

THE PLANNING POST

City of Columbus - Bartholomew County Planning Department

Fourth Quarter 2025

Featured Topic



Bottleworks abandons housing for offices, repeating Indianapolis' worst mistake

Downtown Indianapolis faces a critical challenge in its urban planning approach. Urban planner Jeffery Tompkins warns that the Bottleworks District's Phase III pivot from housing to an office tower may deliver short-term gains but saddle the city with long-term costs. With rising construction expenses, rigid zoning, and a reliance on fragile office projects, Indianapolis could face more taxpayer-funded bailouts unless it embraces flexible, mixed-use development. Tompkins argues that only forward-looking, adaptable land-use strategies will ensure downtown remains resilient and vibrant through future disruptions.



Bartholomew County Plan Commission Noteworthy Decisions

BMP-2025-010: Oakwood of III R-W Estates Minor Subdivision, Section 2, 5th Replat – Approved

A request by Robert C. Morrison & Steve Combs for minor subdivision approval to create 2 new lots, for a total of 3 lots from a 7.09 acre parcel (and a total of 20 lots from the original parent tract). The property is located at 13205 East Legal Tender Road, in Rock Creek Township.

RZ-2025-001: Tulsidas Narsinghani - Favorable Recommendation

A request by Tulsidas Narsinghani to rezone .58 acres from RM (Residential: Multi-Family) to CR (Commercial: Regional), 8.5 acres from AG (Agriculture: General) to CR (Commercial: Regional), and 22.86 acres from (Agriculture: General) to RM (Residential: Multi-Family). The property is located on the south side of Tannehill Rd/650 North, approximately 400 feet west of US 31, in German Township. This rezoning was subsequently approved by the County Commissioners.

City of Columbus Plan Commission Noteworthy Decisions

RZ-2025-007: Dover Development – Favorable Recommendation

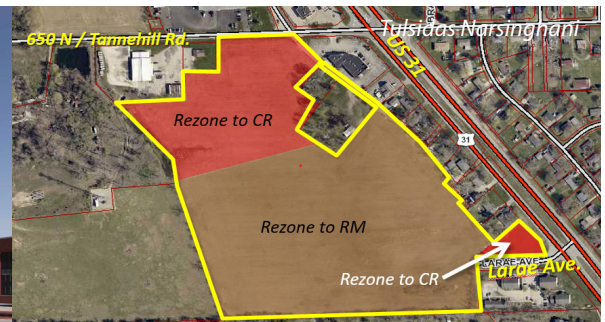
A proposal by Dover Development to rezone 8.48 acres from CN (Commercial: Neighborhood) to RM (Residential: Multi-Family). The property is located at the southeast corner of Middle Road and Rocky Ford Road, in the City of Columbus. This rezoning was subsequently approved by the City Council.

DP-2025-005: Bartholomew County Fairgrounds – Approved

A proposal by the Bartholomew County Commissioners for a major modification of the Bartholomew County Fairgrounds site development plan to allow the addition of a storage building, including a modification for building height and a modification for a fence that exceeds the maximum height in a front yard. The property is located at 750 West 200 South, in Columbus Township.

DP-2025-006: Taylor Uptown – Approved

A proposal by Flaherty & Collins Properties for site development plan approval for a mixed use development (52 multi-family units and commercial space). The property is located on the west side of Washington Street between 6th Street and 7th Street, in the City of Columbus.



