

SECTION 8 COMMERCIAL

The focus of the commercial plan is to identify appropriate areas that are convenient and functional for commercial activities while protecting residential areas. The businesses in this category could range from retail stores and restaurants to offices of service establishments. This section discusses existing and future commercial areas as well as various issues relevant to commercial activities.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL CENTERS

Evansville and Vanderburgh County have many commercial areas that range in size and intensity, from large regional centers to those that serve neighborhood residents. The following is a brief description of the larger existing centers.

THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

- Bounded by Pigeon Creek, Lloyd Expressway, Governor and Mulberry Streets, and the Ohio River;
- Is the financial, government and service center for both the community and region;
- The predominant commercial uses are offices and restaurants along with other major facilities such as Casino Aztar, The Centre, and the Evansville Museum.

GREEN RIVER ROAD COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

- Extends from Covert Avenue to north of Theater Drive;
- Major developments include Eastland Mall on the north end and Lawndale and Washington Square Mall on the south end;
- Serves the entire Evansville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as the primary regional center for retail activity.

EAST LLOYD EXPRESSWAY COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

- Extends from Cullen Avenue to I-164, including Virginia Street;
- Major developments (Super Walmart and Target) at the Burkhardt Road and Cross Pointe Boulevard intersections;
- Serves the entire Evansville MSA as a regional center for retail activity.

NORTH FIRST AVENUE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

- On First Avenue between Mill Road and Diamond Avenue;
- Serves residents of the north side as a community shopping center;
- Major developments include North Park Shopping Center and Target.

WEST LLOYD EXPRESSWAY COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

- Between Rosenberger and Boehne Camp;
- Major developments are Super Walmart, Home Depot, Lowes and Stadium 16 Cinema.
- Serves residents of western Evansville/Vanderburgh County, Posey County and southeastern Illinois and USI students as a growing regional commercial center;

DIAMOND AVENUE COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

- Between U.S. 41 and Heidelbach Avenue;
- the major development in this area is Town Center Mall;
- Serves residents of the near north side.

In addition to these major commercial areas, there are numerous neighborhood centers of commercial activity. These include portions of East Division Street, East Morgan Avenue, Fares Avenue, Weinbach Avenue and Kentucky Avenue. There are several areas which have received Community Development Block Grants to stimulate commercial revitalization including North Main Street, and West Franklin Street. The public improvements and assistance provided for the North Main and West Franklin commercial corridors has spurred additional private development and improved their general appearance. These areas have traditional store-front facades.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The issues and concerns related to commercial activities include traffic congestion, adequate parking space, access, storm water drainage, encroachment on residential areas, and revitalization of older commercial areas.

Perhaps the most noticeable problem resulting from commercial development is traffic congestion. The cumulative effect of piecemeal commercial growth has created increased pressures on the transportation system. Correction of these transportation deficiencies around existing commercial areas are often addressed in an incremental fashion through measures that enhance traffic flow and improve safety. Common examples of incremental corrective measures are the construction of medians and turn lanes, closing of median crossovers, restriction of curb cuts or installation of traffic signals. These solutions are often not popular with shoppers and businesses, but are necessary to move traffic safely and efficiently.

Where new commercial developments are proposed or expanded, frontage roads, limited and/or shared curb cuts, and access from side streets should be required. Obviously, where extensive improvements are needed such as acquiring additional right-of-way, installing additional lanes, constructing frontage roads, and other major capital projects, they are preferred over incremental measures that will not totally correct traffic problems. However, cost constraints must also be considered along with the expected traffic flow benefits.

Parking is not a major problem with most commercial developments; however, in older and redeveloping commercial areas, the parking situation can become critical. Problems frequently arise when a house is converted to a commercial use (which has occurred along Covert, Morgan, and First Avenues) or when an existing commercial building changes to a different tenant which requires more parking than is presently possible on the site. Past solutions to these problems have included creating parking in the back or front yard of converted houses, acquiring adjacent lots and demolishing any adjacent structures for parking; or entering into a lease agreement with another nearby landowner for use of existing parking space. All of these solutions have drawbacks which can inhibit commercial development, but the provision of adequate parking is essential.

Another parking concern, the type and design of lots, can significantly impact the environment and the image of commercial areas. All types of parking surfaces, particularly hard surfaces, increase the amount of storm water run-off, limit ground water recharge (the replenishment of the water table and aquifers) and hold/release more solar heat than green or landscaped ground. Gravel parking surfaces (now prohibited by the Zoning Code) are not as visually appealing and can create dust problems that degrade air quality. Parking lot design that incorporates hard, sealed parking surfaces with landscaped islands, and minimizes excess parking spaces (beyond Code requirements) can avoid the creation of storm water run-off and air quality problems, and increase the aesthetic value of commercial areas.

