



CITY OF CONNERSVILLE

Strategic Investment Plan



*Where we celebrate our community, our history and our natural assets.
Come and celebrate with us!*





CITY OF CONNERSVILLE

LETTER FROM THE MAYOR



The City of Connersville has a population of 13,310 and is the only incorporated city in Fayette County. Our community is centrally located in East Central Indiana between three major metropolitan areas: Indianapolis, Indiana, and Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio. We are fortunate for our beautiful scenery and natural attributes that intertwine throughout our city.

We have an extensive local history here in Connersville and many significant, historical places that continue to tell our progressive stories from the past. Our goal is to embrace our local history and culture as we build and create new opportunities for all our residents and guests to provide the best location to live, work, and spend time within our city.

Just like every community, the COVID-19 pandemic had a large impact on our city in many ways. It is our hope to utilize the Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program with strategic projects that target our community's mental and physical wellness. We believe that providing more outdoor spaces and amenities to our residents will encourage a better quality of life and place for all, here in Connersville.

Our goal with the HELP grant program is to build projects and programs that give our residents an improved quality of place while also targeting improvement of our overall physical health, mental health and wellness. We would like to continue to make Connersville an attractive community to live in by strengthening our city's amenities and outdoor recreational spaces. We do not want our community members to just simply live here but thrive here. Improving our quality of life is key to the city's future growth.

Sincerely,

Chad A. Frank
Mayor, City of Connersville





CITY OF CONNERSVILLE
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Community Progress	6
Key Assets	7
Data Snapshot	8
Projects	9
Additional Initiatives	13
Key Contacts	14
Acknowledgments	15

INTRODUCTION

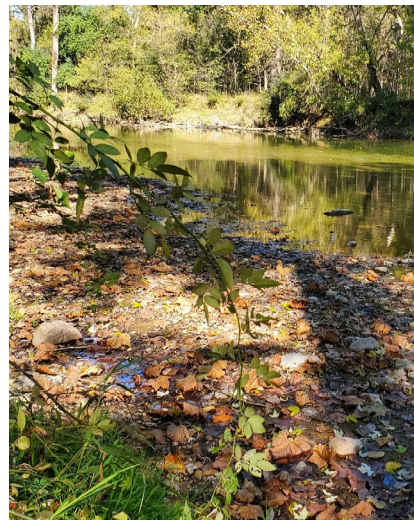
City of CONNERSVILLE Indiana

The City of Connersville has a rich history to be celebrated. Connersville was founded in 1813 by its namesake, John Conner, along the banks of the Whitewater River. The Whitewater River runs through our county from North to South, giving us opportunities for free access to fishing, tubing, kayaking and canoeing.

Connersville also has many significant, historical places that continue to tell our progressive stories from the past. As pioneers in transportation and industrialization the community served as a model of prosperity and technological advancement during its heyday. Once known as “Little Detroit,” Connersville was a hub for manufacturing during the early 20th Century. Many of the City’s historical features remain intact and can be visited by the public.

Several annual events attract people from all over the county and other neighboring areas. This includes the county fair held at the Fayette County Fairgrounds located next to the City’s historic Roberts Park and the wintertime Polar Express Train that takes place downtown during our six-week long “Winterfest” festival. We also host our annual “Celebration In The Ville Festival” every May that attracts over 5,000 people and many other events throughout the year.

The city desires to protect these features, capitalizing on events and amenities that build local pride and interest within the community through new public and private partnerships. Local festivals and community events have become our niche the past several years and we continue to grow them every year. Our goal is to enrich our local history and culture as we build and create new opportunities for all our residents and provide the best location to live, work and spend time within our city.



The City of Connersville is a community teeming with pride and ambition that is focused on providing a quality place for all residents and businesses. Connersville is a community of many different people and ways of life where all live, work, learn. Grow, and age together. The community is centered on strengthening neighborhoods, attracting training, and retaining local talent and workforce, promoting local businesses and industries, and building upon the local character and quality of life that Connersville has to offer.

