

what's the
big idea?

what do
you want?

how do we
get there?

where do
we start?

do you have
a plan?

our future. here.

A VISION FOR CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

big.small. all.

champaign county.

PREPARED BY

BIG. SMALL. ALL. CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

ACP – VISIONING AND PLANNING, LTD.

March 2007

collaborative
prosperous
sustainable
supportive
enriching



our future. here.



our future. here.

March 29, 2007

This document describes a vision of what Champaign County can be if we work together to build a shared future; **our future. here.** The vision is the result of a vitally important civic initiative, **big.small.all. Champaign County**, which brought together people of all ages, backgrounds and professions from throughout the County to construct a vision based on shared values and mutual understanding.

Over 1,100 people came together in a series of dialogues over the last 16 months to define community objectives and action strategies to achieve them. These objectives address a broad array of concerns from community identity, to groundwater supply.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to the hundreds of our fellow citizens who worked diligently in the monthly meetings of the Community Assembly to create the vision, and to the scores of volunteers and the many supporting organizations that made the project possible.

our future. here. defines twelve broad goals and 35 priority objectives. Importantly, an action strategy is included for each objective. What matters about this document are not the words it contains but the actions we undertake to give them life. As a community vision, **our future. here.** is not an agenda for any particular institution but a call to each of us to take action. We all must take responsibility for realizing the vision through business, civic and government initiatives.

big.small.all. Champaign County will continue to support these initiatives and can link you with them. Please consider as you review the vision which parts of it you care most about and how you could contribute to realizing them. Together we can make a prosperous, secure and beautiful future; **our future. here.**

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Acknowledgements

Project Leadership

Sponsors Council

The Sponsors Council has provided overall strategic direction and fiscal supervision of the **big.small.all.** project. It is comprised of the chief elected or executive officer of major funding organizations, and other community leaders acting in a personal capacity.

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The design and implementation of the project is overseen by the Steering Committee. **big.small.all.** would not have been possible without the substantial commitment of time and effort made by the volunteer members of the Committee.

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The Project Coordination Committee provided invaluable day to day guidance to the staff. The members of the Committee did double duty in a volunteer capacity making major contributions throughout the project.

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big.small.all. employed two consultants during the process, ACP-Visioning and Planning, Ltd. which designed and guided the process and Surface51 which developed the project identity, designed the website, and implemented the publicity and public relations efforts. The project was also assisted by students enrolled in the High Tech Edge program. The project was managed and implemented by staff of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

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Topical Stakeholder Committee Members carefully deliberated on ideas and issues that surfaced through the Community Dialogues and Stakeholders Workshop to craft the vision. These committees worked diligently throughout the Spring and Summer of 2006 on tasks that were often difficult and sometimes contentious. Their work constructed the basic content of the vision that became **our future. here.**

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Kris Young
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Marisa Zapata

Julie Zienter
Megan Zimmer
Cheryl Zindars

Project Support

Few community initiatives are possible without financial support and that is certainly true of **big.small.all**. The project is designed and operated as a public-private partnership and has succeeded because of the contributions made by many organizations. In addition to the project sponsors, many other public and private entities provided essential financial contributions or made other material contributions for which we are grateful. We are also grateful to all the staff at the various meeting locations who made the extraordinary level of public participation in **big.small.all** possible.

Sponsoring Organizations

Carle Foundation
Champaign County Alliance
Champaign County Chamber of Commerce
Champaign County
Champaign County Regional Planning Commission
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
City of Champaign
City of Urbana
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois
Parkland College
University of Illinois
Village of Rantoul

Supporting Organizations

Ameren IP
Anderson Foundation
Champaign County Community Development Corporation
Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation
Champaign County Farm Bureau
Champaign Park District
One Main Development
Urbana Park District

Donations and Other Assistance

Central Illinois Produce
Champaign County Chamber of Commerce
Champaign County Farm Bureau
Champaign Park District
Champaign Urbana Mass Transit District
Edison Middle School
Illinois Terminal
Lincoln Trail Elementary School
Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School
Rantoul Community Service Center
Rantoul Township High School
Royal Community Building
The Atkins Group
Unity High School
University of Illinois - Assembly Hall, Beckman Institute, Levis Faculty Center
Urbana Civic Center
Urbana Middle School
Urbana Park District - Phillips Recreation Center and Anita Purves Nature Center



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 Actions Not Intentions

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- E. Stakeholders Workshop Summary
- F. Consolidation of the Original Objectives



1. The Project and Process

Almost 30 years have passed since the people of Champaign County last came together to consider, collectively, what their future should be. While many public and private organizations have adopted vision statements and plans of their own, we as a community, have not. The **big.small.all. Champaign County** community visioning project brought together residents from all walks of life to chart a course toward a common future that reflects our shared values. This document, **our future. here.**, records the results of that effort.

our future. here. identifies goals for most aspects of our county's life—from the arts to business development to preserving natural resources. It also elaborates specific objectives and lays out action strategies to realize them.

our future. here. is divided into the following four chapters:

Chapter 1 – The Project and Process. This chapter provides an overview of **big.small.all.** and the visioning process.

Chapter 2 – **our future. here.: The Vision for Champaign County.** This chapter presents the vision for Champaign County. It describes a framework of five strategic elements, 12 goals, and 35 supporting objectives along with other ideas raised in the process.

Chapter 3 – Moving Forward: Objectives and Action Strategies.

This chapter elaborates the 35 objectives and lays out action strategies to realize them. The objectives are organized into the vision’s five strategic elements.

Chapter 4 – our job.now.: Implementing the Vision. This chapter describes the proposed approach to implementing the action strategies.

From the **big.small.all. Champaign County** Charter:

Purpose

A. The Community Visioning Project is intended to look beyond Champaign County’s immediate concerns to create a positive vision of a shared future reflecting common aspirations and building on our strengths and unique opportunities.

B. The purpose of the Community Visioning Project is to foster unity and clarity of purpose among the people of Champaign County so that we can take effective action in furtherance of shared community goals. The community visioning project will do this by:

- i) promoting mutual understanding of the circumstances and concerns of different demographic groups in the community;
- ii) developing an appreciation of the strategic environment confronting the county and of the community’s strengths and weaknesses;
- iii) overcoming collective ambivalence and hesitancy in the pursuit of community goals;
- iv) constructing a compelling vision of a future reflecting shared community values together with an action plan to achieve the desired future; and
- v) strengthening community leadership and fostering the emergence of a new generation of community leaders.

C. The Community Visioning Project will address conditions within a time span of 20 years.

Additional project documentation is available in the Appendices.

Purpose

Taking charge of the future requires clarity of vision and unity of purpose. In a community as large and diverse as Champaign County we could not expect that to emerge spontaneously. **big.small.all.** was conceived as a means to cultivate common understanding, and commitment to action across the county. The purpose is spelled out in more detail in the project Charter (see sidebar).

Despite the challenges presented by adopting a wider scope, **big.small.all.** was designed to be a county-wide project for several reasons. First, the County most closely matches the market reach of the local economy. Additionally, many institutions operate with county-wide jurisdiction. Most importantly key issues and opportunities almost always cross jurisdictional lines and involve more than one local government.

The project, in a nutshell, was designed as a community-wide dialogue focused on a specific outcome: an articulated vision of the future of the community. The dialogue was structured to find areas of broad agreement, and to overcome ambivalence about community goals.

At its heart the visioning process is action oriented. Effective action requires shared understanding among private and public agencies and broad support in the public, private, and non-profit sectors of the community. **big.small.all.** was designed to produce a vision statement together with action strategies. The vision is intended not only to define a set of goals, but to inspire action to achieve them as well. **big.small.all.** also provides a mechanism for fostering initiatives and tracking and reporting on their ongoing realization.

Project History

It has been a long time since the entire community engaged in an effort similar to **big.small.all. Champaign County**. The last such county-wide project was the Town Meeting for Tomorrow in 1976 (see sidebar on the next page). In recent years many people had become concerned that Champaign County was losing the initiative and lacked the kind of shared vision needed to maintain mastery of its future. This persistent unease appeared in varied contexts from social service delivery to county land use planning to economic development and the competitiveness of the University of Illinois.

