

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Fort Wayne/Allen County

**TOURISM
MASTER PLAN**

A 10-year vision advancing tourism

What is the Tourism Master Plan

Fort Wayne and Allen County have embarked on an ambitious 10-year vision: to become a premier destination for visitors from all walks of life. We've listened to the dreams of our community, partners, stakeholders, and visitors – and identified our collective wants and needs for Fort Wayne and Allen County's tourism transformation. The Tourism Master Plan is the roadmap for making these dreams a reality. It's *Visit Fort Wayne's* promise to residents and visitors – to be the driving force in creating a rich, diverse, and inclusive destination experience.

Facilitated by the Tourism Strategy Practice at CSL International (CSL), the Tourism Master Plan represents a transformative blueprint that positions tourism as a catalyst for post-Covid recovery in the tourism industry, recognizes underserved areas of our community, and builds upon our quality of life for residents. By focusing on economic revitalization, enhanced community engagement, sustainability, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage throughout our neighborhoods, the plan seeks to forge a new path for tourism that benefits both visitors and locals alike.

Strategic Focus

To realize the vision for Fort Wayne / Allen County tourism, we have defined twenty Tourism Master Plan recommendations, prioritized by the TMP Steering Committee into six strategic areas of focus:

- **Foundational**
- **Downtown Fort Wayne**
- **Group Business**
- **Regional Tourism Development**
- **Riverfront Development**
- **Tourism Product Development**

Support of all Tourism Assets in Fort Wayne / Allen County

As Fort Wayne / Allen County sees growth through efforts outlined in the Tourism Master Plan, *Visit Fort Wayne* is also committed to supporting existing partners and tourism assets as they look to the future. As there are opportunities for growth and development at tourism partner attractions, facilities, venues, and organizations, *Visit Fort Wayne* will advocate and support those efforts. Our hope is that the Tourism Master Plan can also support and bring awareness to the tourism industry.

Vision

In 2033, Fort Wayne / Allen County will be a standout and sought-after, welcoming, vibrant, thriving, inclusive, and universally accessible mid-sized midwestern destination visited by curious explorers, families, and group visitors who come to Allen County because it offers a wide variety of unique and memorable experiences which makes them feel enriched, inspired, and fulfilled.



Foundational

How do we define and deliver on becoming an accessible destination – a foundational value our community identifies as the underlying basis for all we believe and all we do?

Recommendations:

- **Accessible Destination**

GOAL: Transform Fort Wayne / Allen County into a globally recognized, premier accessible destination.

- **Potential Actions**

GOAL: Undergo a thorough assessment of current accessibility infrastructure and services, and develop a 5 year plan for implementation.



Downtown Fort Wayne

How do we continue to create a uniquely connected, walkable, and entertaining place for residents and visitors to enjoy now, and for generations to come in Downtown Fort Wayne?

Recommendations:

- **Downtown Connections, Development, and Branding**

GOAL: Continue to transform Downtown Fort Wayne into a premier destination that offers vibrant and inclusive urban experiences, attracting visitors, residents, and businesses.

- **Winter Activation**

GOAL: Transform Fort Wayne / Allen County into a premier accessible winter destination by creating engaging and memorable winter experiences for residents and visitors.



Group Business

How do we continue to elevate Fort Wayne / Allen County's facilities and venues as destinations to host exceptional conferences, meetings, conventions, tournaments, and events for business and leisure travelers?

Recommendations:

- **Allen County War Memorial Coliseum**

GOAL: Continue to develop the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum as a state-of-the-art, multi-purpose facility that serves as a vibrant hub for community events, sports, entertainment, and cultural activities.

- **Grand Wayne Convention Center**

GOAL: Maximize the impact of the Grand Wayne Convention Center as a nationally-recognized venue for meetings, conferences, tournaments, and group events.

- **Sports Tourism**

GOAL: There are two aspects of Fort Wayne / Allen County's Sports Tourism that are equally important, but address different aspects of the opportunity for Fort Wayne / Allen County.