GOALS

- 1 Encourage new construction and redevelopment on vacant and underutilized lots within the city.
- 2 Promote downtown revitalization and become a central location for retail, restaurants and residential uses.
- 3 Develop more family, child and teenager friendly attractions across the community to further establish Connersville as a destination for families to live.
- 4 Update zoning codes and city ordinances to create a healthy mixture of residential, commercial and industrial development to improve the city's fiscal capacity and high-quality public services.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The ability to hire a new city staffed position, the Community Coordinator, has been a major asset for our city. We have been able to actively create several avenues of Community Engagement and outreach between our residents and local government. Through the HELP grant process, we have successfully increased community engagement through our Facebook page and our city website with online surveys, the Community Calendar, leadership attendance in community organization meetings, public meeting presentations, and facilitating Pathway Meetings.

The Community Coordinator also made several presentations at the Connersville Parks and Recreation and City Council Board Meetings and held an Open Community Forum to all city residents. These presentations were all recorded, ran daily on our Channel 3 TV Cable News Channel and will remain on the TV3 News Journal on YouTube for the foreseeable future.

The HELP grant program has been extremely beneficial for our community and has enabled us to create working relationships between city leadership and community members that had not yet been established. This has given us the opportunity to receive deeper community insight and strengthened our decision making processes with community input.

EASE OF BUSINESS PROCESS

The Community Coordinator will be the main point of contact during the implementation phase for the HELP approved projects. She will supervise the planning, budgeting and timelines for all approved projects for the HELP grant funding and be responsible for including updates to the mayor and City Council on all phases of implementation. This will create an easy streamlined system for all investors and contractors for the projects and programs developed with this funding. The Community Coordinator will also be working with the city's grant administrator to locate and apply for additional grant funding sources that can be paired with these projects. They will work together to meet grant administrative deadlines and reporting requirements.

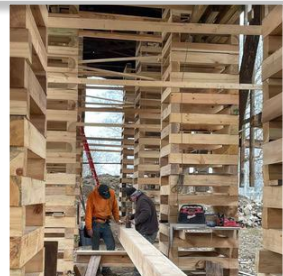
2nd Street Park Development

2nd Street Park Development is a new “pocket park” that is being built on the south east side of downtown this year. Several community members joined together to raise private donations to fund the design and build of this new park for our community.



Restoration of the Longwood Covered Bridge

The Longwood Bridge is a Kennedy Bridge that was built in 1884 and was relocated to Roberts Park in 1980. It has fallen into disrepair and in 2022 the city and private donations shared costs of renovations. The bridge is currently in this process and is expected to be finished within two months.



Utilities Stormwater Separation Project

The Utilities Department completed a stormwater separation project on the East side of Memorial Drive last year. This project greatly reduced the amount of stormwater run-off leading to the wastewater facility and reduced flooding risks in the area.

COMMUNITY PROGRESS BREAKDOWN

<i>Project</i>	<i>Local Municipal Investment</i>	<i>Grant Investment</i>	<i>Private Investment</i>	<i>Total Investment</i>
2nd Street Park Development			\$265,000	\$265,000
Restoration of the Longwood Covered Bridge	\$149,000		\$173,000	\$322,000
Utilities Stormwater Separation Project	\$743,400	\$486,663		\$1,230,063

Local History & Attractive Architecture

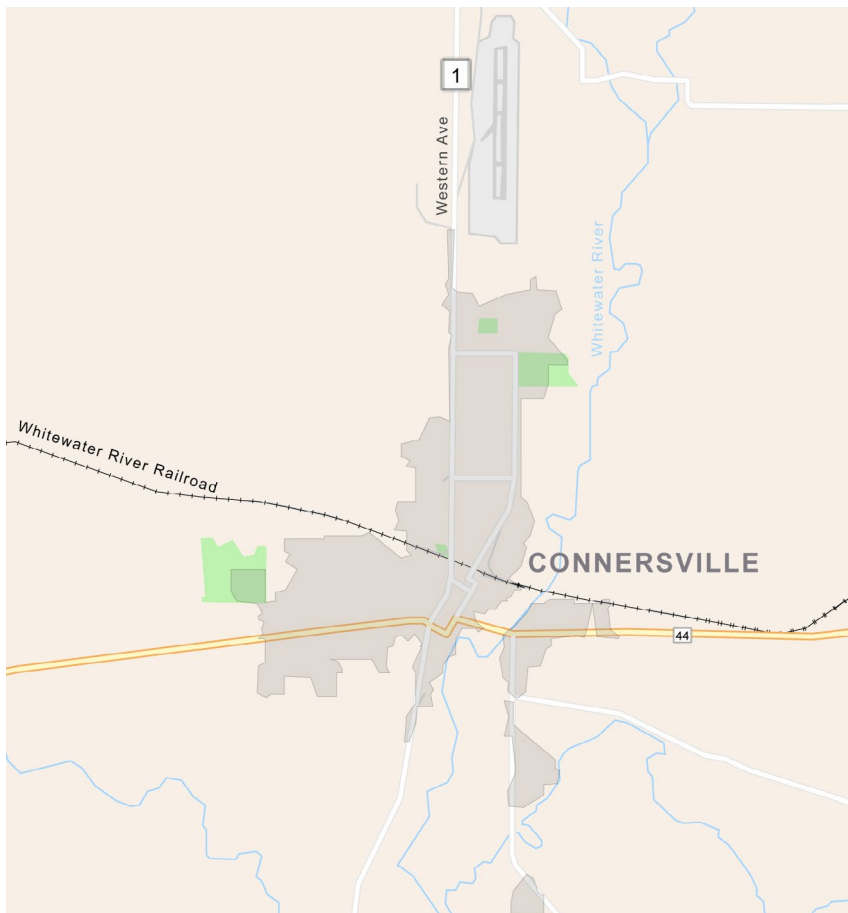
Early Connerville settlers were pioneers in transportation, industrialization and technological advancements during their time. Many of our historical features from this time remain in good standing and create a sense of culture within the walls of these iconic places.

