

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT



Table Of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. What is Community Development? | 3 |
| 2. Vision and Mission | 4 |
| 3. Meet the Team | 5 |
| 4. Housing | 7 |
| 5. Business | 10 |
| 6. Community | 12 |
| 7. Code Enforcement | 14 |
| 8. Looking Ahead | 17 |

What is Community Development?

Community Development's focus is improving the quality of life and place for the City of Columbus. We support and administer a variety of community programs that support local housing, business, and the local community partners. Often acting as facilitators between a wide range of organizations, departments and stakeholders, we strive to connect the dots between community needs and community resources.

How We Are Improving Service to the Community

The Community Development team is constantly expanding our capacity through education, professional development, and supporting research that helps shape future community planning. We actively enhance partnerships with our stakeholders and engage in neighborhood meetings and community events to hear the voices of the community. We also work to empower community members to take an active role in shaping their neighborhood and city.



Vision and Mission



Vision

- To cultivate the most vibrant, engaging and dynamic community in the region, where diverse cultures and ideas flourish and smart, sustainable growth enhance the well-being of our greatest asset, our residents.

Mission

- Community Development fosters a supportive community by enhancing quality of life, promoting economic opportunity, and strengthening neighborhoods. This is done through housing and economic development, communications, code enforcement, and downtown activation with collaboration across a wide range of community partners.

Meet Our Team



Jake Sipe
Director

Jake Sipe has devoted the past twenty-five years to serving the needs of families and individuals with low to moderate incomes in Indiana. Jake joined the City of Columbus as the Director of Community Development in 2025. Prior to that, Jake was the Executive Director of the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCD) for 13 years and was the head of IHCD's Real Estate Department administering federal and state programs.



Paul W. Smith
Assistant Director

Paul W. Smith has served as Assistant Director of Community Development since June 2024. He has a bachelors degree in business administration from Marian University and an MBA from Anderson University. For 21 years, Paul served in the Navy and then transitioned to community development, operations, and program management positions after retirement. He is married and has four children and one granddaughter



Jody Coffman
Communications and Events Coordinator

Jody Coffman has been with the city of Columbus since December 2021 and has held the position of Communications and Events Coordinator since July 2022, specializing in strategic communications, marketing, and large-scale event planning. She has successfully coordinated four Ethnic Expo festivals, contributed on behalf of the city to the Celebration of Lights Festival team, and supported numerous smaller city initiatives. Jody holds a Bachelor of Science from Ball State University and brings a deep understanding of the region as a lifelong resident of Greensburg, IN. She is committed to creating impactful programs that strengthen the community and enhance pride throughout Columbus.

Meet Our Team (Cont.)



Casey Buchanan

Office Administrator

Casey Buchanan has served as Office Administrator for the Department of Community Development since 2024. She brings over a decade of experience in communications, project management and strategic planning to the role. Casey is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Indiana University.



Jerry Duncan

Office Assistant

Jerry Duncan has dedicated 24 years of service to the City of Columbus, bringing experience and a strong sense of community to his work. Originally from Los Angeles, California, his journey as an "Army Brat" took him through several states before he ultimately made Columbus his home. While he takes pride in his professional contributions, he considers his greatest achievements to be his wonderful wife and family.

Housing

Over the course of 2025, Community Development was committed to responsible growth to close the gap and ensuring a steady pipeline of new affordable and market rate housing, while also preserving our existing housing. This year, we supported the efforts to break ground on an additional 174 housing units across two new developments.

| New Housing Development in 2025 | Haw Creek Meadows | Flats on 14th |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1 Bedroom Units | 11 | 35 |
| 2 Bedroom Units | 35 | 50 |
| 3 Bedroom Units | 18 | 25 |



◀◀◀ **HAW CREEK MEADOWS**



FLATS ON 14TH ▶▶▶

Housing Study & Programs

The 2024 Housing Study was conducted to identify the community's need for safe, adequate, and affordable housing across different income levels and household types. It analyzes demographic and market trends, along with community input, to understand housing gaps and challenges. The study ultimately provides strategies and goals to guide future housing development and policy decisions so residents have more choices in housing type and location.

