: Additional Festival Concepts

In reviewing community survey suggestions, there are several other event concepts that could draw in moderate attendance from beyond the Tri-County area. Three of these concepts would also align with Talent 2025 goals of attracting more young talent to the market, enhance diversity in the area, and promote healthy and active lifestyles.

The three potential concepts we recommend for further evaluation and preliminary planning are summarized below, followed by case study examples of similar event concepts.

- **Music Series** – Instead of a one-time or weeklong event, a music series could take place once a week or once a month over the course of a three- or fourth-month timespan. Performances by local and regional acts could take place at plazas throughout downtown, in smaller music venues, and park areas such as the envisioned Roberts Stadium site or expanded Wesselman Woods. Representatives from the national office and Indiana chapter of the Nashville Songwriters Guild indicated they would be interested in a partnership, wherein they would provide talent on a regular basis in exchange for a discounted fee in an effort to support Indiana’s songwriter scene. They would also be interested in assisting with the development of a local artist development program, wherein local acts could be given frequent opportunities to perform at local venues and busk throughout the community, as well as granted social media and marketing guidance.
- **Health and Fitness Festival** – To promote awareness of health and fitness initiatives in the community, a Festival built around a marathon run, iron man, “mud run”, or similar event could take place in downtown. Ancillary activity for the broader public could include health food tastings, outdoor yoga and crossfit classes, obstacle courses, professional sports player autograph signings, and free high-level health screenings. Partnerships should be formed with the Indiana University School of Medicine, Stone Family Center for Health Sciences, Deaconess Health System, Indiana professional sports teams, and relevant competitive event promoters.



Recommendation	Additional Festival Concepts
Detail	Identification and development of one to three additional festivals in Evansville.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • City of Evansville • Downtown Evansville • Local event producers • Local event facilities
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100k to \$500k



9. Festivals: Additional Festival Concepts

continued

- **Cultural Celebration** – Many surveyed community members suggested the development of a cultural food festival. One respondent in particular recommended a “cultural food festival, such as Asian or South American or European or African cultures coming together to sample food, artwork, history.” Many others described a similar event concept that would have the same type of broad appeal as the Fall Festival, but, instead of celebrating Evansville, would celebrate the world.

This type of cultural event would combine elements of art and cuisine. Cooking demonstrations and tastings celebrating BPOC (black people and people of color) food history could be held throughout downtown and/or West Franklin (similar to Greenville, South Carolina’s “Euphoria”), while artists could work on paintings, wall murals, and sculpture projects in front of passersby (similar to Grand Rapids, Michigan’s “Art Prize”). Interactive art installations could be placed throughout downtown (similar to Scottsdale, Arizona’s “Canal Convergence”). Such an event should include involvement from the Evansville African American Museum, local community leaders from the black, Hispanic, and Asian communities, and national arts organizations. The National Endowment for The Arts “Our Town” grant program could be a potential funding entity.

Festivals Recommendation 3: Regional Event Strategies

Many interviewed stakeholders commented on the success of popular events in nearby communities, including the Handy’s Blues Festival and Sandy Lee Watkins Songwriters Festival in Henderson, as well as the New Harmony Project Conference and Kunstfest in New Harmony. Opportunities should be explored to work with community and tourism leaders in these markets, as well as in Warrick County, to develop a collaborative approach to event strategies. For example, attendees of the New Harmony Project Conference could receive discounts at restaurants or performances happening in Evansville, and Evansville convention attendees could be given promotional material detailing the New Harmony Project Conference. Discussions regarding the potential for region-wide partnerships should be initiated within one to two years.



Recommendation	Regional Event Strategies
Detail	Work with Henderson, Warrick, and Posey Counties on event strategies, and evaluate opportunities for Evansville to better capture room nights from outside events.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Evansville • City of Evansville • Downtown Evansville • Local event producers • Local event facilities
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$100k to \$500k



9. Festivals: Cultural and Music Events

Euphoria Greenville, SC

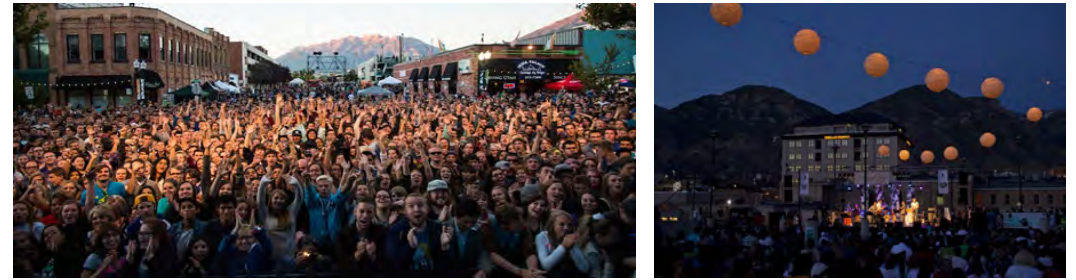


Founded in 2006 by a local restaurateur and famous singer/songwriter Edwin McCain, Euphoria is a four-day event that takes place throughout the entire city of Greenville. The festival, held in September, is comprised of more than 30 different events, including tasting events, intimate musical experiences, food truck rodeos, cooking demonstrations, and wine seminars. Euphoria originated to create a destination event for food, wine, and music enthusiasts across the country, as well as to highlight the culinary and arts community of Upstate South Carolina.

To ensure an incomparable experience, event organizers invite world renowned chefs and songwriters to showcase their art and to lead workshops and/or lectures. Event leadership estimates that the event attracts over 7,000 attendees, with 75 percent comprising of visitors from outside Greenville County.

Event proceeds fund various local non-profits in Greenville.

Rooftop Concert Series Provo, UT



The Rooftop Concert Series began in 2010 with four local leaders in the music scene working together to build an event that would showcase Provo's talent and natural beauty.

The Rooftop Concert Series concept accomplished both of these goals. Due to growing popularity, the event has grown beyond the roofs of downtown to also feature street-level performances. Local officials now estimate that some weekly performances draw attendances in the thousands, a considerable feat given that these events do not take place in privately promoted venues.