1976 Town Meeting For Tomorrow

Twenty eight years ago the community came together to consider its future in a public forum called the Town Meeting for Tomorrow. This was an effort to develop a community consensus on growth and other issues. It was sponsored by the RPC and the Champaign County Bicentennial Commission. More than 300 persons attended the initial Town Meeting on March 27, 1976 and discussions extended over the following year.

The project made numerous recommendations many of which were implemented over the succeeding 20 years, including a new terminal at Willard Airport, the Illinois Terminal intermodal facility, the County Health Department, and the Champaign County Economic Development Corporation.

big.small.all. Financial Support**Sponsoring Organizations**

Champaign County
City of Champaign
City of Urbana
University of Illinois
Champaign County Alliance
Carle Foundation Hospital
Champaign County Chamber of Commerce
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois
Village of Rantoul
Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District
Parkland College

Supporting Organizations

Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation
Anderson Foundation
Champaign County Community Development Corporation
One Main Development
Urbana Park District
Ameren IP
Champaign Park District

In the autumn of 2003 these concerns were taken up by the Metropolitan Intergovernmental Council, an informal panel comprised of executives of public agencies serving the Champaign-Urbana-Savoy metropolitan area. At the request of that body, staff of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission proposed a community visioning project as the most effective approach. In April 2004, the Champaign County Board formally requested that the Regional Planning Commission set about organizing a public-private partnership to undertake a community visioning project.

The first informal meeting of what would become the **big.small.all.** Steering Committee took place in late November 2004. The effort was formalized in March of 2005 with approval of a charter setting goals for the project and outlining its governance. The charter can be found in Appendix A.

Project Organization

big.small.all. was established as an independent organization comprised of representatives from business, community organizations, and government. It is not incorporated and has no legal powers of its own. The organization is funded by contributions from businesses, non-profits, and governments. About one third of the funds came from private sources (see sidebar). Its business affairs are handled by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

The overall strategic direction and fiscal supervision of the project is in the hands of a Sponsors Council comprised of the chief elected or executive officer of major funding organizations (those contributing \$10,000 or more). The Council also includes other community leaders acting in a personal capacity. The Sponsors Council is chaired by former Champaign County Board Chair, Barbara Wysocki, with University of Illinois Chancellor Richard Herman serving as Vice Chair. Sponsors Council members are listed in the Acknowledgements

The design and implementation of **big.small.all.** is overseen by a 44-member Steering Committee representing an array of businesses, civic organizations, and governments. The Steering Committee has also provided the preponderance of volunteers for the project and the members have been responsible for most of the community outreach. The day-to-day decisions are in the hands of a 10-person subcommittee of the Steering Committee called the Project Coordination Committee. The Steering Committee is led by two co-chairs: Bruce Knight, City of Champaign Planning Director, and Jennifer Armstrong, Executive Director of 40 North 88 West.

The process was designed and guided by ACP-Visioning & Planning, Ltd., New York (www.acp-planning.com). The project identity, web design, publicity program and public relations effort is the work of Surface 51, Champaign (www.surface51.com). The project is managed by staff of the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

Participants

To be effective the visioning project requires the active engagement of a broad cross section of the community. The name **big.small.all.** was selected to denote an intent to make the process as open and inclusive as possible. The Steering Committee endeavored to bring together folks from every walk of life, age group, and ethnic heritage. The project is designed to include big institutions, small businesses, civic organizations, governments, the University of Illinois, Parkland College, and folks from every city, village, and rural township.

big.small.all. was distinguished by an intensive, multi-faceted and active effort to reach out to all identifiable groups and interests. This effort included:

- Consultant interviews with dozens of stakeholders;
- Direct contact by Steering Committee members with scores of interest groups, businesses, churches, and governments;
- An extensive publicity campaign including radio and television spots, billboards and distribution of 20,000 flyers mainly through the County's elementary schools;
- Fourteen different public meetings in various locations around the County; and
- Follow up contact with interest groups that were under-represented in the various meetings.



This billboard was part of the publicity campaign to generate awareness of the project. Other publicity and outreach methods included buttons, brochures, flyers, newspaper articles, public service announcements, and speaking engagements.

These efforts resulted in an unprecedented level of public participation. Over 1,100 people attended at least one **big.small.all.** event. Participants came from all over the county including all but two townships and all but three villages. Figure 1.1 illustrates the location of the first set of public meetings, the Community Dialogues, and the rates of participation from various locales. Throughout the project geographic representation was pretty well balanced with the City of Urbana and the smaller villages being somewhat over-represented and unincorporated areas and the Village of Rantoul being somewhat under-represented.

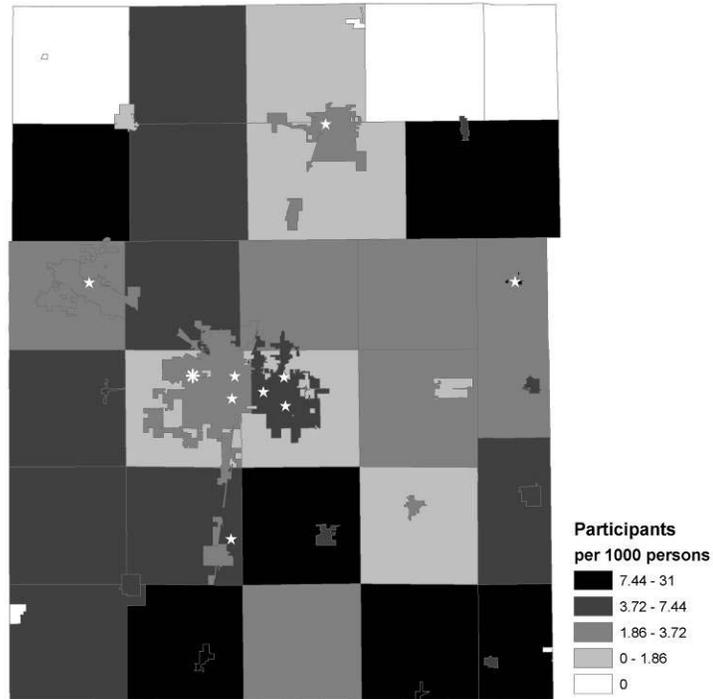
Participants were broadly representative of the county population albeit with some significant reservations. Experience has shown that some segments of the population are very difficult to involve in public meeting processes, particularly lower income households and young adults.

big.small.all. was no exception.

On the whole the participants generally had more education and higher household incomes than the population at large. And though they ranged in age from middle school students to World War II veterans, they also tended to be older than the general population.

The Latino and Asian communities were significantly under-represented, and African-Americans were somewhat under-represented. Persons 25 – 34 years in age were also significantly under-represented.

Figure 1.1 Community Dialogue Meeting Sites and Participation Rates



The demographic profile of participants was tracked using exit questionnaires at various points in the process. The detailed report including some information on occupations can be found in Appendix B.

Process

big.small.all. Champaign County is a citizen-based initiative focused on producing a vision and plan of action for the future and fostering its realization. While the formal dialogue ended in 2006, the project as a whole has no defined end point and will live as long as active efforts continue to achieve its goals and objectives.

The **big.small.all.** process comprises four phases, each of which builds upon preceding activities.

- **your ideas. here.** – The Community Dialogues invited participants to generate ideas about the future of the county. The ideas collected during this phase were later used to develop goals and action strategies.
- **our future. here.** – The Community Assembly consisted of the Stakeholder Workshop and a series of Topical Stakeholder Committee meetings. These meetings explored issues and opportunities affecting the county. The Topical Committees did the hard work of developing detailed goals, objectives, and action strategies.
- **our choices. now.** – The Community Choices Workshops gave citizens the opportunity to review the progress of the effort, identify priority and problematic objectives, and volunteer to participate in

implementation. The results of these workshops were used to distill the emerging vision.