Key Goals of the Housing Study

- Preserve the existing housing stock in strategic neighborhoods
- Support affordable housing models and approaches that connect to the community
- Create ways to share risks to increase housing variety and price points
- Expand the supply of development-ready land
- Attract additional and diverse builders and developments to Columbus
- Support relationships & quality of life outcomes for those most in need
- Continue to offer a housing friendly regulatory environment

Housing Programs

PILOT Program

The City of Columbus signed a PILOT agreement with affordable housing developer, TWG, Flats on 14th. Columbus City Council also approved a resolution creating the affordable housing fund as part of this project. A PILOT agreement is a legal contract between an owner of a property that is exempt from property taxation and a municipal government. The agreement specifies the amount and schedule of payments that are to be made by the property owner to the local government in place of property taxes. Improvements such as, new construction, rehabilitation, or acquisition are eligible if providing affordable housing to income eligible persons. IC 6-1.1-10-16.7.

IPSHI: Indiana Permanent Supportive Housing Institute

In 2025, Volunteers of America OH & IN and their community team graduated from IPSHI. The institute supports housing partners learning how to navigate the complex process of developing housing with supportive services to prevent and end homelessness. The team completed over 80 hours of training and are committed to developing high quality permanent supportive housing in a manner designed to maximize tenant stability and self-sufficiency.



Pictured: Mark Stewart, Paul Smith, Marchelle Berry, Carol Price, Sayward Salazar, Shelbie Hill and Chloe Engleking (not shown),

Housing Programs, Cont.

CHIP: Columbus Housing Improvement Program

The City of Columbus is committed to supporting local homeownership. This program provides an opportunity for eligible homeowners to apply for grant funding up to \$20,000 to fund needed home repairs and improvements. For those who meet the program criteria, this grant opportunity can be used for eligible activities such as roof & HVAC repairs and replacements, ADA modifications and more. Eight homes qualified for CHIP-funded repairs and 20 were repaired under an expanded program called CHIP 2.0.



◀◀◀ **BEFORE**



AFTER ▶▶▶

PACT: Providing Affordable Construction & Transformation

As part of the City's ongoing commitment to affordable housing programs and initiatives, we are excited to offer a new tool to our community in the form of the PACT Program. This program seeks to incentivize home building projects that directly meet the needs identified in the 2024 Housing Study. By focusing this program on vacant lots and sites targeted for demolition, we can expand our effort to increase housing density and support growth in existing affordable neighborhoods. In 2025, eight new infill homes were approved in existing neighborhoods across the city.

Business

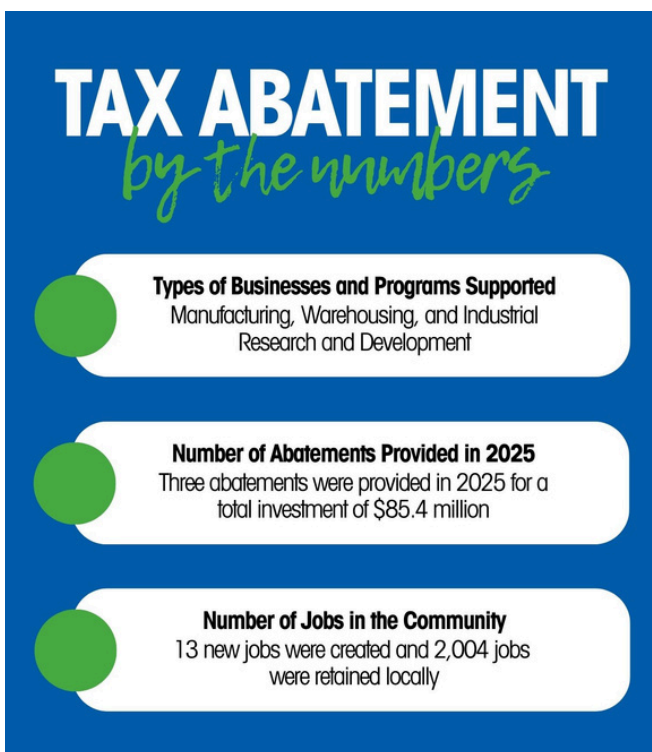
Community Development supports the local business community through a variety of programs, initiatives and activities. Through small business loans, tax abatements, the management of the DORA district, and participation in local business-focused community groups such as Downtown Merchants and the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce, we support local efforts to build a stable, thriving economy.