Festivals & Community Events

We have two major festivals every year, the Celebration In The Ville in May and Winterfest that runs the last six weeks of the year in coordination with The Polar Express train excursion. We have several community volunteer and clean-up days per year and will soon have a state of the art music stage and outdoor sound system in the heart of downtown for free community concerts. We enjoy our festivals and events, it is where we all reconnect with our neighbors and push every year to grow each one a little bigger than the last.

City's Central Location in the Tri-State Region

Our community is centrally located in East Central Indiana between three major metropolitan areas: Indianapolis, Indiana, and Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio. Connerville is the largest city in a 30-mile radius. There are three major highways that intersect in Fayette County: State Roads 1, 44 and 121. There are also three railway lines that pass through our community: CSX, CNC (a locally owned short line railway) and Whitewater Valley Railroad. These rail services provide connectivity to Indianapolis, Indiana, and indirect access to other major Midwestern cities. Our location is desirable for small trips and weekend stays for local tourists wanting to enjoy the events and festival celebrations.



Whitewater Valley Railroad

A local not-for-profit actually owns the South end split of the railroad track that runs throughout the city and downtown. A new Train Depot was built so the WWVRA can now host train rides and events like The Polar Express, Wild Western Rides and the Easter Bunny Train. These excursions bring in roughly 30,000 tourists a year that are traveling to enjoy the historical antiques trains.

Whitewater River

The West fork of the Whitewater River serves as one of the City's most prominent natural resources. The river flows along, and outside of, the eastern boundary of the City north of downtown and runs through the City limits out the south end of the county. It is the fastest flowing river in the state of Indiana and is ideal for outdoor activities such as fishing, canoeing, kayaking and nature walks.

POPULATION & ECONOMICS



Population within city limits

13,324



Median household income

\$38,890



Population in entire county

23,398



Commuting workforce

96%

EDUCATION



Youth enrolled in Fayette County School Systems (PreK-12th Grade)

2,702



FCSS enrolled youth that are students with disabilities

21%



FCSS enrolled youth that are economically disadvantaged

58.5%

HEALTH



State health and fitness ranking

90/92



Youth currently being treated for behavioral health issues

31%



Youth currently being treated for mental health issues

43%



Increase of new patients being treated since 2020

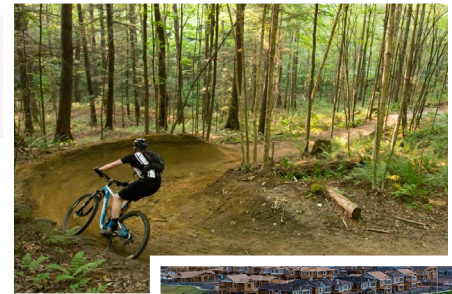
22%

Enhancing Quality of Place

Roberts Park - Youth Activity Zone

Roberts Park is the main and largest park that the City of Connersville offers to the community. In the North East corner of the park sits the main city playground, restrooms and two basketball courts. It is also the most active outdoor recreation area that the city offers. However, this area is very outdated, underutilized, and has very poor ADA accessibility. Connersville Parks and Recreation has never offered public restrooms with all-season accessibility, closing in November and reopening in late March every year. The large playground known as “Kiddyland” is over 35 years old and has several broken and unstable areas, making it generally unsafe. There is a large grass area that surrounds the playground and restroom that could be developed with HELP funding. This project allows the city to create a “Youth Activity Zone” in this area with a new playground, an updated all-season access restroom, a skate park, a pump track and wooded bike trails, and “Mindfulness Walking Path”.