- **our job. now** – The Community Works is the ongoing effort to implement the ideas, make real changes, and track progress toward identified objectives.

your ideas. here. – The Community Dialogues

The ideas generated at the Community Dialogues constitute the foundation of the **big.small.all.** process. In November 2005 everyone living, working, or studying in Champaign County was invited to attend two-hour, open, public brainstorming meetings to think about the future. Approximately 680 people worked in small groups with a trained facilitator to respond to the following question: “What can we do to make Champaign County the best that it can be in the coming years?” This level of participation represented an extraordinary degree of public input. It also captured the diversity of the county, as participants came from varied backgrounds in terms of demographics, income, educational attainment, and place of residence.



A volunteer facilitator records participants' ideas at the meeting in Royal. The Community Dialogue yielded 2,222 ideas in total about the future of Champaign County.

Table 1.1: Community Dialogues Dates, Locations, and Attendance

Meeting Location		Participants
1	Nov. 1, Parkland College, Youth Kickoff	62
2	Nov. 1, Urbana Middle School, Urbana	83
3	Nov. 3, Rantoul Township High School, Rantoul	35
4	Nov. 7, Royal Community Building, Royal	40
5	Nov. 8, Unity High School, Tolono	48
6	Nov. 9, Illinois Terminal, Champaign	125
7	Nov. 10, University of Illinois, Urbana	76
8	Nov. 14, Lincoln Trail Elementary, Mahomet	56
9	Nov. 15, MLK, Jr. Elementary, Urbana	55
10	Nov. 17, Edison Middle School, Champaign	100
Total		681

big.small.all. held ten Community Dialogue meetings, including one focused on youth, and nine others at various locations around the County. A list of the meeting dates, locations, and attendance is included in Table 1.1. The meeting locations are also shown in Figure 1.1 In addition, ideas submitted via telephone, surface mail, email, and the website as well as those generated during the facilitator training sessions were included in the project database. A total of 2,222 ideas were generated.

Reports with the ideas sorted by meeting location and category are available in Appendices C and D.



Participants at the Illinois Terminal meeting listen to the opening remarks before breaking into small brainstorming groups. There were 125 registered participants at this meeting and a total of 681 at all ten meetings.

ACP reviewed all of the 2,222 ideas and sorted them into the 16 categories illustrated in Table 1.2. These groupings were used to structure the Community Assembly process. The ideas have been used as a reference point throughout the **big.small.all.** process.

Table 1.2: Community Dialogue Ideas by Topic

Category	No. of Ideas	Description
Education	243	Ideas relate to primary, secondary, and/or higher education
Social Issues	238	Ideas relate to social and human services issues including healthcare, senior issues, social equity, homelessness, low income needs, etc.
Prosperity	214	Ideas relate to jobs, business, industry, and retail.
Transportation - Public	114	Ideas relate to public transportation.
Community Character	172	Ideas relate to neighborhood and community character, amenities, design elements, revitalization, downtowns, and the urban core. These ideas are focused on the specific nature of development.
Development Patterns	160	Ideas relate to larger land use concerns, connectivity, etc. These are big picture ideas.
Arts, Culture, Activities, and Entertainment	156	Ideas relate to the different types of activities that enhance quality of life including arts and culture, community activities (e.g. markets, fairs, etc.), and other types of entertainment (e.g. movies).
Natural Resources	153	Ideas relate to natural resource and environmental management.
Leadership and Governance	146	Ideas relate to leadership (both civic and governmental), taxation, and processes that improve governance and community participation.
Delivery of Services	145	Ideas relate to “public” services such as utilities, public safety, criminal justice, libraries, and technological infrastructure.
Agricultural Economy and Preservation	92	Ideas relate to agricultural issues from economy to agricultural land preservation.
Parks and Recreation	92	Ideas relate to parks and recreation.
Transportation - Auto	92	Ideas relate to automobile transportation and the road network.
Transportation - Alternative	83	Ideas relate to biking, walking, and alternative forms of transportation.
Housing	58	Ideas relate to housing.
University and Parkland College	52	Ideas relate to the institutions of higher learning – University of Illinois and Parkland College.

our future. here. – The Community Assembly

Stakeholders from throughout the county participated in the Stakeholder Workshop and the subsequent Topical Stakeholder Committees, which together constituted the Community Assembly. The purpose of these activities was to synthesize public input, develop goals and specific objectives, and craft action strategies to achieve them.

Stakeholder Workshop

The Stakeholder Workshop was designed to engage stakeholders in discussions of the future of Champaign County by examining the physical environment and quality of life concerns. These participants were primarily individuals invited by the Steering Committee to ensure broad representation of all interests in the discussions. They also included interested citizens who chose to participate on their own. The workshop was held at the Urbana Holiday Inn on January 27, 2006. Approximately 400 stakeholders and volunteers participated in the event.

The participants were randomly assigned to small groups addressing specific topics. These groups of eight to ten people worked with a trained facilitator on two activities: a mapping exercise, “Strong Places, Weak Places” and a verbal exercise, “Critical Questions”.

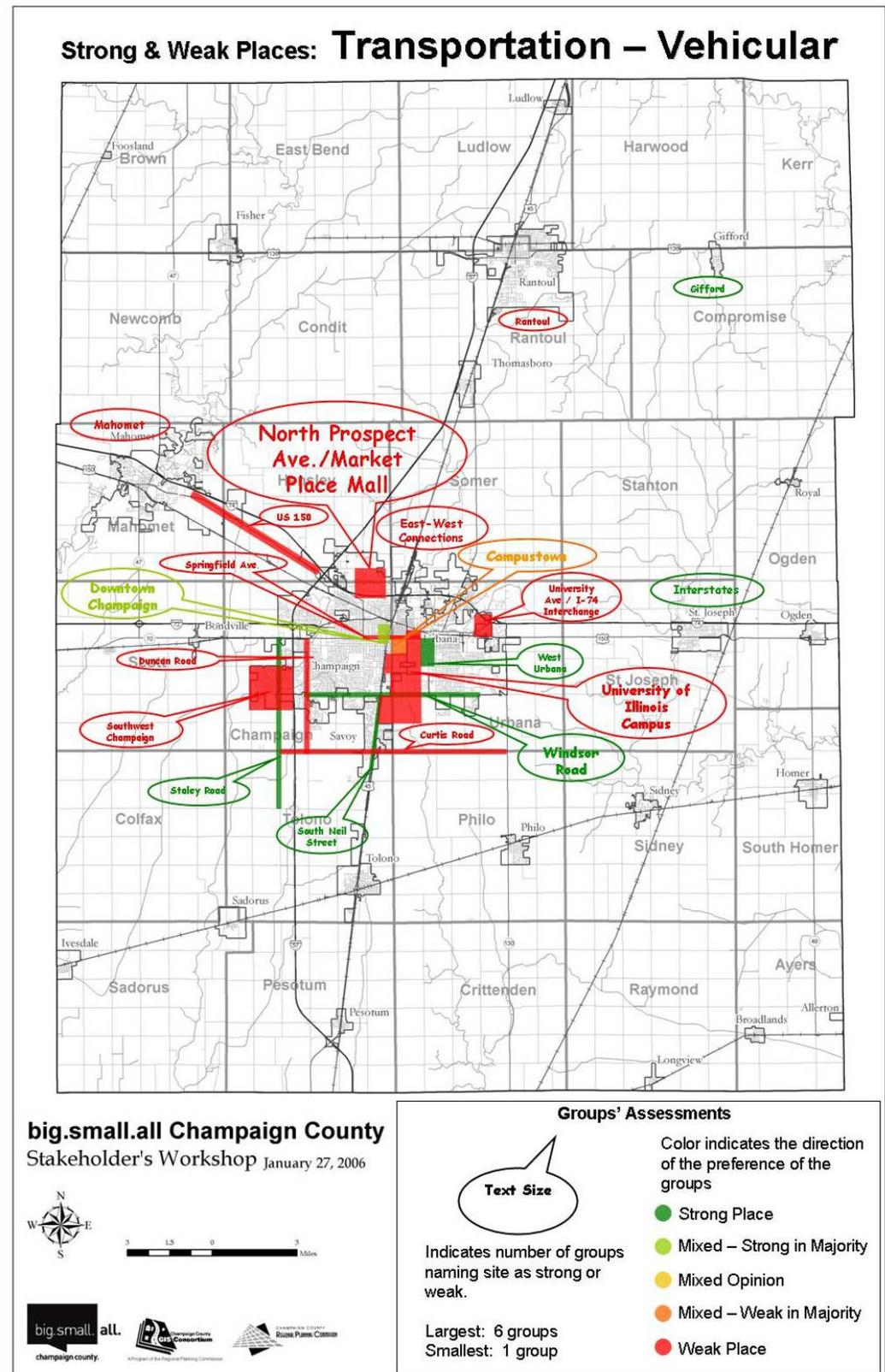
Mapping topics included: Agriculture; Commerce; Community Character; Neighborhoods; Parks, Trails, Recreation and Natural Areas; Transportation – Alternative and Public; Transportation – Vehicular; and Urban Areas and Downtowns. An example of the composite output of one of the nine mapping topics is shown in Figure 1.2.