2019 marked the series' 10th Anniversary and final year of operation. In its last several years, the event was able to garner substantial support from local restaurants and music venues, receiving tens of thousands of dollars in sponsorship revenues and in-kind services (i.e. free use of event venues).

Concerts took place the first Friday of every month from July through September. According to the organizers, the goal of the concert series was to attract people downtown and change the perception and reputation of the area.



9. Festivals: Cultural and Music Events

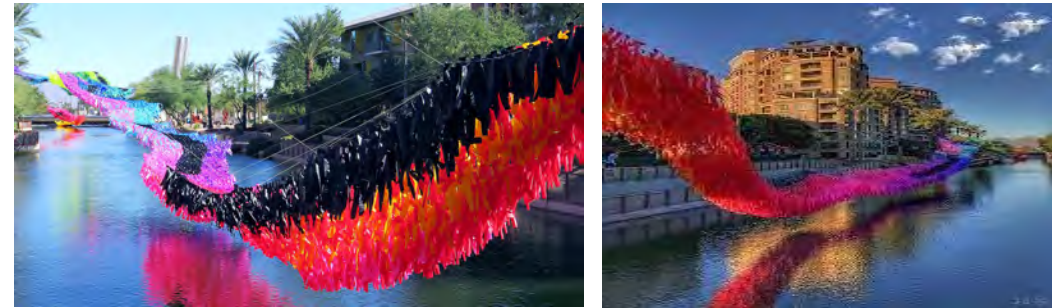
Palm Springs Health Festival



The Palm Springs International Health and Wellness Festival is a 3-day interactive and educational festival showcasing sustainable and holistic living with a low cost \$5.00 admission. The inaugural event was held at the Palm Springs Air Museum in November 2015, and is intended to showcase Palm Springs as a world leader in health fitness. Event planners estimate attendance in the first year approximated 7,500 attendees, but fully expect it to grow to over 20,000 within ten years and foresee moving to the Palm Springs Convention Center to accommodate the growth.

Some of the unique aspects of the Festival include an adult obstacle course, a bicycle agility course, NFL player autograph signings, craft beer offerings, healthy/organic food samplings from local restaurants, and educational seminars.

Canal Convergence Scottsdale, AZ



Developed by Scottsdale Arts, a non-profit organization that serves as the primary coordinator for the arts in Scottsdale, Canal Convergence (pictured left) is a free public event that highlights the importance of sustainability through temporary art installations. The event's activity is primarily concentrated around the Arizona Canal, which bisects downtown Scottsdale. Ten to 15 temporary installations are designed and installed by nationally recognized artists are set up around the Canal. The event attracted approximately 56,200 total attendees in 2016, 50 percent of which were from outside of Scottsdale.

The event costs approximately \$500,000 to organize and manage, and Scottsdale Arts representatives indicated that they would like additional funding to attract the participation of even more well-known artists. The event also features live music, hands-on family friendly activities and beer, food and wine gardens. Notably, the event has grown from two to ten days since 2010.



9. Festivals: Recap

With the development of one or more new festivals, Evansville could attract tens of thousands of people from beyond Tri-County area, including target demographics such as young people, families, and minority groups.

Visit Evansville will need to work with local stakeholders and the implementation partners listed previously to optimally promote these events in the future.

We recommend the following timeline for the projects discussed above.

In 1 to 3 years:

- Initiative a citywide planning group and identify preferred annual festival option.
- Being specific planning for citywide event, including partner/sponsorship acquisition, site selection, and fundraising.
- Select one or more additional event concepts that align with Talent 2025 goals and begin planning and collaborative efforts with relevant partners.
- Form regional event entity in partnership with appropriate parties in Warrick County, Henderson County, and Posey County.
- Host first one or more years of new citywide festival.
- Host first one or more years of other new festivals.

In 4 to 6 years:

- Grow citywide event into a nationally acclaimed event that is also a leading room night contributor for the community.
- Consider development of one or more events that align with Talent 2025 goals.

1 – Citywide Festival



2 – Additional Festivals

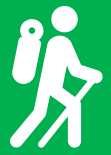


3 – Regional Event Strategies



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena in Detroit at dusk. The arena's distinctive curved, metallic facade is illuminated from within, and a large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of it. The sky is filled with soft, orange and blue clouds. In the background, other city buildings are visible, including a tall skyscraper on the right. The text "10 OUTDOOR AND ECO TOURISM" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

10 OUTDOOR AND ECO TOURISM



10. Outdoor: Introduction

The outdoor and adventure tourism industry is growing rapidly and has had measurable effects on numerous destinations worldwide. According to Allied Market Research, the outdoor adventure tourism market was valued at \$586.3 billion in 2018, and is projected to reach \$1,626.7 billion by 2026, reflecting an annual growth rate of 13.3 percent between 2019 to 2026. It is expected that couples and families will account for much of this growth, with travel party leaders generally between 30 and 41 years of age. “Soft” adventure tourism (casual outdoor excursions such as leisure bike rides and camping), is expected to grow significantly during this time period.

Outdoor adventure travel is ideally positioned to respond to post-pandemic conditions quickly due to its core elements — distance from crowded areas; natural settings; hiking, biking, climbing and rafting in small private parties. Research from Destination Analysts suggests pent up demand for outdoor activities, as surveyed travelers indicated canoeing, kayaking or rafting as their most anticipated travel passion once conditions for travel are safe again. Hiking finished third, camping fourth, and fishing fifth out of a list of 40+ selectable activities.

The Tourism Master Plan includes a focus on Outdoor and Eco Tourism due to four important factors – 1) the outdoor and adventure tourism segment is rapidly growing worldwide across all age groups; 2) outdoor travel trips are well positioned for a strong rebound following the pandemic relative to other types of travel; 3) outdoor destination development would strongly align with community goals for improving the area’s health and wellness; and, 4) outdoor experiences are typically a primary feature of popular mid-sized leisure markets such as Chattanooga, Greenville, Asheville, and Lexington.

Analysis of existing outdoor and ecotourism assets is presented on the following page, followed by recommendations for tourism-related investment to further elevate this segment in the Evansville-Vanderburgh County destination.