- First is the recommendation for an organization to direct and manage sports events and activities, which we have tentatively called a "**Sports Entity**." The name of this recommendation is not final and will ultimately be changed to reflect the type and format of the organization eventually determined.
- The second is our recommendation for continued **Sports Tourism Investment**, which is focused on the facilities, existing and future, that need to be upgraded, enhanced, or developed to best capture and capitalize on the sports tourism market. Each is presented under the umbrella of Sports Tourism.



Regional Tourism Development

How do we collaborate county-wide to attract economic development that delivers high-quality tourism assets and experiences to enhance the quality of life for residents, spreads visitor impact, and celebrates our community's unique personality and flavors?

Recommendations:

- **Air Service**
GOAL: Continue to position Fort Wayne International Airport (FWA) as the region's first choice for air travel, retaining current air service routes while expanding available seats and flight frequency in the Fort Wayne / Allen County market.
- **Culinary Destination**
GOAL: Establish Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier culinary, craft beverage, and wine destination that offers a diverse and exceptional experience for residents and visitors, showcasing the city's local flavors, innovation, and vibrant food and beverage culture.
- **Regional Tourism Asset Development**
GOAL: Develop and position Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier tourism destination renowned for its unique and authentic collection of tourism assets, events, and festivals.
- **Retail & Unique Commercial Districts**
GOAL: Establish Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier Midwest destination for unique and authentic, retail and commercial districts that are universally accessible and enhance the quality of life for residents and create a memorable experience for visitors.
- **Trail and River Experiences** (*also in Riverfront*)
GOAL: Establish Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier destination for inclusive outdoor enthusiasts by providing exceptional hiking, biking, and water trail experiences that promote health, well-being, and environmental stewardship.



Riverfront Development

How do we continue to create beautiful and recreational experiences along Fort Wayne / Allen County's natural assets—our rivers—that inspire, entertain, and bring both residents and visitors back time and time again?

Recommendations:

- **Riverfront Activations**
GOAL: Transform Fort Wayne / Allen County's riverfront into a long-term dynamic and engaging destination that offers a wide range of activities, fosters community connection, and drives economic vitality, while preserving its natural beauty and promoting sustainability.
- **Riverfront Development**
GOAL: Position Fort Wayne / Allen County's riverfront as a leading regional destination known for its vibrant attractions, engaging visitor experiences, and seamless integration with the local community.
- **Trail and River Experiences**
GOAL: Establish Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier destination for inclusive outdoor enthusiasts by providing exceptional hiking, biking, and water trail experiences that promote health, well-being, and environmental stewardship.

Tourism Product Development

How do we continue to innovate, develop, and deliver major infrastructure, large-scale projects, events/festivals, and tourism operations/services that deliver a high-quality and cultural experience for residents and visitors, including the necessary support to realize these visions?

Recommendations:

- **Accessible Destination**
GOAL: Transform Fort Wayne / Allen County into a globally recognized premier accessible destination.
- **Family Attraction Product**
GOAL: Attract a prominent family resort or attraction product to Allen County, Indiana, to continue to establish Fort Wayne / Allen County as a premier destination for family vacations.
- **Music Economy**
GOAL: By 2030, Fort Wayne aims to become recognized for its music economy in the United States, known for its vibrant and diverse music scene, exceptional music infrastructure, and support for local talent.
- **Nightlife**
GOAL: Create a dynamic and vibrant nightlife destination in Fort Wayne / Allen County that attracts both residents and visitors, offers a diverse and accessible range of entertainment options, fosters a thriving local arts and music scene, and promotes a safe and inclusive environment.
- **Winter Activation**
GOAL: Transform Fort Wayne / Allen County into a premier accessible winter destination by creating engaging and memorable winter experiences for residents and visitors.
- **Tourism Support**
 - **Destination Development Professional**
GOAL: Hire a person to manage this plan as a road map.
 - **Hospitality Labor Shortage**
GOAL: Position Fort Wayne / Allen County as a leading destination for travel and tourism by addressing the current hospitality industry labor shortage and establishing a robust, highly skilled workforce that delivers exceptional experiences to visitors and residents.
 - **Transportation**
GOAL: Support and recognize the need for expanding transportation (public and private) opportunities and creating access across our community for the benefit of residents and service for visitors, including transportation options to Fort Wayne International Airport (FWA), by supporting local, state, and federal legislative enhancements and funding initiatives for transportation.