The Critical Questions exercise addressed the following topics: Arts and Culture; Development Patterns; Economy; Education, Environment and Natural Resources, Leadership and Governance; Social Issues/Diversity; and University of Illinois and Parkland College. More information about the results of these exercises is available in Appendix E.



Pictures from the Stakeholder Workshop (from left to right) – Over 400 stakeholders attended the workshop and participated in two activities: Strong Places, Weak Places and Critical Questions.

Figure 1.2 Composite Map Showing Results of One Stakeholder Workshop “Strong Places, Weak Places” Exercise



Topical Committees

Agriculture
Arts & Entertainment
Development Patterns
Education
Housing & Community Character
Leadership & Governance
Natural Resources
Parks & Recreation
Prosperity
Services & Social Issues
Transportation

Topical Stakeholder Committees

Participants in stakeholder workshops were asked to sign up to continue to work in a committee on a topic of interest to them. Two hundred participants volunteered, and an additional 100 citizens were invited to join the committees in order to ensure broad representation and appropriate expertise. About two-thirds of those who signed up participated in at least one committee meeting.

Participants were organized into ten Topical Committees to ensure a workable number of reasonably sized committees. This was done by consolidating some of the 16 topical categories identified from the Community Dialogues (See Table 1.2). The Natural Resources and Parks committee eventually split into separate Natural Resources and Parks & Recreation committees. The sidebar lists the final 11 committees that completed this phase of the project.

The purpose of the Topical Stakeholder Committees was to carefully deliberate on ideas and issues that surfaced through the Community Dialogues and Stakeholders Workshop and to craft the Vision. Each committee was designed to include stakeholders representing a broad range of interests and expertise. In the end, the volunteer participants were able to choose to work on their topics of choice.

The committees met six times over a period of seven months. This was a substantial commitment and hard work. Inevitably, participation tended to fluctuate and declined somewhat over time, although this varied considerably from committee to committee. These meetings generally lasted two hours and many committees had extra meetings or worked outside the regular meetings as individuals or in subgroups.

The topical stakeholder committee process included the following activities:

- Developing goal statements for their topical areas;
- Identifying recurring themes from the related Community Dialogue ideas and, for each theme, crafting specific objectives with reference to a 25 year time horizon;
- Identifying actions that could be taken to implement the objectives and selecting a priority action for immediate attention;
- Conducting a community resources scan to identify appropriate organizations that could be involved in implementation, the resources needed, measurable criteria for success, and initial steps that could jumpstart implementation; and
- Reviewing their own work with reference to the Community Dialogues and the Stakeholder Workshop and the work of other committees with reference to potential conflicts or overlaps.

At the end of the process the 11 committees had developed 12 community goals, elaborated 68 specific objectives and identified 307 potential implementing actions. This work was reviewed by the Steering

Addressing a Controversy

One objective turned out to be more difficult to finalize than any other. The “Urban Growth and Farmland Resources” objective became a matter of great controversy. The controversy derives in part from the underlying dilemma created by the location of Illinois’ premier research university in the midst of its best farmland. This issue also directly involves the livelihoods of both farmers and homebuilders.

Controversy over this issue arose as early as the second round of Topical Committee meetings in March, 2006. It was addressed in a variety of ways including:

- Involving ACP in the work of the Development Patterns Committee;
- Providing extra opportunities for the real estate development community to review drafts of the vision;
- Revising the design of the Community Choices Workshop to strengthen opportunities for providing critical comments; and
- Soliciting participation by the business community in the Community Choices Workshop.

Despite these efforts controversy remained.

In early December representatives of the Agriculture Committee and the real estate development sector met to try to develop a consensus approach. While some progress was made here, controversy remained.

In the end it was left to the Steering Committee to adopt a version of the objective that it feels fairly represents the views of the County as revealed in the **big.small.all** process. This version is, generally, supported by all interested parties.

Committee, and in some cases, by key stakeholders that may have been underrepresented on certain committees, such as developers, bankers, University of Illinois administration, Urban League, and others.

The results of the stakeholder deliberations – the preliminary vision – was reviewed by the public during the Community Choices Workshop described below.

our choices. now. – The Community Choices Workshops

These events were designed to publicly review the results of the Community Assembly process, provide feedback, and prioritize components of the emerging county vision. The first workshop took place on October 25, 2006 at the University of Illinois Assembly Hall. Workshops were also held during the evening in Rantoul and Urbana to allow for additional participation and feedback. Approximately 360 county residents participated.

The workshops included a critical review of the action plans for each goal. Participants worked in small groups where they were able to raise concerns, make suggestions, and recommend additions.

Participants were also asked to identify the five top priority objectives in the entire Vision. They also could indicate up to three objectives about which they had reservations.

In order to fairly evaluate the voting, similar objectives were consolidated and evaluated with respect to the 360 maximum possible votes they could have received. When that was done two objectives or sets of objectives clearly stood out from the rest:

- The “Funding Quality Education” objective garnered 142 priority votes.
- Four very similar objectives were consolidated into the “Urban Growth and Farmland Resources” objective. The consolidated total for that objective was 154 priority votes.

The next highest priority vote total for any objective was 79, a little over half of these scores. The version of the vision that was reviewed at the Community Choices workshop can be accessed at www.bigsmallall.cc.

our job. now. – The Community Works

In the fourth and ongoing phase of the project, **big.small.all.** will serve as an instrument to move the community toward action to realize the vision, goals, and objectives. Chapter 4 details the proposed approach to implementing the action strategies.

Drafting the Vision

Following the workshop, the Steering Committee considered the feedback in order to finalize the Vision. The final form of **our future. here.** was produced by ACP and Regional Planning Commission staff

Goals, Objectives & Action Strategies

Goals are the broadest policy statements, which express desired outcomes in simple terms. Objectives indicate a more specific policy direction and help to organize strategies. Action strategies are detailed sets of action steps to achieve an objective – such as a specific project or program.

under the direction of the Steering Committee. This occurred at meetings from November, 2006 to February, 2007. These efforts were directed at focusing on the components of the vision that enjoyed the greatest level of support as expressed at the Community Choices Workshops and on reducing duplication in the objectives and action strategies of the different topical stakeholder committees. Through this revision seventeen overlapping and redundant objectives were combined into six. An additional 23 objectives were moved to an “Other Ideas” category because they received limited support (less than 5% of the maximum possible priority votes during the Community Choices Workshop). The revisions to the objectives are summarized in Appendix F.

The document was heavily edited for consistency. This was necessary to fill in missing material that the Topical Committees did not provide. It was also important to ensure that the action strategies described activities that could be readily undertaken in a straight forward way.

our future. here. represents the ideas, hard work, and dedication of hundreds of Champaign County residents. It is – to the greatest extent possible – an expression of our collective hopes and aspirations for all aspects of our life together here.

Prospects

our future. here. does not have the force of law. It will be realized to the extent that individuals and organizations come together to pursue its objectives and undertake its actions.

The vision represents the community’s aspirations for the future and a roadmap for achieving them. This document describes goals, objectives, and actions that enjoy broad community support.

big.small.all. has also spurred creative thinking and engaged all sectors of the community in a productive dialogue. The project has helped find the creative “third path” that moves the community forward with collaborative efforts from the public, private, and civic sectors. It has helped to identify consensus in many areas, and has worked to provide a mechanism for approaching issues where broad consensus does not yet exist. With an emphasis on dialogue, the project sets the stage for clearly defining the issues for which further investigation and discussion may be required.

our future. here. is a not wish list to be implemented by any particular entity. It is an agenda for action by residents, community groups, businesses, institutions, and local governments who care about the future of Champaign County.