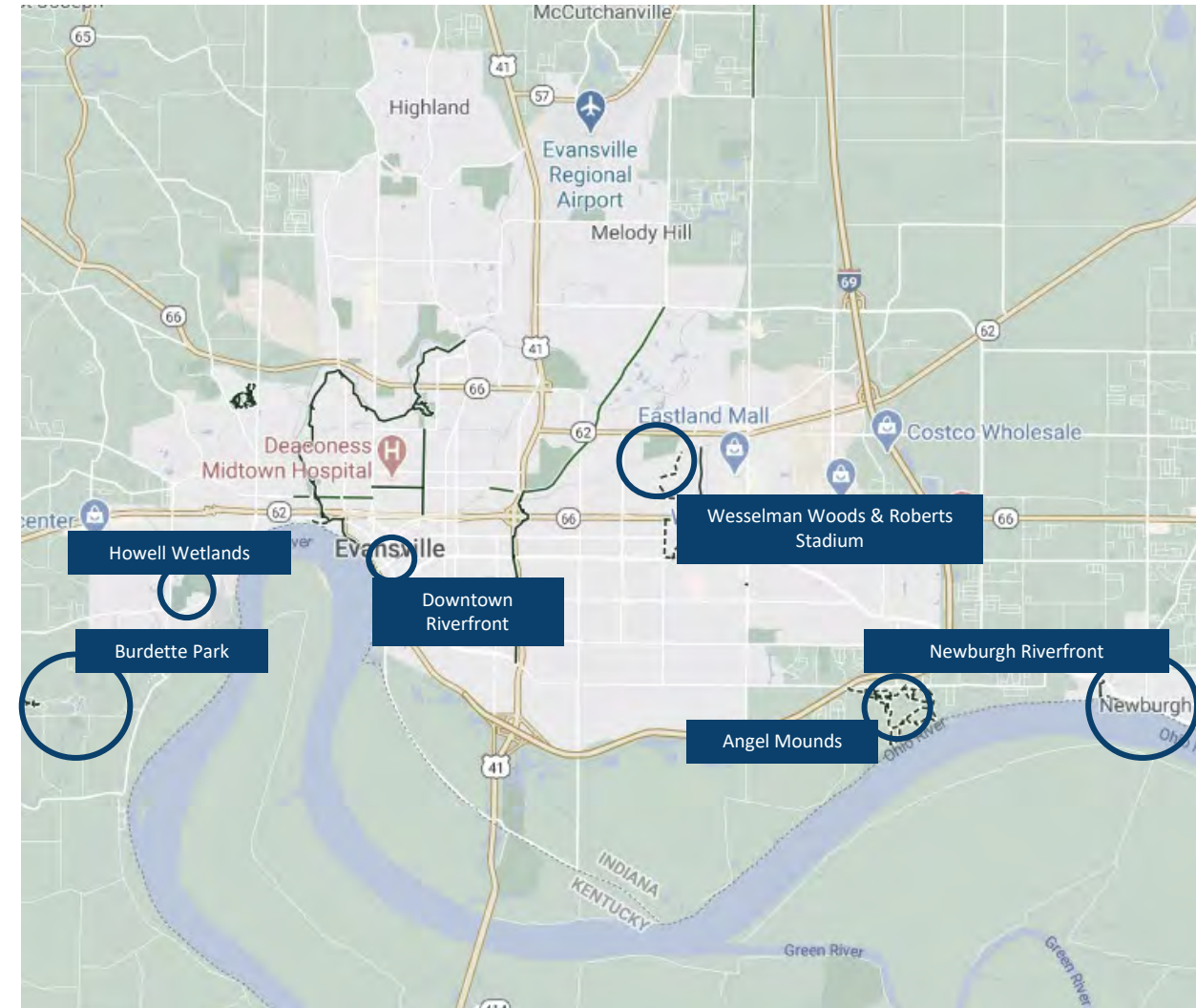


10. Outdoor: Overview of Existing Assets

We begin with an overview of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County area's existing outdoor recreation assets. As shown in the adjacent map, key attractions include Burdette Park and Howell Wetlands to the west, the Ohio Riverfront in downtown, the Wesselman Woods and Roberts Stadium site to the northeast, and Angel Mounds and the Newburgh Riverfront to the east.

Management of both Burdette Park and Wesselman Woods have proposed transformational visions for their respective attractions. A zipline experience, year-round ski attraction, and treehouse accommodation opportunities for Burdette Park will be discussed further herein, followed by an evaluation of potential expansion opportunities at Wesselman Woods that could include new walkthrough exhibit experiences, public art installations, and an expanded children's playscape. We present more detailed recommendations for investments at both properties herein, followed by case studies that could guide general visions for both projects.

In addition, a modest network of trails throughout the destination gives visitors and residents opportunities to bike, skateboard, walk, and jog. With a length of 9.8 miles, Pigeon Creek Greenway Passage converses downtown along the Riverfront and represents the longest and most notable trail today. Plans also exist to expand this trail and add shared lanes and cycle tracks to existing roadways throughout the region. Investments that would be beneficial to the visitor industry, including extending and connecting trails, marketing and promoting these assets, and encouraging trail-adjacent development, will be explored further herein.



10. Outdoor: Burdette Adventure Park

Outdoor Recommendation 1: Burdette Adventure Park

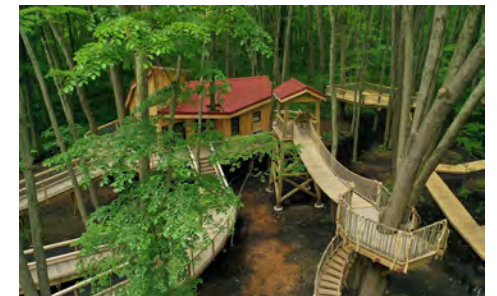
The outdoor tourism segment in Evansville could be significantly benefitted by an all-in-one outdoor adventure park concept at Burdette Park. Current management has a transformative vision for the Park that includes new attractions, overnight accommodations, and improvements of existing assets. Further, CSL’s Community Survey results suggest resident demand for an outdoor adventure park, as the concept received the fourth highest average rating among 13 concepts presented, and the second highest rating among respondents 35 and younger.