CITY OF COLUMBUS - BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

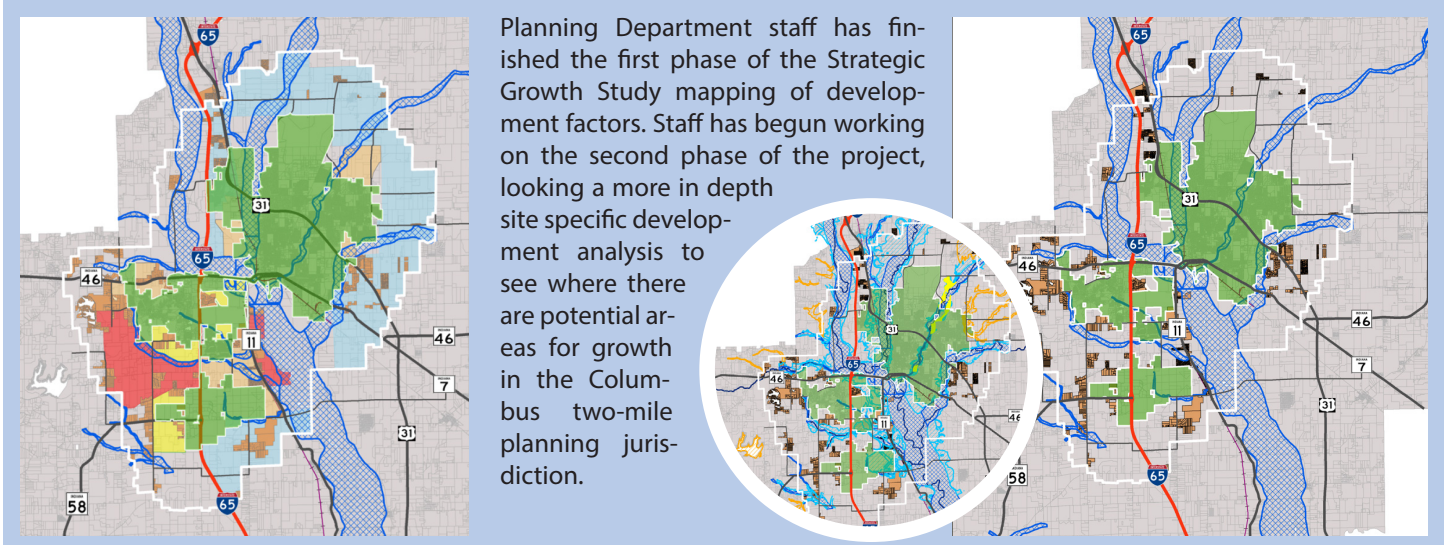
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Long Range Planning Report

Written By: Jessie Boshell



Planning Department staff members Melissa Begley, Jessie Boshell, and Andres Nieto attended the Indiana Planning Association Fall Conference in South Bend, Indiana in October. At the conference, staff members were able to attend sessions on renewable energy, utilization of AI in planning, corridor restoration, DORA establishment and management, and sessions related to Senate Enrolled Act 1. The sessions were very informative and reaffirmed previous efforts as a department with renewable energy but also provided insight into other planning solutions that can be applied to the City of Columbus. After the sessions, staff members toured the University of Notre Dame Campus, Eddy Street Commons, and the River walk of Downtown South Bend. As informative as the sessions are at the conference, these opportunities to explore other communities provides new ideas for design and innovation in our zoning ordinance.



Planning Department staff has finished the first phase of the Strategic Growth Study mapping of development factors. Staff has begun working on the second phase of the project, looking a more in depth site specific development analysis to see where there are potential areas for growth in the Columbus two-mile planning jurisdiction.

Staff has also been finalizing edits to the zoning ordinance revisions reflecting changes for housing types and associated development standards, and has begun to plan next steps for public engagement on the matter. Staff intends to host an open house type event that will allow for the public to come out and see what is being proposed, and to provide feedback on the proposed changes. Staff has yet to determine the date of the open house.



Source: "Missing Middle Housing", Opticos Design, Inc.

Long Range Planning Report Cont.

Written By: Jessie Boshell



Finally, Planning Department staff that participate in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Team (BPIT) will be going on a fall bike ride in November. The BPIT group tries to get out and ride the People Trail and other associated bicycle facilities at least once a year to see progress that has been made, but also to see where there are changes needed. With that staff will be riding west towards recently completed projects that have significant People Trail branding to see how that is holding up. In other bicycle news, staff is already beginning to plan Bike Month for 2026, with hopes of making it better than the last and offering more programmatic offerings to the residents of Columbus other than bike to work day and bike to school day. Staff will provide more details as they develop.

Floodplain Management Report

Written By: Chelsea Cottingham



Nearly 43% of the City of Columbus and Bartholomew County jurisdiction areas are in a FEMA defined floodplain. With changing climate patterns resulting in an increased potential for more intense precipitation events, flood insurance is more crucial than ever. According to FEMA, in 2024, floods caused more than \$8 billion worth of damage to homes and businesses nationwide. And of that \$8 billion, \$3.8 billion occurred in communities that aren't considered high-risk or along coastal areas.