**Champaign
County:**
Collaborative
Prosperous
Sustainable
Supportive
Enriching

2. our future. here. The Vision for Champaign County

our future. here. is built upon the ideas and aspirations of those who live and work in the county. These ideas – 2,222 in total – were generated during the Community Dialogues. The Community Assembly distilled the ideas from the Community Dialogues into 12 goals, 68 objectives, and 307 action steps. This version of the vision was then revised and refined based on feedback received at the Community Choices Workshops.

our future. here. is organized by five broad strategic elements that define the scope and key dimensions of the vision. It retains the same 12 goals but condenses the vision to 35 priority objectives supported by 145 specific action steps.

The results of the **big.small.all.** process capture a broad consensus of the community’s aspirations. The supporting action strategies in Chapter 3 suggest ways to turn the goals into reality.

**The Structure of the Vision:
Objectives and
Strategic Elements**

A Collaborative County

- County Identity
- A Tolerant Community
- Strategic Thinking
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Participatory Government
- Representative Government
- Town & Gown Relationship
- Countywide Transportation Planning

A Prosperous County

- Business Climate
- New Business Growth
- Technology Infrastructure
- Workforce Development
- Air Service
- Locally Grown Food

A Sustainable County

- Urban Growth and Farmland Resources
- Parks and Natural Areas
- Groundwater Supply
- Energy Use
- Waste Reduction
- Alternative Transportation
- Mixed Use Development
- Urban Redevelopment

A Supportive County

- Health and Well Being
- Healthcare Access
- Access to Services
- A Safe Community
- Affordable Housing
- Accessible Housing

An Enriching County

- Funding Quality Education
- Alternative Education
- Arts Education
- Regional Arts Center
- Access to Open Space
- Open Access for Recreation

Five Strategic Elements

our future. here. envisions a Champaign County that is collaborative, prosperous, sustainable, supportive and enriching.

These five themes describe the overall thrust of the vision. They organize the 12 broad goals and 35 specific objectives that were developed by the Topical Committees. The committee topics (see side bar on page 1.10) do not map directly onto these themes. Objectives developed by one committee may fall within two or more themes. The individual goals and objectives often have multiple dimensions. They are grouped in themes that reflect the primary, but not necessarily the only, concern that they address.

The five themes are:

A Collaborative County speaks to our intent to work better together, understand one another, and be prepared to work cooperatively and effectively to pursue shared goals.

A Prosperous County captures our desire to create a future in which Champaign County attracts new investment, the University is fully competitive, businesses flourish, individuals and families thrive, and resources are available to support community initiatives.

A Sustainable County describes our aspiration to create stable and convivial neighborhoods, use natural resources including prime farmland efficiently and wisely, minimize waste and pollution, and restore the ecological integrity of the natural environment.

A Supportive County reflects our commitment to ensuring that everyone in Champaign County has access to the basic necessities of a secure, happy, and dignified life in which they can contribute to the larger life of the community.

An Enriching County addresses our intent to enable individuals to flourish and to reach their full potential, and to lead lives that are healthy, stimulating, and fulfilling.

A Collaborative County

Goal

In 2030, we envision Champaign County as a collaborative county where...

All government bodies in the county work cooperatively, efficiently and with a high level of citizen participation to provide excellent public services.

Objectives

- **County Identity** – The residents of Champaign County will have a strong sense of being part of a single community with shared values and common interests.
- **A Tolerant Community** – Champaign County will be a model of tolerance, harmony and respect for racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity.
- **Strategic Thinking** – Organizations, businesses, and governments in Champaign County will have a clear sense of their place at the state, national, and global scale, and of the ways that global trends and conditions affect their immediate and long term prospects.
- **Intergovernmental Cooperation** – Champaign County will be a place where intergovernmental cooperation is actively undertaken by all units of government.
- **Efficient Public Services** – Duplicative services will be substantially eliminated and all appropriate opportunities for sharing or consolidating government responsibilities will be implemented.
- **Participatory Government** – A significant proportion of the citizenry, of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, will be actively engaged in local elections and in government decision-making and action.
- **Representative Government** – Citizen leaders will effectively represent all segments of the community.
- **Town & Gown Relationship** – Leadership of the University of Illinois and Parkland College will bring the knowledge, skill, and energy of their institutions to all significant civic initiatives.
- **Countywide Transportation Planning** – All appropriate agencies will implement a coordinated countywide transportation plan produced by a representative planning program comparable to the Champaign Urbana Urbanized Area Transportation Study (CUUATS).

Other Ideas

- Local governments will effectively communicate with the community regarding the effects and costs of significant government proposals and the process for decision-making.

2. Our Future Here: The Vision for Champaign County

- Capital improvement planning will be done on a countywide basis through ongoing formal collaboration.
- All local planning authorities will have current, electronically-compatible plans for growth and development and share them through participation in a regional planning consortium to identify possible conflicts and opportunities with respect to regional issues (such as aquifer withdrawals).
- The County, municipalities, and other governmental entities will have formal policies guiding infrastructure investment and service provisions that equitably share the costs and benefits of development.

A Prosperous County

Goals

In 2030, we envision Champaign County as a prosperous county where...

A vibrant, diverse economy ensures the competitive position of the University of Illinois; trains, attracts, and retains a quality workforce; fosters an array of environmentally responsible businesses; provides well-paid jobs; creates a variety of shopping opportunities; and contributes to the quality of life in all communities.

Agriculture is a thriving segment of the community that is maintained through the preservation and protection of farmland and is supported by the use of locally grown crops, strong family farms, and a public informed about the importance of an agricultural sector that fosters ecologically sound, socially responsible and economically viable practices.

Objectives

- **Business Climate** – Champaign County will have a national reputation for its favorable business climate and support for local businesses.
- **New Business Growth** – The success rate of new businesses will increase significantly, and the earnings and employment in small businesses will keep pace with the overall growth of the county economy.
- **Technology Infrastructure** – Champaign County will have technology infrastructure that places it among the leaders in the nation.
- **Workforce Development** – Champaign County will have a unified, comprehensive workforce development program that will increase the share of county employment in well-paying occupations and raise the median wage relative to the State.
- **Air Services** – Champaign County will be the premier regional air service hub in Central Illinois.
- **Locally Grown Food** – A significantly increased share of the food consumed in Champaign County will be produced in the county.

Other Ideas

- The number of farms in Champaign County will be at least as large as today.
- Economic growth in municipalities, outside Champaign, Urbana, and Savoy, will keep pace with the overall county rate of growth.
- Most people, and all school children, will have had direct contact with farm operators and have greater knowledge of the significance of Champaign County agriculture.

2. Our Future Here: The Vision for Champaign County

- New interstate highway access points will be constructed as needed.
- Freight and passenger train service will be much more frequent and reliable, and will link Champaign County with local, regional, and national points of interest.

A Sustainable County

Goals

In 2030, we envision Champaign County as a sustainable county where...

The community is a nationally recognized leader in environmental conservation, recreation, and education that successfully integrates people and their activities with the natural world in ways that create high quality, sustainable human and natural communities.

Land is used to create well planned, compact, and contiguous communities that minimize sprawl, provide sustainable infrastructure, promote infill development, protect natural and green areas, preserve farmland, encourage accessible mixed use neighborhoods, provide affordable housing, and offer an array of transportation choices.

Attractive and vibrant communities - old and new, rural, urban, and suburban - are pedestrian-friendly, include diverse activities and people, incorporate natural areas and landscaping, and highlight the distinctive qualities of the area.

A variety of countywide transportation options, including accessible public transportation and attractive well-maintained roadways, bike paths, and pedestrian ways allow people and goods to move safely and efficiently within and between communities, to the larger region, and beyond.