Specific recommendations for investment at the Park are presented below:

- **Zipline** – a zipline tour that spans the entirety of the 200-acre park with four station “drops” along the line; cost estimates range between \$1.2 million to \$1.8 million.
- **Obstacle Course** – a canopy-based course that would feature tight ropes, rope bridges, mini ziplines and other elements.
- **Year-Round Ski Hill** – one of the Park’s hill areas could be covered in a special synthetic material to enable skiing and sledding during warmer months; special surfacing would cost approximately \$10 per square foot, while a pulley system could cost between \$30,000 to \$50,000.
- **Treehouse Village** – construction of 12 or more units built up to the tree canopy that could accommodate four guests per treehouse.
- **Lazy River** – new leisure-focused waterway for tubers could be built around existing Aquatic Center.
- Other investments being considered by Park management including tennis court renovations, campground extension for 16 new RV sites, a centrally located ADA compliant family playground, and repurposing of Oasis Mini-Golf into a go-kart track and mini dog park.

Vanderburgh County and Burdette Park officials should begin more detailed cost analyses for these projects, as well as identifying funding sources for these initiatives.

Case study examples for several of these examples are presented on the following page.



Recommendation	Burdette Adventure Park
Detail	Development of zipline, canopy obstacle course, year-round skiing, and treehouse attraction to Burdette Park.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-6 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vanderburgh County • Burdette Park • Private operator *optional*
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5m to \$9m



10. Outdoor: Outdoor Adventure Case Studies

To help guide visions for investment in Burdette Park, we have prepared the following case studies detailing unique outdoor adventure attractions that have been developed nationally.



Synthetic Slopes – Burnsville, MN

Opened in 2016, the synthetic slopes at Buck Hill features frictionless bristles manufactured by Neveplast in Italy. It is estimated that the surfacing costs approximately \$10 per square foot to purchase and install. In total, management estimates the project cost just over \$1.0 million. Admission costs \$14 for weekdays and \$22 for weekends, and a majority of attendance consists of groups and classes. At peak times, the hill hosts around 100 concurrent skiers and snowboarders on weekends, and many of these are travelers visiting Minnesota.



Boone Creek Outdoor – Lexington, KY

Championed as the first eco tourism destination in Fayette County, KY, Boone Creek is an outdoor adventure destination featuring ziplines, a canopy tour, and paddle board tours. Attraction management estimates that 80 percent of its visitors are from out of town. Boone Creek has recently partnered with area vineyards as part of “Sip and Zip” packages. The Park is considering the addition of a trail for electric bike tours, as well a treehouse overnight accommodation.



Earthjoy Treehouse – Brooksville, KY

Opened in 2007, Earthjoy Treehouse has received national press regarding its three uniquely themed treehouses that can be used for glamping, group events, and weddings. Each property is outfitted with hammocks, countertops, cooking stoves, and multiple bedrooms. The structures were designed by Pete Nelson, an internationally-known treehouse builder. Overnight rates at these properties range between \$200 and \$300 per night, and accommodations can be booked online. Earthjoy also features 200 acres for hiking, as well as tree climbing lessons.



Navitat – Knoxville, TN and Asheville, NC

Opened in 2010, Navitat is a premier tree-based zipline experience in Asheville, North Carolina. There are two zipline tours available; the Treetop Tour, which has six ziplines, two bridges, a rappel, and a spiral staircase, and the Mountaintop Tour, which features a massive high flying zipline tour with three side-by-side "racing style" ziplines, the longest of which stretches more than 3,600-feet and is 350-feet above the forest floor. Navitat was able to expand its operations due to a \$500,000 grant from the Asheville CVB. Management recommended creating an all-in-one destination that offers other experiences such as ATV rides, mountain biking, or water-based leisure to incentivize repeat visitation.

10. Outdoor: Wesselman Woods Expansion

Outdoor Recommendation 2: Wesselman Woods Expansion

With plans to eventually expand onto the adjacent former site of the Wesselman Par 3 golf course, Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve management has been exploring opportunities to create an outdoor destination that could combine nature, education, cultural, and entertainment elements. Opportunity also exists to create synergies with the former Roberts Municipal Stadium site to the south, atop which the city of Evansville is planning a significant placemaking initiative that could include an amphitheater, walking trail and other elements. Developing both these sites could create a critical mass of outdoor amenities that could be strongly positioned as a signature visitor asset in Evansville, as well as a large urban park for residents to enjoy.

In speaking with Preserve management and considering CSL’s experience with similar nature centers and outdoor attractions, there are several potential attractions and programs that could be included in the re-purposing of the Par 3 golf course. Some concepts were inspired by respondents to the Community Survey. Recommended initiatives are listed below:

- **Added Forest** – additional wooded forest with navigable trails, adding a unique manmade forest setting adjacent to the largest virgin forest located in city limits in the United States.
- **Outdoor Exhibit Tour** – a guided tour of interactive installations could be developed in the added forest area; these installations could combine art, interactive, and educational components, and could be tied to themes of sustainability and environmentalism. For instance, a solar-powered crystal installation could light up when touched and feature a caption that educates passersby about alternate energy sources.
- **Sculpture Garden** – the expansion land could feature an open area with a sculpture garden and a “music and cultural park” that would feature public art installations that double as playable instruments. The Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana and other local arts groups could assist with procurement and fundraising for this type of project.
- **Edible Forest** – a walkthrough garden with vegetables, fruits, and herbs could serve as an alternative to a farmer’s market experience, wherein visitors could pick out fresh fruit and vegetables for a picnic at Wesselman Woods or the adjacent Roberts Stadium site.