Encroachment of commercial development into residential areas and conversion of houses to commercial uses are often viewed in a negative way by surrounding residents. The typical problems caused by encroachment are increased traffic, provision of adequate parking and change in neighborhood character. Typical problems caused by either residential conversion to commercial uses or areas with narrow commercial lot frontage can include requests for variances to meet code requirements (e.g. parking, setbacks, etc.) and numerous curb cuts in a short distance. Limiting commercial encroachment and conversions in residential areas minimizes these potential impacts.

Where commercial encroachment does occur, protection for residential areas should be required through buffering and creative site design, especially for higher intensity/volume commercial uses. Protective buffering techniques include: structural (e.g. decorative fencing, masonry walls), vegetation (e.g. trees, hedges), and terrain/elevation changes (e.g. earth berm, water features). A combination of these methods would greatly enhance the look and effectiveness of the buffer.

Many areas of Vanderburgh County have severe drainage limitations due to slope and soil types. When this is combined with the large impervious surfaces (roofs and parking lots) in commercial areas, potentially severe surface water run-off problems are created. As part of proper site design, developments that involve larger amounts of impervious surfaces must submit a drainage plan to the Board of Public Works or the County Drainage Board, and smaller developments are reviewed by the Site Review Committee to ensure that drainage problems do not occur. The drainage policy of the City and County is that the post development run-off rate shall not exceed predevelopment run-off.

Revitalization efforts and investments are needed to maintain and improve older commercial areas. A concern is the recent trend of businesses moving to outlying commercial centers leaving large vacant buildings in more established areas. This outward movement not only casts doubt on the stability of the remaining businesses in these older commercial centers, but also affects the stability and perception of the surrounding neighborhoods. In particular, the loss of establishments selling essential goods and services (e.g. grocery stores) can accelerate neighborhood decline. Smaller retail businesses should be offered incentives and be encouraged to locate in and share these large vacant commercial buildings. Older commercial areas need periodic upgrades (e.g. facade changes, modern signage, and/or revised access) so that they are competitive, appealing, and economically viable. For these older areas to remain competitive, the decision making process for rezonings must evaluate the impact of new commercial areas on established areas.

FUTURE COMMERCIAL GROWTH

The site requirements used in this Plan to designate areas for future commercial growth are: location on high visibility/high traffic volume roads; easy, safe access; supporting population; and minimal site preparation. High visibility locations are typically along existing commercial corridors, and other primary routes that have documented high traffic counts. Easy, safe access is accomplished with adequate turn lanes, frontage roads and where possible, driveways on lower classified streets. Depending on the type of business, the supporting population is available at the regional, community or neighborhood level. Site preparation involves extension of utilities (if they are currently or will be available in the future), grading, and installing storm sewers and other drainage facilities.

Map 8-5 illustrates the areas that are projected for future commercial use. The largest of these areas is between Oak Grove Road, I-164, Virginia Street and the Burkhardt Road corridor. Most of this land is available for development. In addition, the area west of Burkhardt Road also contains substantial parcels of undeveloped land with commercial zoning and utilities. Continued growth is expected in this area, which is basically an extension of the existing Green River Road commercial corridor. Although Map 8-5 shows this entire area for future commercial uses, The Future Land Use – 2025 Map designates the area east of Burkhardt Road for mixed uses. Although some high density residential uses are likely, and even a light manufacturing use is possible in this area, the majority of this land is expected to be commercially developed.