Small Business Loan Program

The Columbus Small Business Loan Program (CSBLP) provides loans and technical assistance to small and emerging private business enterprises located or locating within the corporate limits of the City of Columbus. The maximum loan amount is \$20,000 and may finance working capital (inventory, receivables, operating capital) and equipment. The business must create or retain one full-time job per \$10,000 borrowed.

In 2025, the CSBLP provided a \$20,000 start-up loan to launch the St. Denis, a new retail wine, book, and furnishings venue located downtown at 426 Washington Street. St. Denis will hire five employees.

St. Denis is a boutique wine bar and cultural destination located in the heart of downtown. It will feature 50 seats, set in an immersive bookstore with an art collection. Guests can select light snacks, and curated wines by the glass and bottle, and enjoy the space with friends before, in between, or after downtown experiences.



Tax Abatements

The Tax Abatement program is offered by the City of Columbus to incentivize new commercial development in the community. The program offers up to a 10-year abatement from real property and personal property taxes for large-scale business development or expansion projects. The abatements are approved on a case-by-case basis through City Council. The City of Columbus is committed to growth and expansion of industry in the community to provide jobs and economic prosperity to the community.

Business, Cont.

DORA

The Downtown Columbus Social District, a Designated Outdoor Refreshment Area (DORA), continues to serve as a strategic tool for downtown economic development and placemaking. In 2025, the district included 16 participating businesses, offering residents and visitors expanded opportunities to engage with local restaurants, breweries, and retailers in a vibrant, walkable environment.

In addition to daily operations within the established district boundaries, the city approved 10 temporary DORA event locations to be used throughout the year by vendors who would like to participate outside of the brick-and-mortar walls of their businesses. These temporary activations supported major festivals, community gatherings, and special events, increasing foot traffic and enhancing the overall downtown experience.

The program has contributed to stronger collaboration between the city and the business community while supporting extended visitor stays and increased customer activity. As downtown Columbus continues to grow, the DORA district remains a measurable and impactful component of the City's economic vitality strategy.



DORA Designated Permittees

- ZwanzigZ Pizza
- Thai Connection
- Henry Social Club
- Bespoke Events + Experiences
- 4th Street Bar & Grill
- Black Sheep Pizza
- The Columbus Bar
- Taku Japanese Steakhouse
- The Garage Pub
- Upland Pumphouse
- ZwanzigZ Production Brewery Co.
- Luciana's Mexican Restaurant
- White Star Meat Market
- The Gallery Bar & Bistro - Hotel Indigo
- The Forge on 4th
- Fraternal Order of Eagles #741

Community

How Community Development Supports the Local Community

From maintaining beautiful downtown streetscapes to hosting one of the city's largest annual events, Community Development supports a wide range of initiatives that help keep the Columbus community connected and engaged. This includes programs such as maintaining the Downtown Streetscape, the Banner Program, the Community Garden Project, and hosting the annual Ethnic Expo event.



Community Garden Project

Beginning in 1982, a local philanthropic organization, Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation, launched a community garden project in Columbus. The initial purpose was to give city residents who did not have a suitable area for their own garden the opportunity to grow food or to practice amateur gardening. The city assisted Irwin Sweeney Miller Foundation with the project in 1983. The following year, 1984, the city of Columbus assumed full management of the community garden project.

This was the 42nd year of the Columbus Community Garden. The project is funded by gardeners' rental fees. The community garden receives support from Columbus City Utilities, Columbus Engineering Department, Department of Public Works, and the Aviation Board.