Recommendation	Wesselman Woods Expansion
Detail	Development of added forest, outdoor walkthrough exhibits, sculpture garden, edible forest, event spaces, expanded playscape, and bathhouse.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 to 6 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wesselman Woods • City of Evansville • Visit Evansville • Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana • Local arts groups
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2m to \$4m



10. Outdoor: Wesselman Woods Expansion

continued

- **Event Spaces** – small, rentable cabin spaces or “micro classrooms” should be added to provide the facility with a new revenue generator and group tourism draw. The inventory of new spaces could consist of a mix of inventive structures, such as redeveloped shipping containers, tiny homes, or geodesic domes.
- **Expanded Playscape** – Preserve management would like to enhance the existing children’s playscape by adding tasteful jungle gym features, a potential treehouse exhibit, and other enhancements. We recommend using the Wild Center in the Adirondacks, New York as a guiding vision for potential expansions. This type of attraction should be highly engaging for young visitors, while also blending seamlessly with the natural environment at the Preserve. Such an attraction has the potential to become an iconic youth asset for Evansville and the greater region.
- **Botanical Garden** – Opportunity exists to partner with a local organization to produce a walkthrough botanical garden experience. This type of exhibit could be situated between the Preserve expansion site and the Roberts Stadium site.

To further convey the concepts above, several case study examples are included on the following pages.

Visit Evansville, the city of Evansville and other local stakeholders should begin working with Wesselman Woods spur community support for these projects, as well as assist with identifying and acquiring federal and state funding sources.



10. Outdoor: Outdoor Arts and Culture Case Studies



Wild Walk – Adirondacks, NY

The Wild Walk experience, located at the Wild Center nature preserve, includes a four-story twig tree house with swinging bridges, along with scenic vantage points such as the “spider web” and “eagle’s nest”. Since its opening, Wild Walk has attracted thousands of visitors and has made the Wild Center (the broader nature preserve) a more popular year-round visitor destination. The project took nine years to design and complete and cost approximately \$5.5 million. It opened in 2015.



Empathy Garden – Cernobbio, Italy

A large-scale interactive musical string instrument, the Garden at Lake Como served as an educational tool regarding the importance of sustainable living. These interactive, playable strings (pictured left) enveloped 800 different plants from 20 different plant species. The intent of the Garden was to symbolize the harmony of the sensory experience – for example, depending on your location within the room, the weather outside, and the time of day, the strings would play different sounds.



Vogel Schwartz Sculpture Garden – Little Rock, AR

The Garden is adjacent to Little Rock’s Statehouse Convention Center and also features a botanical garden, an Eastern-styled shrine, natural terraces and various walkways. The design creates a more intimate space to view smaller works within the Riverfront Park and is ideal for hosting receptions. The Garden is privately funded by the local Vogel Schwartz Foundation. Private donations and proceeds from the annual Fine Art Sculpture Show and Sale fund the procurement and installation of the new sculptures.



Music Box Village – New Orleans, LA

The Music Box Village in New Orleans was created in 2013 by New Orleans Airlift – an artist driven non-profit - to provide residents and visitors with an interactive, equitable art park that could double as an exciting and immersive concert venue capable of hosting a highly diverse catalog of programming. Surrounding the central spectator area, each of the installations in the Village’s music garden doubles as musical instruments. This creates a dynamic 360-degree musical experience that allows for musical duels, dances, and cross-genre collaborations that cannot be replicated at other live music venues. It is estimated that the attraction draws tens of thousands of visitors per year.

10. Outdoor: Trail Completions and Expansions

Outdoor Recommendation 3: Trail Completions and Expansions

We know that the Walnut Street enhancements are already being constructed and will undergo continued improvements over the next several years. The track will span from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to Vann Avenue, and will provide downtown access to the former Roberts Municipal Stadium site from downtown Evansville, both areas with significant development tourism-related development potential. A planned Oak Hill Road bike lane will also add significant amount of trail mileage going northeast.

Once completed, opportunity will exist to market these trails to visitors, and then it will be important to begin planning for additional trail developments with even more visitor industry potential. The following project have been proposed or preliminarily planned in the past, and considering the analyses presented previously, each would have significant benefits for the local visitor industry.

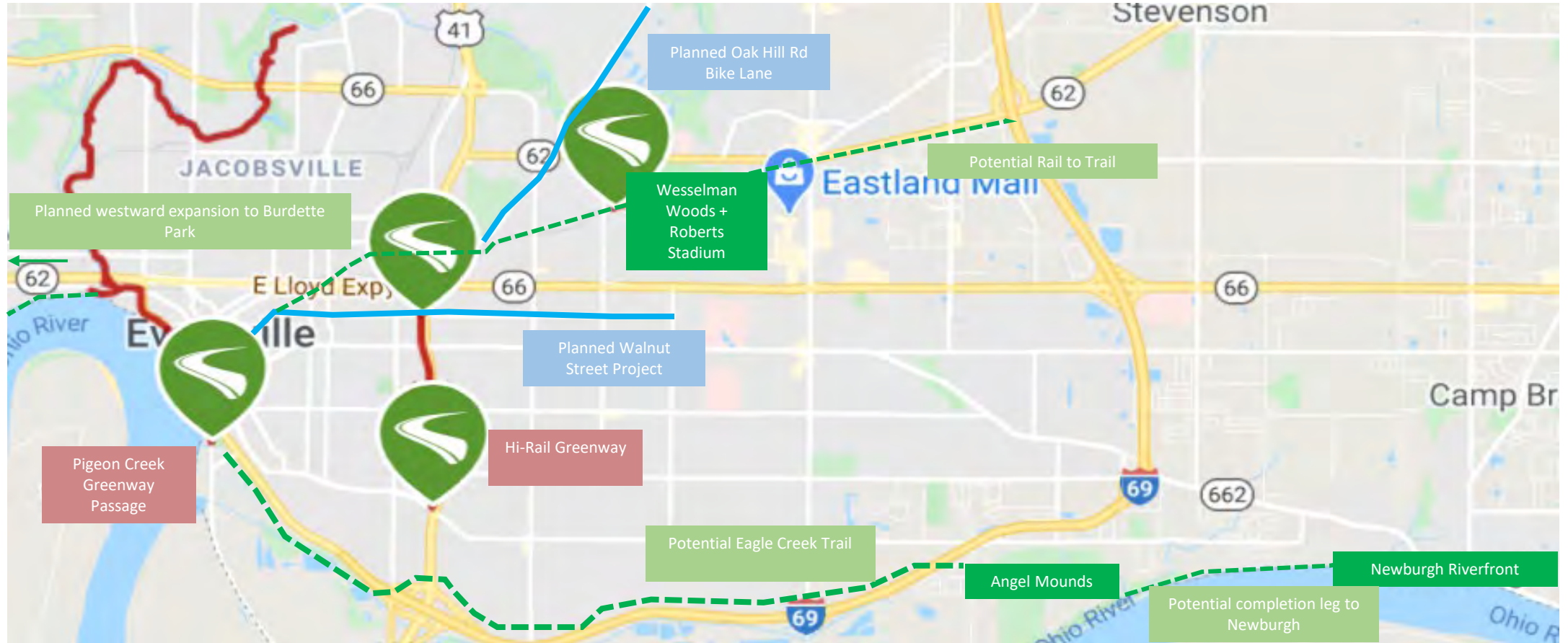
- **Eagle Creek Trail** – would run parallel with the Riverfront and connect downtown Evansville with Angel Mounds. Efforts should then be made to connect Eagle Creek with the existing Pigeon Creek Trail, providing a seamless connection from Evansville to Angel Mounds and Newburgh.
- **Extension of Pigeon Creek Greenway Passage** – Long-term MPO plans include a westward connection of Pigeon Creek to Burdette Park. This connection would provide a fittingly active mode of transportation to the envisioned outdoor adventure park.
- **Rail to Trail** – Opportunity exists to develop the former rail line that runs from downtown to Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve. Working with a non-profit such as Rails-to-Trails could lead to the design and development of a greenway connection that could then possibly create a circuit with the Walnut Street project.
- **I-69 Connection to Henderson** – with plans to develop a new I-69 bridge connecting Evansville with Henderson, Kentucky to the south, visitor industry stakeholders should support the Evansville Trails Coalition in advocating for shared-use infrastructure along the new roadway. A designated bike lane or walled off cycle track would create an important connection to the south that would enable a connection with the planned 430-mile Ohio Valley Trail in the long-term.