Timeline

Following is an illustration of the estimated implementation timing for each of the recommendations. Please note, these estimates are in “order of magnitude” and will be adjusted and updated by the Tourism Master Plan Committee as the project progresses.

Areas of Focus	Tier 1 (1-2 years)	Tier 2 (3-5 years)	Tier 3 (6-10 years)
Foundational			
Accessible Destination			
Downtown Fort Wayne			
Downtown Connections, Development, and Branding			
Winter Activation			
Group Business			
Allen County War Memorial Coliseum			
Grand Wayne Convention Center			
Sports Entity			
Sports Tourism Investment			
Regional Tourism Development			
Air Service Development			
Culinary Destination			
Regional Tourism Asset Development			
Retail & Unique Commercial Districts			
Riverfront Development			
Riverfront Activation			
Riverfront Development			
Trail and River Experiences			
Tourism Product Development			
Accessible Destination			
Family Attraction Product			
Music Economy			
Nightlife			
Winter Activation			
Destination Development Professional			
Hospitality Labor Shortage			
Transportation			

Although each of the recommendations is important, it will be necessary to stagger their activation according to their overall priority and available resources (human, financial, time, and logistics). Tier 1 recommendations are slated for immediate near-term activation (i.e. 2024-2026), while Tier 2 and Tier 3 recommendations will follow according to available resources.

Once a recommendation is activated, its ten-year plan starts with the timing envisioned for each of the major activities estimated from the start year, which might be 2025 or 2028 etc.

Our Role

As a Destination Marketing and Management Organization, *Visit Fort Wayne* plays a crucial role in promoting and marketing Fort Wayne and Allen County to attract tourists, new residents, businesses, and investors. In addition, *Visit Fort Wayne* manages the destination where and when possible, to deliver a high-quality experience for visitors and a high quality of life for residents. *Visit Fort Wayne* will act as a Tourism Advocate and Champion on behalf of Fort Wayne / Allen County, the industry, its visitors, and its residents.

Realizing the Vision

To realize the vision of the Tourism Master Plan, *Visit Fort Wayne* needs the support of the community and many partners who will play a role in the recommendations.

We hope this plan empowers the community to think big, and creates a sense of ownership, pride, and shared responsibility, ultimately leading to a tourism sector that is reflective of the diverse and authentic experiences our region has to offer.

Let's seize the opportunity to advance Fort Wayne's quality of life assets for residents and inspire growth for the future using the economic power of tourism. Let's build for the tourism of tomorrow!

If you have an idea, would like to learn more, or support efforts in funding, please submit the form at VisitFortWayne.com/TourismMasterPlan.



Visit Fort Wayne

The Fort Wayne / Allen County Convention and Visitors Bureau (*Visit Fort Wayne*) is the nonprofit organization whose purpose is to expand Fort Wayne / Allen County's economy by attracting convention and leisure visitors. Each year, millions of dollars from visitor spending generates increased commerce, sustained jobs, and enhancement of Fort Wayne / Allen County's image.

Impact of Tourism in Fort Wayne / Allen County

Each year, Fort Wayne / Allen County welcomes more than **8.8 million visitors** to experience our exceptional attractions, festivals, arts, parks, and events around the city. Visitors directly spend an estimated **\$995 million** on food, lodging, retail, and entertainment purchases. Tourism generates **\$46.5 million in local tax revenue**.

Tourism is also an economic driver. Tourism employment in Fort Wayne and Allen County sustains and retains **13,626 jobs** with over **\$398 million in paid wages** to tourism industry employees.



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