Award Winning Science Fair Project

In 2025, a gardener and local high school student, Harshith Devaguptapu, made an important discovery. He was interested to find a way to support his garden plot's growth. After a chemistry teacher mentioned tea was used for radiation, Harshith decided to look into how the polyphenols in green tea might help to slow cell breakdown and reduce drought stress on his garden plants. After setting up shop in an abandoned store room at school, he was able to conduct an experiment that showed a notable impact when his tea recipe was applied to the leaves of his plant subjects, showing to both lower rate of chlorophyll degradation and cell lysis.



Pictured: Local High School student and Community Garden participant Harshith Devaguptapu at his garden plot.

Ethnic Expo

Ethnic Expo 2025 was a resounding success, drawing nearly 40,000 attendees over two days and reaffirming its role as one of the community's largest and most anticipated celebrations. Marking its 40th year, the Expo created an inclusive space for both residents and visitors to experience global cultures through food, music, art, and shared traditions. This year featured representation from 31 countries, including 40 food vendors representing 26 countries and 20 market vendors from 14 countries, offering authentic cuisine, handmade goods, and cultural artwork.

Several new elements enhanced the overall experience. A dedicated food truck area added six dining options, easing congestion while expanding culinary variety. The Biergarten was relocated, and for the first time, attendees could carry beverages within the designated DORA district, allowing for greater mobility and exploration. Entertainment remained a cornerstone of the event, with 15 musical, dance, and spoken word performances across two stages, delivering continuous, culturally rich programming throughout the weekend.

Family-friendly activities also played an important role, with the children's tent offering interactive and educational experiences through a partnership with The kidscommons Children's Museum and the Department of Public Works. Overall, Ethnic Expo 2025 successfully blended cultural celebration, community engagement, and thoughtful enhancements to deliver a vibrant and memorable event, with strong attendance and positive feedback highlighting its continued growth and importance. Thank you to First Financial Bank, our presenting sponsor, for your generous support each year in helping make Ethnic Expo a vibrant celebration of culture, community, and connection.



Code Enforcement

What is Code Enforcement?

Code Enforcement is responsible for enforcing all City of Columbus Indiana Municipal and Zoning Codes along with addressing public health and safety issues. We coordinate with other city and county departments as well as outside organizations for positive resolution of code enforcement issues. We work with landlords to improve relations with tenants and neighborhood groups and to be proactive in our approach to prevent violations before they become a problem to the residents of Columbus.

Code Enforcement realizes that there is a housing shortage in Columbus and has worked hard to eliminate vacant and distressed houses. This is accomplished by working with residents, the police department, and other neighborhood groups to identify which properties in their area fall under the Indiana Code as it relates to vacant and distressed properties. Our job is to recognize these properties and find ways to either have property owners or investors repair or demolish a structure to reduce blight.

2025 Code Enforcement Highlights

- Worked with United Way, Columbus Police Department, Columbus Animal Care Services and the Department of Public Works to reduce the number of unhoused within the City of Columbus.
- Reduced the number of vacant and distressed properties by over 60 units.
- Collaborated with the City Council and legal counsel to revise codes, enhancing our ability to serve the residents of Columbus more effectively.

Resident Testimonial

As a 60 year resident of Columbus, I'm especially happy to report that in the last many years, I have witnessed that Fred Barnett and his team with Columbus Code Enforcement have protected/improved home resale values and have enhanced the cleanliness and livability of our city. I have personally seen clear progress in addressing dozens and dozens and dozens of abandoned, unlicensed and inoperable vehicles littering our streets, alleys and yards around Columbus. This has had quite a positive impact on clutter reduction, and therefore, the beautification of our city.

Residential Rental Registration

How the program helps support both landlords and tenants:

- Program provides crucial data for first responders regarding the number of occupants for residences throughout the city.
- Provides up-to-date contact information for property owners and property managers for notification of damage caused by fire or natural disaster.

Meet Code Enforcement



Fred Barnett
Code Enforcement

Fred Barnett has served as the Code Enforcement Officer since November 2014 and continues in that role today. A proud graduate of Western Kentucky University, he holds a degree in Institutional Administration. Before assuming his current position, Fred dedicated 25 years to the Food Service Industry and 20 years to commission sales. Additionally, he served on the Elizabethtown City Council for eight years. Fred is passionate about Judo, Jujitsu, weight training, and horseback riding. He and his wife reside on a 6-acre hobby farm, where they care for three horses, four dogs, and a multitude of barn cats. He has one daughter.



