

News



New future for Ellettsville outlined in ambitious plan

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Listen Now: New future for Ellettsville outlined in ambitious plan

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The Envision Ellettsville Vision Plan, first proposed in 2021, consists of a comprehensive vision for the future to further develop and grow the town. *(Isabella Vesperini)*

After years of living in Bloomington's shadow as the less developed and appealing destination, the town of Ellettsville has big plans to revive the community.

Rachel Peden McCarty's grandparents maintained the [Peden Farm](#) in Ellettsville for years since moving there in 1941. They lived on Maple Grove Road, when there were only seven houses built on a rocky, unpaved road at the time.

"Things were smaller then, so your neighbors, even if there was some distance between, you were still neighbors," she said.

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Rachel Peden McCarty's grandparents have lived in Ellettsville since 1941, and maintain a farm that families can now visit. (Lucas González)

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, Ellettsville's economy was based on agriculture; most residents had farmland they maintained and made business off of. People decided to settle in this area specifically because it was by Jack's Defeat Creek. The water from the creek provided power for waterwheels to operate gristmills for grinding grain and for cutting trees into lumber. Citizens worked with farmers in surrounding areas because it was less convenient to travel by train.

Now, there are many more apartments being built. The population has increased approximately 4.3 percent in the last decade, and approximately [31.5 percent](#) since 2000. [Bloomington's population](#) has increased by about only 14.4 percent since 2000.

"When I was on my very first trip, I drove solo to Ellettsville, [and] a calf ran out of the fence into the road and I hit stop and put the calf into the fence," she said. "That's where Woodgate is located now; it's a big housing development. So there's a lots of change population, neighborhoods."

The year 1987 was a big one for Ellettsville, McCarty said. The Monroe County Fall Festival was held in Ellettsville after years without it, and Good Morning America came to the festival. Around this time, Richland Plaza was developed, and stores like the IGA grocery store and a hardware store filled up this area. The Monroe County Public Library opened an [Ellettsville branch in 1990](#), and a recycling center and senior homes were added to the mix as well.



The IGA grocery store, the Ellettsville Chamber of Commerce office and more have filled up

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Richland Plaza since it was first developed in 1987. *(Isabella Vesperini)*

"We got our first fast food; there it was a two window go both directions drive thru," she said. "We had a wallpaper store, we had a carpet store. So it was a one-stop shop to get anything that you needed for your home."

The plan

The Envision Ellettsville Vision Plan, first proposed in 2021, consists of a comprehensive vision for the future to further develop and grow the town. The plan has five main objectives, including creating safe neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown, a thriving business environment, expanding the parks and trails and driving strategic growth. As part of this plan, Ellettsville is also drafting a [Unified Development Ordinance](#) to provide guidelines for development to make the town more visually appealing.

Christa Curtis, president of the Greater Ellettsville Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber partnered with the Bloomington Monroe County Community Foundation and received a \$30,000 grant to fund the community-driven visioning process. Local businesses, residents, high school students and not-for-profits gave their input on what change they wanted to see.



Christa Curtis, president of the Greater Ellettsville Chamber of Commerce, said the town is in contact with many businesses that want to move in to the downtown area. *(Clayton Baumgarth)*

Read more: [Ellettsville hoping plan can help revive community](#)

"We were being positioned as a community as a place for growth for affordable housing, for new workforce attraction initiatives," she said. "We literally have people knocking on our door. People wanted to build housing developments, they wanted to bring employment opportunities."

Businesses like Bigby Coffee are starting to appear near the downtown area.

"[It's] a great location, right on the corner, drawing people to our downtown," she said. "That's exactly what we want."

The Hoosier Hawaiian is opening this week, and a new carwash is being built. A bed and breakfast may also come to town.

"That's pretty exciting, because not only does it aesthetically improve our town, but it's amenities that we're always looking for," Michael Farmer, Ellettsville town manager, said.



Mike Farmer, Ellettsville town manager, said builders are in the process of constructing a park behind Ellettsville Town Hall and expanding the town's trail network. *(Aubrey Wright)*

More apartment complexes are being built as well.

"We are having a building boom; we're just the tip of the iceberg," he said. "We're annexing to the west, and there's a lot of people that are interested in annexing their properties all around the town. People see a lot of opportunity."

Chris Smith, broker and owner of Remax Acclaimed Properties, said he is working on building a development on 115 acres next to Edgewood High School.

"The concept of new urbanism is everything you need," he said. "You walk out your front door, you can walk to a restaurant, you can walk to a grocery and walk to shopping. You walk to whatever you want to but it's also got room for cars. You still have garages. You still have street parking."