Recommendation	Trail Completions and Extensions
Detail	Complete proposed Eagle Creek Trail, as well as extension to Newburgh, in addition to “rail to trail” initiative that could reach Wesselman Woods and beyond.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 to 10 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to Significant
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Evansville • Evansville Trails Coalition • Visit Evansville • Local businesses/corporation
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$3m to \$4m



10. Outdoor: Existing Evansville Trails and Opportunities



As shown above, by completing the proposed Eagle Creek Trail and Rail to Trail projects, in addition to the planned Oak Hill Rd and Walnut Street projects, the Evansville area would have a tens-of-miles long network of greenway passage that could connect downtown with the potential transformation at Wesselman Woods and Roberts Stadium, as well as the scenic Newburgh Riverfront. A broader regional perspective of trail opportunities is presented on the following page.



10. Outdoor: I-69 Connection & Regional Trail Opportunities

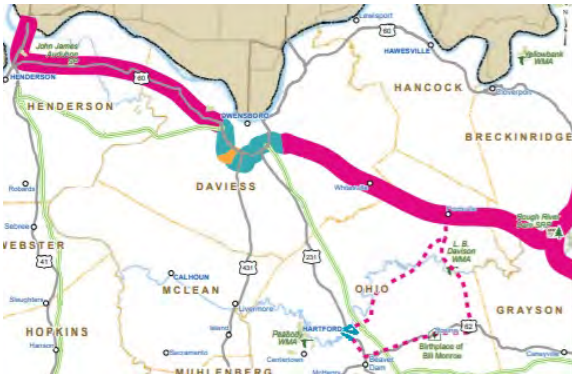
I-69 Alternative



American Discovery Trail



Ohio Valley Trail



Additional comments and recommendations regarding broader regional trail opportunities include:

I-69 Alternative - As noted previously, the I-69 bridge construction could provide safe passageway for riders going to/from Kentucky and Indiana with the inclusion of a cycle track or designated bike lane. This important River crossing could play an important role in future regional trail developments, including eventual connections to US Bike Route 37 and Ohio Valley Trails in Henderson to the south.

American Discovery Trail – Evansville is already on the American Discovery Trail (ADT) route, an east-west cross-country bike trail. The Eagle Creek Trail would provide more scenic and safe passage to downtown Evansville than the current route through Memorial Parkway. Developing this trail and prioritizing more aggressive marketing of the ADT is recommended. Warrick County, through which the ADT also traverses, should be seen as a collaborative partner in leading trail developments that would better the Trail experience.

Ohio Valley Trail and US Bike Route 37 – two planned extensive bike trail networks are being planned in Kentucky to the south, both of which would use Henderson as a key node in their routes. Evansville leadership, the Trails Coalition, and Henderson County decisionmakers should work together to identify ways to support these developments and consider them as significant long-term tourism product developments.

With added trail inventory and new and/or stronger connections to regional trails, it will be important to promote, program, and enhance these this new product. Specific recommendations regarding these types of initiatives are provided on the following page.



10. Outdoor: Trail Planning for The Visitor Industry

Outdoor Recommendation 4: Trail Planning for The Visitor

The following initiatives are designed to better position the numerous trail-related projects for the visitor industry, followed by a “best practices” case study of the Prizma Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville, South Carolina.

Signature Trailheads – With added trail inventory, creating a frictionless experience for visitors to access these trails will be important. As such, future trail heads should feature elements such as bike share docks, map kiosks, public art, and/or pocket parks to help distinguish themselves to visitors and provide directions for the trail experience.

Creative Event Concepts – The Trails Coalition, Visit Evansville, Downtown Evansville and other entities should work to develop special events that would showcase existing trails and future trail extensions. Building on event activity that has been organized in the past by the Trails Coalition, possible event concepts could include a concert series that takes place at various stages along the Trail. Other concepts include neon night rides, races, themed charity rides, and other concepts.