With this funding, we would like to install new playground equipment with an emphasis on sensory features and ADA accessibility. We would like to renovate the current restrooms with ADA stalls, new sinks, new roof and support posts, and a water heat pump for winter usability. We would like to build a hybrid combined skatepark and bicycle pump track to create an “All Wheels Park” next to the playground and restroom. There are 35 wooded acres next to this site that are owned by the park but have never been open to the public. We would like to add multiple bike trails and one large “Mindfulness Walking Path” into these woods for free and open public access. A “Mental Health Wellness Campaign” program will also be paired with the skate park and pump track to teach youth usability and safety, goal achievement, physical and mental health wellness and offer a youth mentoring program. Our response to COVID-19 is planning and preparing for a similar pandemic in the future. Our community has rising numbers of mental and behavioral health needs after the pandemic. We have a need to increase free community places that promote wellness to help those affected by COVID-19 and prepare for a similar event returning with social distancing restrictions.



Location

Roberts Park, 2900 N. Park Road
Connersville, IN 47331

Lot Size

Project Area: 2.2 Acres
Wooded Trails: 35 Acres
Roberts Park: 80 Acres

Budget

Projected Cost	\$1,500,000
Total Funds	\$1,500,000

Site Description

The proposed site area is mostly flat with a small slope in the southwest corner of the lot. In this 2.2-acre area is a playground with swings and a men’s and women’s restroom with four lavatory stalls on each side. There are existing drives and parking spaces on the west, south, and east perimeter of this lot. There are existing water, sewer, and electrical lines installed in this lot. Roberts Park has existing free Wi-Fi throughout the park.

Project Scope

Creation of “Youth Safety Zone” in the city’s main park creates a safe and inclusive environment where the youth of the community feel as though they belong. This creates an area where parents are more confident of the safety of their children allowing the youth to have an option for social engagement with their peers. Updating the playground will greatly improve the park’s amenities as this playground is the largest and most active that the city offers. Renovating the restroom for all-season access and installing a water bottle refill station will allow these amenities to be offered for the first time in the city. Adding creative and artistic features to design for mood setting and cultural enrichment. Collaborating with Local Mental Health Services and not-for-profit organizations to increase community participation as stakeholders.

Project Timeline

We expect that this project will take roughly a year to complete. This project will require more time spent on design and layout. Skateparks and pump tracks require roughly three to four months to complete once construction begins. Many features cannot be completed until these tracks are near the completion stage. The playground and restroom renovations are projected to take between two and three months to complete once the skatepark and pump track is near completion.

Enhancing Quality of Place

River's Edge Park - ADA Requirements

River's Edge Park was a large city project that was under construction during the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is the future relocation site of our baseball fields due to the extreme flooding in the current site. However, Rivers Edge is not just a sports complex, but the first city owned outdoor park with river, canoe launch, fishing and true nature trail access. The city received a federal grant from DNR to install the park features along the river. Most of the design was built, however all ADA requirements were not purchased or installed in the build. DNR has not allowed the park to be open to the public until these ADA features are built. Since the rise of inflation during COVID-19, grant funding is depleted and the park has sat unfinished and unopened for several years. The city is now out of compliancy with DNR, due to time length, and is not eligible for any DNR grants until this issue is resolved. River's Edge will be the very first playground installed in the south-east side of our city. Currently, our parks are on the far North side of city limits. It is designed to have full scale ADA accessibility for a nature trail, fishing, sports games, outdoor concerts, programs and other activities. With the HELP funding, individuals with a handicap or disability would have several options of safe and accessible outdoor space during times of social distancing. It also will give a much closer proximity of physical and mental health and outdoor recreation options to the residents in the Southern Region of the city and county, roughly 7,000 residents. We have broken this project up into three phases. Phase 1 is finishing the grant requirements with DNR and all ADA specifications to officially open this free park up to the public.