Objectives

- **Urban Growth and Farmland Preservation** – A significantly larger share of new development will be built at higher densities and will be contiguous to or within existing built-up areas, reducing the rate of farmland conversion.
- **Parks and Natural Areas** – The acreage of urban and county parks and protected natural areas will at least double, the ecological integrity of their natural areas will be restored, and the sites will be protected from disturbance by neighboring land uses.
- **Groundwater Supply** – Policies will be in place that protect the county's groundwater resources and ensure a safe sustainable water supply for humans and wildlife.
- **Energy Use** – Champaign County will significantly reduce non-renewable energy use.
- **Waste Reduction** – Champaign County will significantly reduce the tonnage of waste disposed of in landfills and increase the volume and type of materials that are reused or recycled.
- **Alternative Transportation** – Land use patterns, infrastructure investments, programs, and policies will provide most people with convenient and safe transportation choices and encourage walking, biking, and public transit.

- **Mixed Use Development** – Public and private initiatives will significantly increase the development and redevelopment of mixed use neighborhoods that include strong local businesses.
- **Urban Redevelopment** – Existing neighborhoods and downtowns will see significant new investment and become desirable locations where older buildings are preserved and complemented by new development.

Other Ideas

- Private and governmental actions have improved the quality of the county's streams and riparian areas, exceeding federal and state standards while maintaining effective drainage for agriculture and appropriate flows for other vital economic and public uses.
- Champaign County will have developed regional plans with neighboring counties to link natural landscapes and improve streams and riparian areas on a regional scale.
- Buildings in Champaign County will be constructed to be environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live, study and work.
- Multi-modal, controlled access, complete streets in Champaign, Urbana, and Savoy will be guided by the vision's goal for development patterns.
- Champaign County will be a national leader in its use of sustainable transportation modes and models.

A Supportive County

Goals

In 2030, we envision Champaign County as a supportive county where...

A caring, tolerant community that values diversity provides all people access to comprehensive services that contribute to health, welfare, safety, and quality of life throughout the county.

All communities provide people of all ages, abilities, and incomes with safe, affordable, well-maintained and energy efficient housing choices for both renters and owners.

Objectives

- **Health and Well-Being** – Key measures of health and safety will significantly improve for all residents in Champaign County.
- **Healthcare Access** – Champaign County will be a national model for providing access to an affordable, integrated, comprehensive, seamless model of health care.
- **Access to Services** – Residents of every community will have convenient access to information, education, recreation, supportive services, and crisis intervention.
- **A Safe Community** – Champaign County’s communities will be safe environments that effectively deter drug use, criminal activity, and inmate recidivism through an integrated countywide system of evidence-based practices.
- **Affordable Housing** – All persons at every income level will be able to afford safe, quality housing.
- **Accessible Housing** – All persons with disabilities will be able to purchase or rent quality housing that is accessible, supportive, and meets their needs, at an affordable cost.

Other Ideas

- All schools will provide a safe and healthy learning environment in which students of all ages learn about, practice, and adopt a healthy lifestyle.
- Champaign County's opportunities and services for persons of retirement age will be a recognized model throughout the Midwest for the retention and attraction of persons 55 years of age and older.

An Enriching County

Goals

In 2030, we envision Champaign County as an enriching county where...

A countywide array of arts, cultural activities, community events, and entertainment options contributes to an exceptional quality of life and community spirit and is promoted to people of all ages and incomes, residents and visitors alike, at educational institutions, community centers, museums, performance venues, and exhibition spaces.

An excellent life-long education system provides a safe, healthy, diverse, innovative learning environment and job training opportunities through equitable funding, community involvement, and supportive relationships with the University of Illinois, Parkland College, and the business community.

Ample parks, trails, and centers for active and passive recreation opportunities contribute to the enjoyment, health and well being of the county's residents.

Objectives

- **Funding Quality Education** – All public schools will provide excellent instruction and student services in state-of-the-art facilities to all children, and will have the necessary financial resources, funded from a balance of sources that significantly reduce dependence on property taxes.
- **Alternative Education** – All students will have access to a range of alternative forms of schooling that meet their educational needs and enrich the learning environment.
- **Arts Education** – A consecutive program in all arts disciplines will be an integral part of the curriculum at every grade level in all Champaign County schools.
- **Regional Arts Center** – Champaign County will have a reputation throughout the Midwest as a center for art and entertainment and will be a model for its public and private financial support of the arts.
- **Access to Open Space** – All communities and residents will have access to quality neighborhood and regional parks that are connected through trails, greenways, and public sidewalks to all major cultural facilities and schools throughout the county and adjacent locales.
- **Open Access for Recreation** – Government entities will cooperate to provide all county residents with open access for recreation at all appropriate public facilities.

Other Ideas

- Everyone will have access to a comprehensive, lifelong career development system and a learning environment that promotes a thirst for knowledge and a passion for excellence.
- The audience for Champaign County attractions will be substantially larger and more diverse. Local attractions will be significantly enlarged and enhanced and new attractions serving the county and beyond will be established.
- All parts of the academic, business and professional sectors of the community will be actively involved in education and career development programs.
- Arts and cultural programs that address the needs, preferences, and talents of people of all ages, from children to seniors, will be conveniently available in every community.
- Arts programs that reflect the culture of all racial and ethnic groups will be accessible throughout the county in venues that bring those different groups together.
- Every arts group will have the capacity to utilize a wide array of media to effectively reach the entire population of the county in promoting arts events and venues.
- Each community in Champaign County will have and maintain an individual identity and Champaign County will have a regionally distinctive identity.
- All commercial development will be designed, maintained, and redeveloped to meet uniformly high aesthetic standards.
- All communities will be implementing plans to beautify all areas and neighborhoods and have policies that require that all development and public infrastructure be designed and maintained to meet uniformly high aesthetic standards.



3. Moving Forward: Objectives and Action Strategies

The significance of the vision lies in the actions taken to realize it. This chapter details, for each strategic theme, the objectives, their rationales and the means for achieving them. This is where the “rubber meets the road.”

The key element is the Action Strategy for achieving each objective. The Action Strategy includes a “starting point” representing the most appropriate place to start work. The starting points are described in some detail. Additional follow-on or supporting actions that will help to achieve the objective are also included.

It is important to note that the actions identified through the **big.small.all.** process respond to the current issues and conditions in the county. It will be necessary to adapt them to include, supplement and support ongoing and future initiatives originating apart from **big.small.all.** As time passes and conditions change the implementation effort will evolve. New action strategies will emerge to best realize the objectives and goals of the vision.

A Collaborative County

These objectives speak to a desire to work better together, understand one another and be prepared to work cooperatively and effectively to pursue shared goals.

- County Identity
- Tolerant Community
- Strategic Thinking
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Efficient Public Services
- Participatory Government
- Representative Government
- Town & Gown Relationship
- County-wide Transportation Planning

County Identity

All our objectives require effective concerted action, which can only come about with unity of purpose. Unity of purpose can be developed and maintained with a stronger sense of mutual interests and shared values.



Credit: Darrell Hoemann

Objective

The residents of Champaign County will have a strong sense of being part of a single community with shared values and common interests.

Starting Point

Organize an annual event intended to bring all the people of the county together in a comfortable and fun setting that also helps broaden understanding and mutual appreciation of every element of the county community.

This could entail one or more activities such as a chautauqua, exhibition, tour, etc. It would have to be attractive to a wide array of persons and strongly promoted county-wide.

An appropriate entity with county-wide responsibility could organize participation by a broad cross-section of organizations, businesses, and governments to underwrite and produce the event.

Other Actions

- Organize an annual county-wide dance for high school students from all districts.
- Host forums, seminars, exhibitions, etc. focusing on issues that affect the entire county and that highlight common interests.
- Organize field trips, employee exchanges, and other means of broadening people's exposure to other communities within the county.
- Organize projects to involve people across the county in the same activity, like book reading, film screenings, etc.

A Tolerant Community

Relations between different racial, ethnic, and religious groups have been a challenge historically and remain so today. Moving the entire community forward on key initiatives with concerted and unified purpose requires that all persons feel included and valued in the community.



Objective

Champaign County will be a model of tolerance, harmony and respect for racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity.

Starting Point

Develop specific proactive strategies to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

Many techniques have been developed around the country to do this. A systematic survey and evaluation could identify the approaches and specific programs with the greatest relevance to our community.