Robin Chavez
Code Enforcement

Robin Chavez brings more than a decade of experience in property and project management to the code enforcement team. She enhances her role with a background in IT, holding a degree in Information Systems and Helpdesk, along with a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification. Recently, she earned her certification in Property Maintenance through International Code Council (ICC) and consistently participates in training sessions to further develop her expertise. Outside of her professional life, Robin is a passionate photographer and has a deep love for animals. She currently shares her home with a mischievous Siamese cat and a playful Pixie Bob teenager.

CD2030



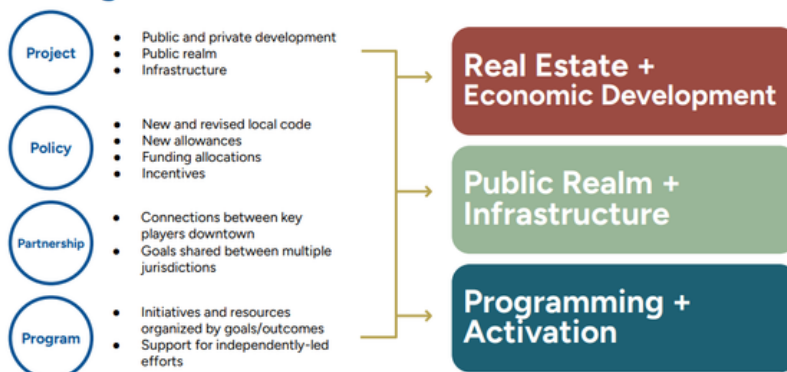
Study & Findings

After recognizing the changing landscape of downtown strategic planning in a post-COVID environment, the Columbus Redevelopment Commission engaged a team of consultants, comprised of Sasaki, SB Friedman, and Storyboard, to complete a new strategic plan for our downtown district. This plan builds on the work accomplished through the previous plan, Envision Columbus, however provides a new framework that is focused, site-specific and time-bound. Through community engagement, stakeholder feedback and market research, Sasaki and their team have provided a plan for strategic downtown development, programming, infrastructure and activation that meets these objectives and lays the groundwork for the next phase of strategic development in downtown Columbus.

Implementation

After a year of community engagement and input, the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan was finalized and introduced to the community. The Columbus Downtown 2030 is a bold vision focused on specific prominent areas that will spark renewed energy and investment, shaping a vibrant future of downtown in the near and long term. Three teams of community leaders meet every month to support the implementation of the strategic plan recommendations:

Strategic Plan Recommendations



Looking Ahead

As we move into 2026 and beyond, Community Development remains focused on building a stronger, more connected Columbus through growth, strategic investment, and continued collaboration with our community partners. Guided by the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan, we will advance key initiatives that promote vibrant public spaces, support local businesses, and encourage year-round activation of our downtown.

Addressing housing needs will remain a top priority. Building on the progress made in 2025, we will expand efforts to increase the supply of diverse and attainable housing options, preserve existing housing stock, and strengthen programs that support homeownership and neighborhood revitalization. At the same time, Code Enforcement will build on recent success by proactively addressing quality-of-life concerns and supporting safe, well-maintained neighborhoods.

Economic development efforts will focus on supporting small businesses, encouraging entrepreneurship, and leveraging tools such as the Small Business Loan Program, tax abatements, and the DORA district to sustain a thriving local economy.

Community engagement will remain at the heart of our work. Through events, programs, and ongoing outreach, we will continue to listen, respond, and empower residents to play an active role in shaping their neighborhoods. By aligning our work with community needs and long-term strategic goals, we are confident in our ability to support meaningful progress and continued success in the year ahead.



Jake Sipe

Thank You!

We couldn't have accomplished all this work without the incredible support of our wonderful community partners!



- +812-376-2520
- columbus.in.gov/community-development/
- communitydevelopment@columbus.in.gov
- 123 Washington Street, Columbus, IN 47201