The community members are emotionally tied to the completion of this park and it was the most identified project during the Community Engagement Process. Many residents have become upset and discouraged that this park has been built, yet not open to use. This project would restore pride and bring our community back together after the uncertainty that COVID-19 created while giving all residents free access to nature, outdoors activity and several park amenities.

Site Description

River's Edge Park has a new playground, concession stand/restroom and an amphitheater and is owned by the Connerville Parks and Recreation Department. It is not open to the public due to the ADA features not being installed on all three builds as well as handicap parking spaces and walk paths. Stage 1 includes installing these ADA features, parking spots, drives, walk paths and directional site signs to all features. All electricity, water lines and internet are properly installed. A septic tank and sewer line is not purchased or installed leading into the concession/restroom facility. The site needs excavated and graded preferably, however all features in stage 1 can be installed without this done prior.

Project Scope

This project began construction in 2018 and halted in 2020. Since then, the built amenities at the park have sat unused, not maintained and not open to the public. Utilizing HELP funding for this project will make major improvements to the accessibility of the park, allow it to be opened to the public for the first time and offer a public location for enjoyment and relaxation in nature for the entire community.



Location

River's Edge Park
300 E. Veterans Memorial Drive
Connerville, IN 47331

Lot Size

33.7 acres

Budget	
Projected Cost	\$100,000
Total Funds	\$100,000

Project Timeline

Using the original renderings from Architecture and Engineering Firm speeds up our project timeline drastically. We would like to find local excavators and contractors that can begin doing small site grading this fall. Depending on weather, the features of stage one can be completed in three months once the project begins.

Promoting Community Wellness

Offutt's Park - Fitness Park Development

The Connorsville Parks and Recreation Department owns an eight acre lot in a large low-income neighborhood here in the city. This lot is named Offutt's Park and has been owned for many years, yet never fully developed. We would like to develop this lot using HELP grant funding to renovate the area into a free All Access Outdoor Fitness Park. We would like to install an Outdoor Fitness Court, which is a rubberized flooring outdoor court with exercise features on one side and a flat mat surface on the other for outdoor classes. This court is also fully ADA accessible. We also would like to design and install ADA walking paths completely around the park and add parking spaces with at least two handicap parking spots. We also would like to add additional exercise equipment along the path with a handwashing station, a water bottle refilling station and sanitizing stations around the equipment. Outdoor security lighting and poles would also be included. Updates to the existing playground is also desired if it is feasible.

Site Description

Offutt's Park is a relatively flat and undeveloped 8 acre plot located on the North side of the city. This park is inside a large residential neighborhood with over 1400 individuals in close proximity. There is an outdated basketball court, foosball court and small playground on this site, although these features encompass less than 10% of the total usable space. The Connorsville Parks Department will be responsible for updating the existing courts.

Project Scope

This project will create an outdoor park in a highly populated and low-income neighborhood. This will give access for social distancing in the event of another pandemic to return. Providing more sufficient outdoor spaces for our community to be outdoors, work on physical and mental health and having more accessible amenities for residents with disabilities are our major focus with this HELP grant funding.

Location

Offutt's Park
3301 N. Virginia Avenue
Connorsville, IN 47331

Lot Size

2 Parcels, 4 Acres Each

Project Timeline

Depending on weather and the official date of implementation for the HELP grant projects, we would like to see the Fitness Court installed in early winter of 2023 or spring of 2024. This project could take between three to four months to be fully complete once started.

Budget	
Projected Cost	\$360,000
Total Funds	\$360,000



Promoting Community Wellness

Mental Health Wellness Campaign

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health symptoms such as anxiety, depression, behavior issues and suicides have greatly increased in the community. Our youth were greatly impacted during this time and city leadership recognizes a need for increased options and safe locations for them to spend their time within the community. Roughly 60% of our youth live without one parent or both parents and desperately need more positive mentors and role models. We would like to establish a youth focused wellness campaign with the skate park and pump track in the Roberts Park prioritized project. A large portion of our youth do not participate in the traditional youth sports programs and want alternative and high-impact sports options. Our goal is to take advantage of this funding and build these facilities next to the already established youth amenities in Roberts Park, creating a dedicated zone in our main city park that is dedicated as a safe and welcoming zone for all youth. The skate park and pump track will be key in this program’s success for teaching wellness strategies to our youth through skills and mindfulness training and solution focused therapy approaches.