This initiative could be undertaken by a panel of key stakeholders with the support of community leadership and appropriate local agencies.

Strategic Thinking

We live in a challenging, fast-paced world. This dynamic requires a much greater understanding of the current conditions and trends and the interconnections between Champaign County, the region, and beyond.



Objective

Organizations, businesses and governments in Champaign County will have a clear sense of their place at the state, national and global scale, and of the ways that global trends and conditions affect their immediate and long term prospects.

Starting Point

Develop a set of agreed upon county-wide statistical indicators that track conditions relevant to the objectives contained here.

Statistical indicators can be developed that relate to most objectives in this vision. In most cases, data is already collected and published by other entities and would only need to be compiled for this purpose. In other cases new efforts to collect data would be required.

A central entity would need to work with key interests to develop one indicator (or possibly more) for each objective. This may be done by touching base with stakeholders in some cases and in others may require more extended discussion.

Other Actions

- Establish an agriculture blue ribbon panel to report on the current state and prospects of agriculture in the county, including the status and conversion of farmland. The panel would consist of recognized experts in agriculture and related disciplines, and appointees by townships from a geographically-representative set of rural townships.
- Develop an annual economic report for Champaign County addressing all key sectors, including agriculture, and supported by an advisory panel with appropriate experts in each field.
- Host forums and other discussions of global trends and conditions that do or may affect Champaign County.
- Develop an agreed upon list of other U.S. communities with whom we compete for new public and private investment and compare Champaign County's performance on key indicators with those competitors.
- Host exhibits, competitions, etc. that focus on the long-term future of the county and imaginative ways to meet potential challenges.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

Champaign County has many independent governmental units with overlapping jurisdictions. Moving forward on any specific initiative usually requires consensus from numerous local taxing districts that coordinate and implement public policy, planning, and appropriation of resources. More efficient, effective and coordinated delivery of public services will also reduce public expenditures.

Objective

Champaign County will be a place where intergovernmental cooperation is actively undertaken by all units of government.

Starting Point

Strengthen county-wide governmental councils for various government bodies.

A central agency would work with existing organizations to assist them with developing and promoting agendas, meeting logistics, and recording and reporting on meeting results.

Other Actions

- Inventory existing governmental entities and their current cooperative efforts, and identify opportunities for improved communication or cooperation.
- Create joint alliances for service provision whenever possible.
- Promote communication and cooperation on a regional basis beyond the county's boundaries on important regional issues such as water supply, transportation, and the environment.

Efficient Public Services

More effective and efficient governmental services should translate into better government and lower costs. Fewer independent entities will make it easier for citizens to understand the authority and responsibilities of the governments that serve them. In other regions, fewer governmental units provide the same range of services, which may create a potentially significant competitive disadvantage for the county.

Objective

Duplicative services will be substantially eliminated and all appropriate opportunities for sharing or consolidating government responsibilities will be implemented.

Starting Point

Establish a process with strong public input to study consolidation opportunities.

An independent and credible group of citizens could create the process and undertake such a study. The study would identify opportunities for reducing public expenditures and improving public services based on operational efficiencies, availability of practical legal mechanisms, and supportive public opinion with respect to various alternatives for sharing or consolidating responsibilities.

This could be initiated by an independent civic organization with the participation of local governments.

Other Actions

- Conduct an inventory of existing municipal services and taxing bodies to identify those that could be combined or merged for economy and efficiency.

Participatory Government

A more involved citizenry ensures more responsive government and more effective policy. This is especially true today, since it is difficult to understand and navigate local governments, many of which have overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities.



Objective

A significant proportion of the citizenry, of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, will be actively engaged in local elections and in government decision-making and action.

Starting Point

Create a county-wide local government “ombudsman” office that can be contacted by any citizen to help them get to the right person in the right government to answer their question.

The “ombudsman” would serve all county units of government. The office would answer inquiries directly, maintain a web-based guide to local government, make presentations, and otherwise provide information. The “ombudsman” could be an added function of a county-wide entity and would need to be responsible to the local governments it supports.

Other Actions

- Develop, disseminate, and utilize simple, brief, pre-written lessons for the classroom to increase civics and voter awareness.
- Provide leadership training in school by giving students opportunities for substantive decision-making.
- Create opportunities for community leaders to visit and teach in schools through establishment of a speaker’s bureau.
- Increase opportunities for community participation by regularly scheduling town meetings, conducting thorough public information and outreach, and exploring multiple methods to reach stakeholders.
- Promote the creation of official, web-based mechanisms to post information and provide a forum for citizen input and dialogue.
- Encourage local radio and television stations to air shows and segments devoted to local government issues and community focus.

Representative Government

Good government requires appreciation of all perspectives in the community and sound decision-making processes. This requires that concerns be expressed effectively by persons who can speak credibly for constituent groups and who are also knowledgeable about government procedures, processes, and issues. It also requires independent critical review of government processes.



Objective

Citizen leaders will effectively represent all segments of the community.

Starting Point

Establish a non-partisan, government watchdog organization that can objectively explain ideas and policies, and help improve their effectiveness.

Bring together non-partisan leaders engaged in increasing representation and watchdog activities to examine the feasibility of supporting a staffed organization similar to the better government groups typically found in larger communities.

This could be initiated by an existing independent non-partisan organization engaged in these efforts.

Other Actions

- Publicize the advantages of and means to create nonpartisan decision making.
- Develop a resource guide to educate citizens about local government and encourage/facilitate participation.
- Establish an academy of local leaders and volunteers who go out and speak to clubs, groups, and schools to explain the function of all local governments in the county.
- Initiate an awards program to recognize community members who participate in local government activities.

Town & Gown Relationship

Our institutions of higher learning are among the best in the nation and a unique source of specialized knowledge and expertise. At the same time they are very important employers in highly competitive industries and have a special stake in the well-being and competitiveness of the community. It is crucial to leverage their substantial resources and address their concerns as we make decisions and undertake initiatives.



Credit: Darrell Hoemann

Objective

Leadership of the University of Illinois and Parkland College will bring the knowledge, skill and energy of their institutions to all significant civic initiatives.

Starting Point

Identify opportunities for the leadership of the University of Illinois and Parkland College to collaborate with the larger Champaign County community.

Identify past examples of successful collaboration as well as noteworthy misunderstandings or missed opportunities. Identify potential future collaborations and means to ensure timely communication and involvement and document them so that all key business, civic, and government entities can make best use of them.

This could be undertaken within the framework of an existing forum where the University and the College are represented.

Other Actions

- Foster comprehensive work force development and integration with technology transfer initiatives, focusing on high-tech workers and on under-skilled/underemployed employees.
- Support the University of Illinois master teacher program, as described in the University of Illinois Strategic Plan.
- Develop a plan for Parkland College and University of Illinois to support the K-12 educational system.

County-wide Transportation Planning

Present transportation planning efforts are tied to institutional structures with artificial boundaries. Travel and transportation questions extend throughout the county and need, therefore, to be coordinated on a county-wide basis.



Objective

Appropriate agencies will implement a coordinated county-wide transportation plan produced by a representative transportation planning program comparable to the Champaign Urbana Urbanized Area Transportation Study (CUUATS).

Starting Point

Identify the potential legal framework and means of funding a county-wide transportation plan.

Current law provides no clear mechanism to undertake transportation planning on a county-wide basis. Various means and legal authority exist but the optimal approach requires consideration and consultation with many parties.

An agency with county-wide responsibility, access to legal assistance, and appropriate expertise could be tasked to prepare this report.

Other Actions

- Create the legal, financial, and institutional framework needed to develop a county-wide transportation plan.
- Conduct a county-wide transportation study to research transportation needs and required infrastructure improvements including public transit, freight movement, and alternative transportation modes.
- Identify county roads to become “complete streets” which provide infrastructure for all transportation modes, as defined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- Designate and protect selected streets or roadways that exhibit historical, cultural, or scenic value as “legacy lanes.”
- Provide county residents with education on the costs and benefits of all modes of transportation.

A Prosperous County

These objectives captures our desire to create a future in which Champaign County attracts new investment, the University is fully competitive, businesses flourish, individuals and families thrive, and resources are available to support community initiatives.