Chris Smith, broker and owner of Remax Acclaimed Properties, said this development will provide more amenities and housing options for Ellettsville residents. *(Devan Ridgway)*

Smith said this development will provide a more stabilized commercial center for Ellettsville while also being about 15 minutes to downtown Bloomington, the Indiana University campus or the stadium. He hopes to build a hotel, assisted living centers, coffee shops, stores and more.

"Conventional development has caused sprawl, has caused traffic problems, congestion because you have to drive everywhere to get anywhere," he said. "Projects like this limit that because they give you everything you need in one place. You can still even go to work. That all is pretty standard. There's still automobiles, still have a stop light, still have roads, but it gives you the chance not to drive as much."

Over the next 10 years of construction, Smith expects to invest over \$300 million on things like builders and contractors. There will be a mix of family homes, town homes and apartments. Smith hopes to price the town homes in the low \$200,000s and single-family homes under \$300,000. Site work will begin sometime in September.



In the next decade, a new development will be built by Edgewood High School, and will include homes, stores and more. *(Isabella Vesperini)*

The Chamber promotes Ellettsville by sponsoring local events, and posts about local businesses and tells stories of the town on social media. But Curtis wants to do more.

"We're working with the Bloomington Economic Development Corporation and other economic development organizations in the county to better tell the story through our communication channels of the town and what we have to offer to attract business," she said.

What residents want

More dining and nightlife options, as well as more childcare and medical services are high on the list of wants.

"All we have is pizza," Ellettsville resident Patty Lewis said. "We do have a Mexican restaurant and I love China Star, but other than pizza, Mexican and Chinese, we'd like family sit-down dining."

Lewis has lived in Ellettsville since 1990 and runs her own hair salon from home. While the downtown area does need to be upgraded, Lewis thinks Ellettsville doesn't need more apartments. She would like things to be more accessible.



Ellettsville resident Patty Lewis said she would like a more diverse selection of restaurants in Ellettsville. (Katy Szpak)

"We want to just run down the road and grab something for dinner. And without having to drive into Bloomington," she said.

Lewis said she is excited the town included developing parks in the Envision Ellettsville plan. She also hopes the plan will help attract and support local vendors at the Fall Festival.

"I love going to festivals and buying my rings; I want to buy from local people instead of the big box," she said. "I think that this Envision Ellettsville thing is going to be really great for people to be able to come in and we can support each other."

Lewis isn't worried about competing businesses that this vision plan may bring into town.

"I've been doing this for 40 years," she said. "My clientele is built."

Curtis has seen more people move to Ellettsville because housing is more affordable than it is in Bloomington. Residents also like the strong sense of community.

"We like a small town, it's quaint," Lewis said. "Everybody knows each other and that's the fun of it. You can go into the IGA (grocery store) and you're going to know people."

When Curtis left Bloomington in 1993, State Road 45/46 wasn't very developed. It's since been widened to four or more lanes.

"Ellettsville was a community that was very disconnected from the rest of the county," she said. "So when I moved back, 46 really created that connection point and opened up this community."

Curtis said historically, Ellettsville also had an outdated utility infrastructure and lack of flood mitigation.

"Some of the things that we were missing were development ordinances, a more holistic land use plan," she said.

Read more: [Ellettsville pauses construction of certain businesses until 2024](#)

Amid plans to grow the town, McCarty thinks older limestone buildings should be preserved. An old cabin from the 1880's on [Vine Street](#) was also moved closer to Town Hall and restored so visitors can learn about its history. The Ellettsville History Center has been closed for a while now, but it contains old photos, newspapers and artifacts.



Built in the 1880's, this cabin was moved to the land behind Ellettsville Town Hall and restored so people can visit and learn its history. *(Isabella Vesperini)*

"I like to preserve photos and memories and stories of what was and is so that we can go back and say, 'this is what we had done and this is where we're going,'" she said.

Curtis said it has been challenging for the town to get funding and adequate resources to fully implement the plan.

"It's a challenge to be Ellettsville in the county because most people think of Bloomington and Bloomington is a bit like a force of nature that sort of pulls everyone along," she said. "And so when things are happening, and decisions are being made, there's a lot of focus on the county government, and the government of Bloomington, and sometimes we're an afterthought. It's frustrating."

Curtis hopes that over the next 10 to 20 years, as Ellettsville grows as a community, more people will visit and enjoy what the town has to offer.

"We recognized that if we didn't have a vision or a plan, all of these other people were really going to design our destiny for us," she said.