Promoting - A strong managing entity representing the extended Pigeon Creek/Eagle Creek Trail and possibly other trails will be critical in executing and promoting many of the initiatives discussed herein. Referencing Greenville’s Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail, Greenville County created a “Greenways” office to manage and promote the development of the Trail. Over the years, this office has helped organize large events, raised \$100,000 per year in naming rights (from Prisma Health), developed an assortment of marketing collateral (such as the “The Carrot”), and advocated for the continued expansion of the Trail to neighboring counties, among other initiatives.

Packaged Tours – The Trails Coalition expressed interest in partnering with Visit Evansville to organize group rides for visiting convention groups. Preliminary discussions regarding this type of partnership should begin in the near future.

Commercial Pockets - As the inventory of trails in the Evansville area is further developed, opportunities for private sector investment in the form of bike shops, cafes, breweries and other appealing businesses will emerge. Located along the Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville (SC), for example, are a number of highly unique commercial areas, including a small organic grocery store/café establishment and a district called Hampton Station featuring breweries, art studios, and an area for food trucks. For the network of Evansville trails to become a viable attraction and experience, area leadership should work to identify opportunities to create small commercial nodes along the Trail through economic incentives and master planning efforts. Potential project ideas include food truck gathering areas, farmers markets, redevelopment of blighted properties into studios or galleries for the creative sector, and other solutions.

Recommendation	Trail Planning for The Visitor
Detail	Bike share, events, marketing, and economic development to complement trail developments..
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 to 6 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Evansville Evansville Trails Coalition Visit Evansville Downtown Evansville
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n/a

10. Outdoor: Case Study - Greenway Development for The Visitor Industry



Swamp Rabbit Trail Greenville, SC



The Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Bike Trail that leads from the Reedy River has also been highly impactful and has spurred developments congruent with many recent trends in the visitor industry, such as organic cafes, breweries, and Hampton Station (a craft brew and artisan campus). In fact, due to the Trail's growing popularity and promotion of health and fitness, the Greenville Health System acquired naming rights for the Trail for \$100,000 per year. In total, nearly \$2.8 million has been invested in the Trail's development since 2009, which includes a significant \$1.0 million in marketing expenditures.

The Trail is managed by Greenville Greenways, who also publishes "The Carrot" (pictured right) a quarterly publication promoting the businesses and events along the Trail. Future plans for the Trail include an expansion to surrounding counties, an overhead zip line attraction, and music festivals running the length of the Trail.

The Carrot – Publication promoting the businesses and events along the Trail.



COLOR-CODED DESCRIPTIONS:

- BAKERIES & CAFES
- BEER & BREWERIES
- COMMERCIAL KITCHENS
- FARMERS MARKETS
- GROCERIES
- ICE CREAM
- JUICE BARS
- RESTAURANTS
- SPECIALTY RETAIL
- CARROT SPONSORS

- A** Travelers Rest
- B** Furman
- C** Northwest Greenville
- D** Downtown (College St. to Washington)
- E** Downtown (Washington to Broad St.)
- F** Downtown (South of Broad St.)
- G** Downtown (Augusta St. & South Main (West End))
- H** Augusta Road
- I** Fountain Inn

10. Outdoor: Mountain Biking Course

Outdoor Recommendation 5: Mountain Bike Trail – Site TBD

According to local stakeholders, including the Evansville Trails Coalition and surveyed community members, there is interest in a state-of-the-art mountain biking course in Evansville. A mountain biking course in nearby Booneville has been a draw for mountain bike enthusiasts in recent years, but with a more populous market and a larger critical mass of tourism draws, opportunity may exist to build a more attractive and popular product in Evansville.

Mountain biking is a lucrative tourism market. In fact, according to the Journal of Vacation Marketing, mountain bike tourists are predominately middle-aged affluent males that take an average of five short break trips annually of about 400 miles per trip on average during the spring and summer months, and in the process spend approximately US\$400 per trip.

Potential sites for this type of course include Angel Mounds, where they have hosted mountain bike races in the past, as well as Burdette Park. Other sites should be identified in the near future, and planning and design should begin sometime within the next one to three years. To make the most of small parcels of land, consideration could be given to implementing wooden structures throughout the course similar to those at Copper Harbor Trails in Michigan (shown in the adjacent image).

It is estimated that these structured courses could cost \$80,000 per mile, so a five-mile loop would cost approximately \$400,000.



Recommendation	Mountain Biking Trail – Site TBD
Detail	Select site for development of a high-quality mountain biking trail for outdoor enthusiasts.
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 to 5 years
Tourism Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate
Implementors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evansville Trails Coalition Visit Evansville Angel Mounds Relevant property owners
Total Costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$200k to \$500k



10. Outdoor: Recap

Outdoor tourism investment represents a key opportunity to improve the destination product in Evansville while also addressing key health and wellness goals of the community. With access to signature adventure park, an expanded nature center, miles of quality of bike trails, creative and aggressive programming of the trails, and a new mountain biking course, Evansville could become an acclaimed outdoor tourism hub within several years that offers attractions for both casual outdoor enthusiasts and outdoor adventure fanatics.

As product is developed, Visit Evansville will need to consider targeted marketing initiatives to highlight these products, and to reach the outdoor traveler demographic.

We recommend the following timeline for the projects discussed above.

In 1 to 3 years:

- Initiate collaboration between the Trails Coalition, Visit Evansville, Downtown Evansville, and the MPO to develop a strong marketing presence for the existing and eventually expanded Pigeon Creek Greenway Passage.
- Begin planning and identify funding sources for Burdette Park and Wesselman Woods investments.
- Coordinate Wesselman Woods with the City of Evansville regarding Stadium site plans and Wesselman Woods expansion plans.
- Select a site for new mountain biking course.
- Advocate for completion of Eagle Creek Trail, I-69 connection, and “Rail to Trail” project.

In 4 to 6 years:

- Develop new Burdette Adventure Park and Wesselman Woods attractions.
- Develop new mountain biking course.
- Create new events and incentivize business development along Pigeon Creek/Eagle Creek Trail.

In 10 years:

- Continue to lengthen the Pigeon Creek Greenway Passage.
- Identify opportunities to connect to regional trails in Henderson, Owensboro, and other areas.