This quarter the floodplain manager has continued to stay up to date with federal updates regarding the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Due to the federal government shut down, the NFIP was currently paused. The Congressional authorization for the program lapsed on September 30, 2025. During this lapse in funding the NFIP could not issue new or renew existing flood insurance policies until the program was reauthorized. Homeowners that had

an active NFIP policy were still covered until their policy expiration date, which includes a 30-day grace period.

The NFIP continued to adjust and pay claims for current active policy holders, as long as funds were available. If those funds had been depleted, payments would be delayed until additional funding became available. If you were looking at purchasing a home in a flood zone with a federally-backed mortgage, closings may have been postponed or delayed until funding resumed.

FEMA encouraged policyholders to contact their insurance agents and check when their current NFIP policy expired and investigate potential private insurance options during any lapse in coverage. Though flood insurance is outside of the role and duties of the floodplain manager, often stakeholders and partners will ask for general guidance, which is provided. During this last quarter, a much higher than usual amount of inquiries and requests for guidance on the topic have been received by the floodplain manager from the community.

**Federal Government Shutdown
FEMA Pauses New and Renewal
Flood Insurance Policies**



Transportation Planning Report

Written By: Ashley Beckort

MTP Project Update: As a pre-requisite for Columbus and Bartholomew County to receive federal funds to assist with transportation construction projects, CAMPO (the Columbus Area Metropolitan Planning Organization) must maintain a current Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). This plan provides a long-term vision for all types of travel throughout the area and has a direct influence in identifying needed and priority transportation improvements for motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, and bus users. This long-range transportation plan must be updated every 5 years and have a minimum of 20-year outlook. The Planning Department, as the staff for CAMPO, has starting work on the 2050 MTP with the help of Kimley-Horn. The MTP update will take approximately a year, with a draft document anticipated in May of 2026 for public review. The CAMPO Policy Board, made up of City, County, and INDOT representatives, will consider the plan for adoption at their July 2026 meeting.

Throughout the development of the MTP, public engagement opportunities (including public meetings and an online survey) will be shared with the public by fliers and media release. We encourage those that live or work in Bartholomew County to take the survey. The survey includes trade-off questions where the user has to determine where efforts should be focused. There is also an interactive mapping component where users can add comments related to biking, walking, sidewalk, driving, transit, and safety. All provided input will be combined with feedback from the recent Columbus Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update, Transit Route Study, and Safety Action Plan. The Planning Department also be hosted an open house on November 19th to discuss MTP goals and priorities.

Website Improvements: CAMPO’s webpages have been updated with additional images and graphics to help explain the required plans and how they are connected.

Annual Construction Funds Report: CAMPO has submitted our early Annual List of Obligated Projects (ALOP) to INDOT (Indiana Department of Transportation). The ALOP is a list of projects that were flagged for federal funds in the preceding fiscal year (State of Indiana fiscal year is July 1st to June 30th). The projects typically include road improvements, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, bridge repair and replacement, transit operating and capital costs, and safety projects. These can be projects sponsored by the City of Columbus, Bartholomew County, or INDOT. The current list of local obligated projects includes the following: Preliminary Engineering (PE) for county-wide bridge inspections, for the bridge on Tannehill over the Driftwood River, traffic signal improvements at 62 intersections, and HAWK signal at Central Ave and 19th Street. Right-of-way Purchasing (RW) for Lowell Road (from 325 West to City Limits) and Talley Road (between 25th Street and Rocky Ford Road). Construction Engineering (CE) for Lowell Road (from I-65 to Indianapolis Road). The full list of projects can be found on the “CAMPO Plans and Documents” page of the Planning Department website.

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Anti-Discrimination Policy: The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and INDOT require agencies receiving federal funds to maintain a Title VI Implementation Plan. This is part of a continual and ongoing effort to proactively meet and exceed the compliance requirements established under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the related anti-discrimination laws, regulations, and executive orders: “No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” This plan is updated periodically, specifically when warranted by changes in federal laws and regulations. In conjunction with the Implementation Plan, CAMPO also maintains a Title VI complaint process. CAMPO recently updated our plan and submitted our annual goals and accomplishments report to INDOT.

**Columbus and Bartholomew County
Transportation Plan Update**

Survey/Encuesta
Share your opinion on transportation goals & projects for the next 25 years. engage.publicindiana.com/en/project/campo-mtp

Open House
Date: Nov 19, 2025
Time: 4pm - 7pm
Location: Columbus City Hall, 123 Washington St.