We would like to use the HELP grant funds to acquire one part-time staff position or increase staffing hours to an already existing employee that will be directly responsible for implementing this program. We are budgeting \$30,000 for this position with CDBG funds for an eighteen month program and dedicate funds for implementation until December 31, 2025. An amount of \$10,000 is also being budgeted for supplies for this coordinator to utilize in program events and promotion for this campaign.

Location

Roberts Park
2900 N. Park Road
Connerville, IN 47331
(John H. Miller Building during inclement weather)

Budget	
Supply Costs	\$10,000
Staffing Costs	\$30,000
Projected Cost	\$40,000

Site Description

The proposed site area is a predominantly flat area with small slope in the south-west corner of the lot. In this 2.2 acre area is a playground with swings and a men’s and women’s restroom with four lavatory stalls on each side. There are existing drives and parking spaces on the west, south and east perimeter of this lot. There are existing water, sewer and electrical lines installed in this lot. Roberts Park has existing free Wi-Fi internet throughout the park.

Project Scope

Mental and Physical Health Wellness Program. Outdoor fitness and activity during social distancing. Targeting mental health wellness, general anxiety and social anxiety, depression, behavioral health, mentorship program for all youth, specifically at-risk youth. Mental Health Service Providers can utilize youth therapy sessions and target increased anxiety, social anxiety, depression and behavioral health symptoms that have worsened since COVID-19.

Project Timeline

This program must be publicly advertised for open public bid. The CORE team will vet submitted bids for City Council’s approval. The CORE team will establish an advisory board to oversee program planning with the decided program facilitator. At least one Mental Health Service Provider must be on this board. This program must be fully established before the skate park and pump track opens.



Enhancing Quality of Place

Child Care and Before/After School Center Serving 0 - 18 Years Old



Strengthening Local Economies



Updates to Zoning Codes and City Ordinance

Stimulate Entrepreneurship
by supporting pop-up shops, short rental space, and/or incubator downtown.

Promoting Community Wellness

City Master Trail Map

to connect existing trails, create new and connect the North end of City to South end.

Create Indoor Recreational Space

Possibly Indoor Recreation Center.

Advancing E-Connectivity

New Firewalls

for City Police Department and County Jail.

Dispute Broadband Access


on State Broadband Map. Many areas are incorrect and keep us from receiving bids.






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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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Core Team

Team Members

Dianna Phillips

Brian Robb

Alexandra Pflug

Tara Wessler-Henry

Chad Frank



Pathway Teams

Enhancing Quality of Place

Marla Steele	Connersville Parks and Recreation Director
Brayton Johns	Fayette Community Voices Vice-President, Owner of Johns Brothers General Store
Steve Robbins	Co-owner of Miller, Moster, Robbins Funeral Home & Redevelopment Commission Board Member
Dianna Phillips	CORE Team Member, City Council Member At Large, Discover Connersville Board Member
Andrea Napier	City of Connersville Community Coordinator

Promoting Community Wellness

Patrick Ripberger	Owner of Mezzo Solutions, Communities That Care Board Member
Eric Adams	Communities That Care President & Youth Coalition Director
Timothy Luke	Youth & Mental Health Community Activist
Natasha Walters Koons	Behavioral Specialist at Centerstone & Fayette Central Elementary School
Marla Steele	Connersville Parks & Recreation Director
Alexandra Pflug	Fayette Community Foundation Director CORE Team Member
Andrea Napier	City of Connersville Community Coordinator

Advancing E-Connectivity

Michael King	City of Connersville IT Director
John Pause	TV3 News Channel Director
Brad Colter	City of Connersville Street & Utilities Department Director
Andrea Napier	City of Connersville Community Coordinator

Strengthening Local Economies

Denise Dubois	Owner of Act 3 Pottery
Art Johns	City of Connersville Festivals Committee Member, Community Volunteer & Activist
Dan Parker	Economic Development Commission Director & Discover Connersville Board Member
Sharon McQueen	Whitewater Valley Arts Association Director & Discover Connersville Vice-President
Carolyn Bunzendahl	Discover Connersville President
Alexandra Pflug	Fayette Community Foundation Director CORE Team Member
Dianna Phillips	CORE Team Member, City Council Member At Large, Discover Connersville Board Member
Andrea Napier	City of Connersville Community Coordinator