1 – Burdette Adventure Park



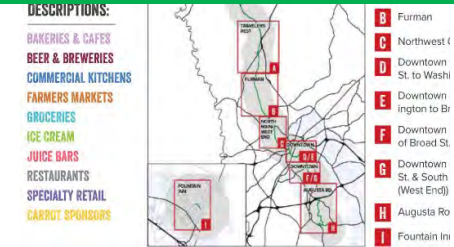
2 – Wesselman Expansion



3 – Trail Developments



4 – Visitor Planning for Trails



5 – Mountain Biking Course



An aerial photograph of the Ford Center arena at dusk. The arena's exterior is a mix of grey panels and glass, with the "Ford FORD CENTER" logo visible. A large crowd of people is gathered on the sidewalks and plaza in front of the arena. The sky is a mix of dark blue and orange, with scattered clouds. In the background, other city buildings are visible, including a tall, modern skyscraper on the right. The overall scene is a vibrant urban setting during the "golden hour" of sunset.

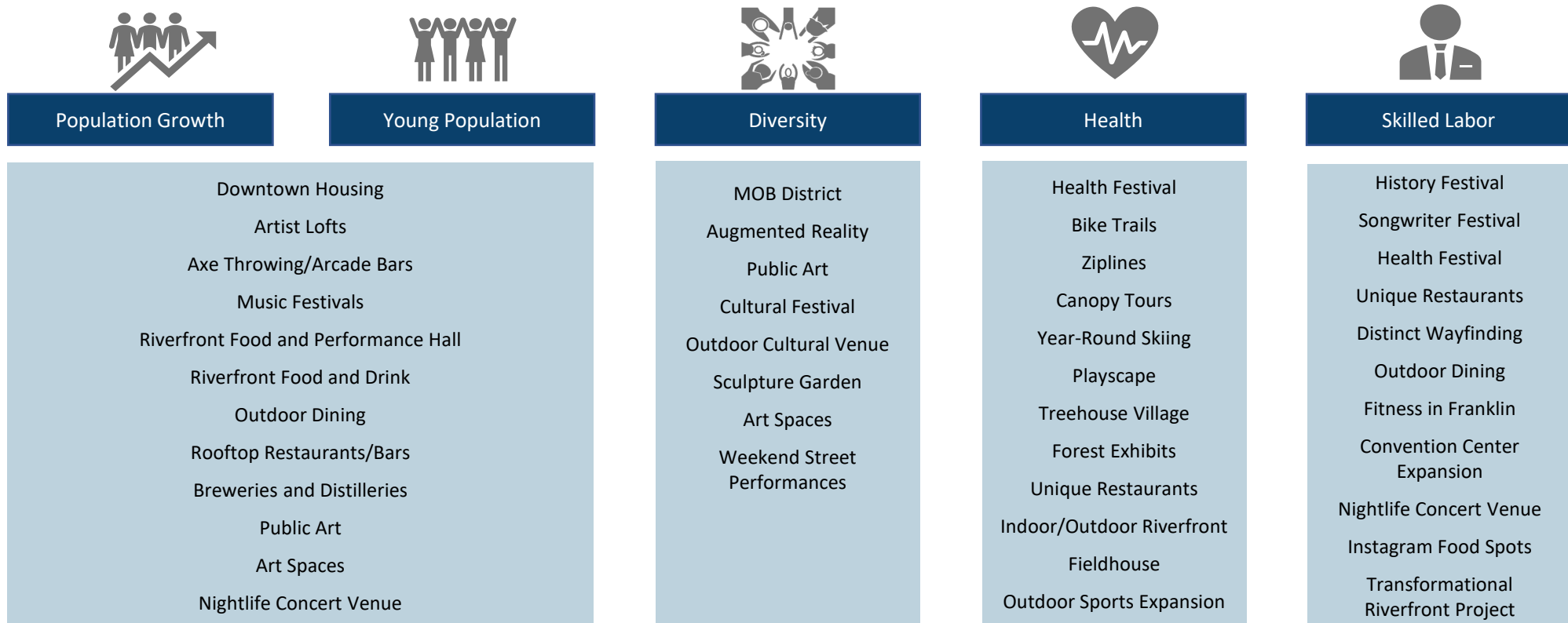
11 ADDRESSING COMMUNITY GOALS

Tourism Master Plan Recommendations

The image below highlights one of the most important facets of the Tourism Master Plan. While the Plan is intentionally focused on assets, programs and policies that can expand the economic impact of the visitor industry in Vanderburgh County, the reality is these efforts also align with broader community goals of growing the population base, attracting a next generation skilled workforce, attracting new businesses, increasing destination diversity and providing opportunities for residents to lead healthy lifestyles.

The efforts undertaken to fund and implement the recommendations presented herein need to be shouldered by a broad set of stakeholders. While Visit Evansville can lead the effort to market and sell the destination, it will take a variety of public and private organizations and businesses to realize the Tourism Master Plan goals. We strongly recommend that Visit Evansville, in partnership with city and county representatives, begin the process of identifying work groups to focus on each of the six areas of recommendation. A point person within Visit Evansville could be identified to lead these efforts with planning and staff support from the broader organization.

We look forward to assisting in any way with these efforts.



11. Tourism Master Plan: Addressing Community Goals

The image below highlights one of the most important facets of the Tourism Master Plan. While the Plan is intentionally focused on assets, programs and policies that can expand the economic impact of the visitor industry in Vanderburgh County, the reality is these efforts also align with broader community goals of growing the population base, attracting a next generation skilled workforce, attracting new businesses, increasing destination diversity and providing opportunities for residents to lead healthy lifestyles.

The efforts undertaken to fund and implement the recommendations presented herein need to be shouldered by a broad set of stakeholders. While Visit Evansville can lead the effort to market and sell the destination, it will take a variety of public and private organizations and businesses to realize the Tourism Master Plan goals. We strongly recommend that Visit Evansville, in partnership with city and county representatives, begin the process of identifying work groups to focus on each of the six areas of recommendation. A point person within Visit Evansville could be identified to lead these efforts with planning and staff support from the broader organization.

We look forward to assisting in any way with these efforts.