Deadline/Fecha Tope: Feb 1, 2026/1 de Febrero

This long-range plan will...

- focus on the next 25 years.
- be updated every 5 years.
- evaluate development trends & capacity.
- review possible funding sources including grants.
- take into account recent Columbus Bike/Ped. Plan Update, Transit Route Study, and Safety Action Plan.

 For additional project details: www.columbus.in.gov/planning/mtp

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Development Review Report

Written By: Melissa Begley



Opengov is now live. The Planning Department recently implemented a new permit tracking software system, Opengov. The online system will help streamline application submittals and receiving, and plan review tracking. It will also improve our project management, expand database functionality and record keeping.

Applicants will be able to apply through our online portal (shown below) and follow along and see to progression of their applications and know in advance, what steps are included in the process. They will get email alerts when certain steps have been completed and their action is required.

Welcome!

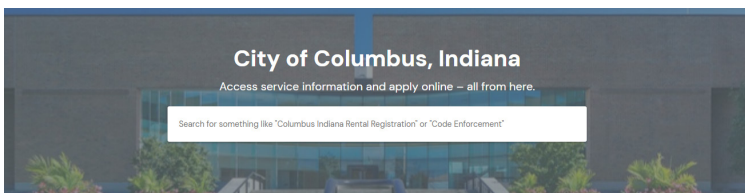
Welcome to the Planning Department Applications page. We look forward to working with you!

All applications, including those for projects in Columbus, Bartholomew County, and the Edinburgh / Bartholomew / Columbus Joint District must be submitted using the City of Columbus Opengov services portal – please see the **Apply Online** link below. The portal also provides additional information on the various types of applications and their purpose.

All applications require the upload of a completed [Property Owner Authorization](#) for each included property owner. Additional forms may be found below.

Please note that your project may also require additional local approvals, such as a building permit, storm water permit, or utility connection authorization. If your project is located in the City of Columbus, please visit the City’s [Development and Building Services Resource Page](#).

Please note, we began using Opengov on November 17, 2025. Its new for us too. We hope that it improves the efficiency and transparency of our permitting process. Please be patient as we make this change. Please call our office if you experience any issues or just have a suggestion. We value your input.



Discover Online Services
Choose below to browse services by department

Compliance Regulations Policies Standards

Code Enforcement
Code Enforcement, CE-Vehicle Tow/Tag Tracking

[Explore](#)

FOR RENT

Residential Rental Registration
Columbus Indiana Rental Registration

[Explore](#)

City of Columbus – Bartholomew County Planning Department
Zoning Compliance Certificate (ZCC)
Application, Site Development Plan Application + 4 more

[Explore](#)

Apply Online

Zoning Compliance Certificate (ZCC) Application
This is a required verification, prior to obtaining a building permit, beginning site work, or installing a sign, that your proposed project complies with all applicable zoning regulations. Please contact the Planning Department if the property is in a CD, CN, P, PUD, CFD-OL, of JD-OL zoning district; a site development plan may be required instead (see below also). Pre-application meeting – optional.

[Select](#)

Site Development Plan Application
Like a ZCC, this is a required verification, prior to obtaining a building permit, beginning site work, or installing a sign, that your proposed project complies with all applicable zoning regulations. However, because of unique circumstances in certain zoning districts, review by the Plan Commission (as a site development plan) is required. Please contact the Planning Department if the property is in a CD, CN, P, PUD, CFD-OL, of JD-OL zoning district; a site development plan may be required. Pre-application meeting – recommended.

[Select](#)

Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) Application
These applications include those for zoning ordinance development standards variances, land use variances, floodplain variances, conditional use consideration, and appeals of administrative decisions. Pre-application meeting – required.

[Select](#)

Annexation or Rezoning Application
An annexation petition seeks to incorporate property into the Columbus city limits. A rezoning application seeks to change the zoning classification for a certain area applicable to property. This would

[Select](#)

Bottleworks abandons housing for offices, repeating Indianapolis' worst mistake | Opinion

Indianapolis cannot afford to keep making the same mistakes and then writing checks to fix them.

Jeffery Tompkins
Contributing Columnist

September 25, 2025

The Bottleworks District was supposed to mark a new era for downtown Indianapolis. When it was first pitched, renderings showed hundreds of new apartments above boutique office space and ground-floor retail. It was the perfect pitch for an 18-hour corridor that could support itself through the overused planning aphorism of “live, work, play.”