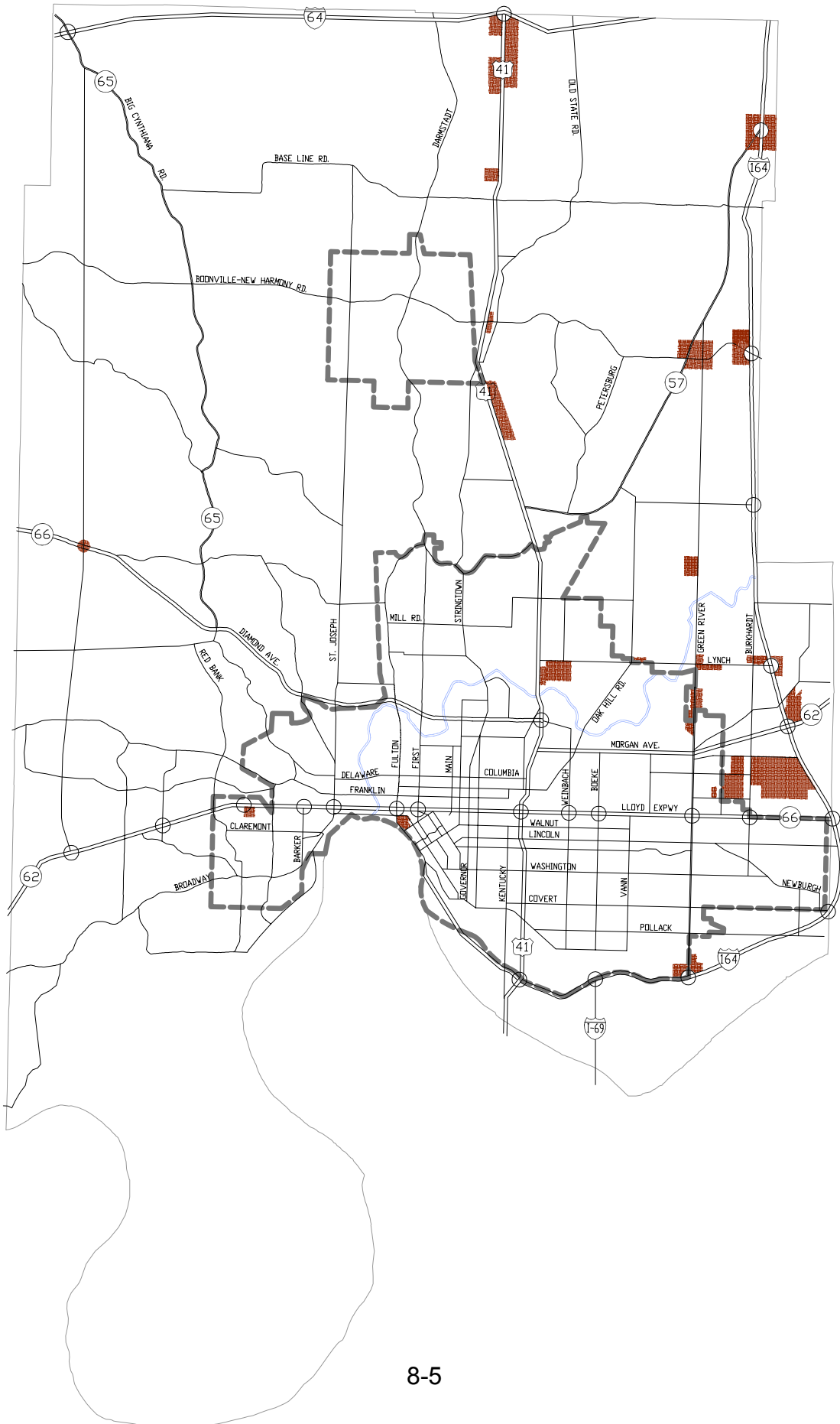
Commercial development is also expected to occur around the riverboat casino in the downtown. More specifically, the area between Second Street, Court Street, Riverside Drive and Fulton Avenue will be attractive for entertainment-related uses compatible with Casino Aztar. Additional development/redevelopment of commercial uses is anticipated for other locations in the downtown.

Other areas where future commercial development is anticipated include:

- The area generally bounded by Lynch Road, Maxx Road, Pigeon Creek, and U.S. 41;
- Along the U.S. 41 corridor south of I-64;
- The east side of the U.S. 41 corridor between Old State Road and Mt. Pleasant Road;
- Around the Green River Road and Boonville-New Harmony Road intersection;
- Around the Boonville-New Harmony Road, Lynch Road, Morgan Avenue, and South Green River Road interchanges on I-164; and
- Around intersections along the Lynch Road Extension

For the most part, all of these areas designated for future commercial development presently meet the commercial site requirements or will meet these requirements by Year 2025.

Future Commercial Land Use - 2025



COMMERCIAL ACTION PLAN

GOAL

Commercial uses that benefit the region, community, and neighborhoods through their contribution to the overall pattern of orderly development, the local economy, and how the community is perceived.

OBJECTIVES

Ensure efficient and appealing commercial development in the appropriate areas that minimizes adverse impacts on surrounding property, the road network, and utility systems.

POLICIES

Support the revitalization and/or redevelopment of older Urban Core commercial areas that serve residential needs.

Support actions that encourage stabilization and upgrading of existing commercial areas.

Encourage only those commercial uses in or adjacent to residential neighborhoods that primarily serve neighborhood residents.

Direct new commercial development into existing commercial areas prior to rezoning new land.

Encourage compact commercial areas and, where possible, avoid new or expanded inefficient strip development.

Discourage spot zonings of property for higher intensity/volume commercial uses in residential areas.

Encourage small-scaled, commercial uses that primarily serve neighborhood residents at major intersections or in existing neighborhood commercial centers within residential areas.

When new commercial sites are developed adjacent to residential areas, schools, churches, public parks, and the proposed greenway, encourage a landscaped buffer that exceeds the minimum setback requirements in the Zoning Code.

Develop Zoning Code standards to require landscaped strips or islands as breaks within large commercial parking lots.

Encourage the construction of sidewalks in commercial subdivisions.

Encourage and develop incentives so that smaller retail businesses can locate and

share in the redevelopment of larger vacant commercial buildings.