That vision has not materialized.

Instead, Phase III of Bottleworks will be an office tower for the Ice Miller law firm on top of a parking podium. The project is shorter than originally proposed, contains more floors of parking than leased space and offers neither housing nor retail.

A development once hailed as the model for future mixed-use in Indianapolis now looks like a return to the one-trick-pony mistakes that have hollowed out downtowns across the U.S. Developers can point to reasons. The pandemic reshaped demand for urban living and sent construction costs soaring. Residential projects that once cost \$200 to \$250 a square foot to build suddenly spiked near \$400. In that environment, housing became harder to finance. Hendricks Commercial Properties, the Bottleworks developer, even tried to add more apartments in Phase II by increasing building height. That idea was shot down by the city’s preservation commission. Faced with those obstacles, the pivot to boutique office looked like the safer option.

Short-term thinking, long-term costs

But what makes financial sense in the short term can create long-term liabilities for the city. Office-heavy projects are fragile. They generate activity during the workday but sit empty at night and on weekends. They depend on narrow cycles of demand.

When the market shifts, or another shiny office development opens in the suburbs, they risk becoming stranded assets. Cities are left with vacant space, empty shells and pleas for public subsidies to save them.

We are already seeing that story play out with the Gold Building. Once a downtown landmark, the office tower is being converted into apartments. But that project cannot stand on its own. The city last week approved up to \$18 million in public loans to keep the conversion afloat. This is not an isolated case. Across the country, cities are spending millions of taxpayer dollars to subsidize the repurposing of outdated office towers. Indianapolis is now joining those ranks.



Phase II of the Bottleworks district is seen under construction on Dec. 12, 2024. *Alysa Guffey / IndyStar*

A pattern of poor planning

The danger here is not just the loss of one or two projects. It is the pattern of poor land use on some of the most valuable parcels in the city.

Every time we allow inflexible office space, we risk being forced years later to spend millions propping up conversions. Every time we deny density in housing or fail to encourage mixed use, we undercut downtown's resiliency.

The city cannot afford to keep making the same mistakes and then writing checks to fix them. This is the equivalent of building a new Panera Bread across the street from another one. The old one closes, but the shell remains.

Both developers and the city share responsibility. Developers tend to pursue what pencils out most easily, even if it duplicates what downtown already has in excess. The city reinforces those decisions with rigid zoning, regulatory limits on height or density and burdensome codes that treat the building of a triplex and an airport the same.



The bottling plant seen against the Indianapolis skyline Aug. 12, 2017. *Jenna Watson / IndyStar*

Building for flexibility, not fragility

There is another way forward. Land-use policy should be focused on flexibility. That means approving projects that are truly resilient. That means allowing greater diversity, density and flexibility where it makes sense, especially when it supports housing. It means requiring new buildings to be designed with the possibility of future conversion so that offices can become homes, or vice versa, without massive subsidies. Or changing codes so these conversions become easier.

Some cities are beginning to experiment with these models, and Indianapolis should be at the front of that line. Go to any dynamic city and you won't find merely residential or entertainment districts. You'll find neighborhoods with everything.

Downtown Indianapolis cannot thrive if it is built around fragile, back-of-the-napkin uses. It cannot keep writing multimillion-dollar checks to bail out yesterday's office projects. It needs to embrace a land-use strategy that anticipates change rather than reacts to it.

Our development should eschew corporatism in favor of hyperlocal and adaptive needs. I call this thinking big by thinking small. Bottleworks' shortsighted pivot to boutique office will doom this project once something shinier and fancier gets built.

It is ironic that the best local case study for this is Circle Centre, another Hendricks property. It will be curious to see how much that project cannibalizes Bottleworks if future flexibility is not imbued in that project.

Bottleworks was meant to embody the future. Phase III, as planned, risks undermining it. If Indianapolis wants a downtown that can keep its head above water through the next disruption,

it must start making land-use decisions that are as flexible and forward-looking as the city itself deserves.

As Hendricks plans the future of Circle Centre and Bottleworks — some of downtown's most valuable real estate — we should think a little harder about not repeating the same mistakes we made before.

Jeffery Tompkins is an urban planner. He lives in downtown Indianapolis.