- Business Climate
- New Business Growth
- Technology Infrastructure
- Workforce Development
- Air Service
- Locally Grown Food

Business Climate

Attraction, retention, and expansion of local businesses is a primary contributor to the financial health and employment of Champaign County citizens and the foundation for other community initiatives. Fostering the development of small and minority-owned businesses is a key means of expanding economic opportunity. National quality of life rankings, including business climate, provide comparative data that individuals and businesses use to decide where to locate and invest. The actual and perceived business climate is a key factor in retaining and attracting business in Champaign County.



Objective

Champaign County will have a national reputation for its favorable business climate and support for local businesses.

Starting Point

Coordinate efforts of local governments to review and amend ordinances to remove or lower obstacles to business development.

Coordination between communities is important to reduce competitive disadvantages and increase uniformity of regulations and incentives. A joint business/government process would be required to enlist all of the stakeholders and key actors in this process.

Other Actions

- Increase awareness, among the public and business-owners, of existing programs and agencies that provide support services to local businesses.
- Encourage business owners to participate in on-going training to promote successful business practices.
- Support federal and state initiatives that promote economic development in the county.
- Proactively lobby to reduce the cost of doing business in Illinois to make it more competitive with other states.

New Business Growth

New businesses generate a substantial part of overall employment growth and are the foundation for expansion of the county's economy into new areas of opportunity. Supporting minority-owned businesses is an important means to broaden economic well-being and community cohesion. Fostering new business is especially important with respect to commercializing innovations developed at the University of Illinois.



Objective

The success rate of new businesses will increase significantly, and the earnings and employment in small businesses will keep pace with the overall growth of the county economy.

Starting Point

Survey existing small businesses throughout the county to generate a profile of small business in the community and to document the challenges and opportunities they face.

Existing efforts to assist small businesses can be strengthened and focused by better understanding specific needs and opportunities particularly with respect to research spin-offs and minority businesses.

This could be done by an independent entity, perhaps in conjunction with an academic unit at the University of Illinois.

Other Actions

- More widely promote and better coordinate programs to provide small businesses with technical assistance, mentoring, and wider networking opportunities.

Technology Infrastructure

Fast, dependable, affordable broadband access to digital information is an increasingly important factor in retaining and attracting quality jobs and employment in Champaign County. National rankings of communities with the best technology infrastructure contribute to comparative data that individuals and businesses use to decide on where to locate and invest.

Objective

Champaign County will have technology infrastructure that places it among the leaders in the nation.

Starting Point

Define the elements of an improved technology infrastructure county-wide, identify gaps, and address funding issues.

A county-wide “technology needs assessment” of existing and planned technology infrastructure requires cooperative work by several entities and considerable technical expertise. A lead agency would be required to initiate the coordination of business, government, and University of Illinois participants from throughout the county.

Workforce Development

The overall economic well-being of the county and the breadth of economic opportunity are built on the well-being of individual families and the wages they earn. A local economy where growth is led by more well-paying higher-skilled jobs will also generate a greater number of jobs at all skill levels.



Objective

Champaign County will have a unified, comprehensive workforce development program that will increase the share of county employment in well-paying occupations and raise the median wage relative to the State.

Starting Point

Work with existing agencies and institutions, including Parkland College and the University of Illinois, to support the K-12 educational system and develop a plan for an integrated unified workforce development program.

A number of agencies are involved in workforce development and related education programs. A comprehensive plan would integrate technology transfer initiatives, focus on high priority occupations including technology fields and the building trades, and assist the under-skilled and underemployed. This would require the participation of each of the existing entities as well as the University and College.

An independent entity in a position to coordinate with school districts, workforce development programs, and employers would need to convene discussions leading to development of a unified plan.

Air Service

The actual and perceived availability of convenient passenger and freight air service is a key location criterion for many businesses. This is particularly true in the technology sector where the University of Illinois plays a key role. Air service is also important to existing enterprises and is a quality of life issue for many. Champaign County possesses facilities at Willard Airport, the Rantoul National Aviation Center, and Frasca Field that constitute important opportunities to expand passenger, freight, and other air services.



Credit: Lonna Pruitt

Objective

Champaign County will be the premier regional air service hub in Central Illinois.

Starting Point

Study and report on alternative means for funding airport improvements and operations.

An independent entity could sponsor such a study, working with key stakeholders.

Other Actions

- Develop educational programs so that the citizens and users can understand the operations and funding of the airports.
- Improve personal services inside the security areas of Willard Airport and address the issue of parking cost.
- Develop an information center and gateway to the county at Willard Airport.

Locally Grown Food

The desire to support local farmers and food-processors as well as the growing interest in organic and healthier foods creates opportunities to promote local farms and businesses, which could result in economic, health, and environmental benefits to the community.

Objective

A significantly increased share of the food consumed in Champaign County will be produced in the county.

Starting Point

Develop a county-wide publicity campaign in the community and schools to promote consumption of locally grown foods.

The campaign could include information, farm tours, and a local food awareness week, among other initiatives.

An interested organization would need to take the lead to bring together producers, advocacy groups, and retailers.

Other Actions

- Conduct a comprehensive review of state health regulations for on-farm processing and product sales to develop streamlined and producer-friendly regulations.
- Create a producer cooperative to facilitate the procurement, processing, and distribution of locally grown foods.
- Encourage buy-local requirements for local government civic events. For example, require purchase of a certain percentage of food from local sources.
- Work with the University of Illinois and other large institutions to purchase locally grown foods.

A Sustainable County

These objectives relate to creating stable and convivial neighborhoods, using natural resources including prime farmland efficiently and wisely, minimizing waste and pollution, and restoring the ecological integrity of the natural environment.

- Urban Growth and Farmland Preservation
- Parks and Natural Areas
- Groundwater Supply
- Energy Use
- Waste Reduction
- Alternative Transportation
- Mixed Use Development
- Urban Redevelopment

Urban Growth & Farmland Resources

"The wealth of Illinois is in her soil, and her strength lies in its intelligent development."

Andrew Sloan Draper, President, University of Illinois, 1894-1904

Champaign County is blessed with uniquely productive and irreplaceable soils in a setting that is extraordinarily well suited in terms of climate, topography and geography to the pursuit of agriculture. Similarly productive regions with such mollisols (prairie soils) constitute less than 1% of the world's agricultural land. They are found only here, in the American Corn Belt, and in two other areas, neither of which have an agricultural infrastructure as highly developed as that found here. This is a resource of global importance.

Growth is the foundation of economic opportunity for Champaign County communities and we are fortunate to have experienced steady moderate growth in recent decades. The county is also home to the state's premier research university. The university serves as an engine for growth and if the community is to provide the opportunities and amenities that make the institution globally competitive growth is required. Growth, however, requires that new offices, homes, shops and employment be provided in a timely and cost competitive way that meets consumer demands as well as community goals.

Farmland is also a financial resource for landowners. Farmers, landowners, developers, homebuyers and the community as a whole have a stake in the way this resource is used.

Growth, unavoidably, will result in the conversion of more farmland. At issue is how much and where.

More efficient use of land conserves the soil resource while addressing the varied concerns of different stakeholders. Judicious and carefully designed measures can achieve more efficient use of land and help preserve agricultural and natural areas for future generations while providing opportunities for growth and development of the community and respecting the interests of all stakeholders.

Objective

By 2030 a significantly larger share of new development will be built at higher densities and will be contiguous to or within existing built-up areas.

Starting Point

Establish a panel of stakeholders to develop specific sets of strategies that will increase infill development, and produce more compact and contiguous development patterns to conserve soil resources while recognizing market forces. The panel would consider, among other approaches, the following:

- a. removing regulatory barriers to infill and more compact development patterns;**
- b. creating or refocusing incentives (existing and new) to target compact and/or infill development;**
- c. supporting a county-wide plan for land use and development; and**
- d. formulating appropriate zoning, subdivision and other regulations to be used by the County and municipalities to achieve more efficient use of land and more compact and contiguous forms of development.**

The panel could be tasked by the bodies that create it to consider an array of techniques including: revised parking, stormwater and other regulatory requirements; land assembly and write down, tax abatements and other incentives; and transfer of development rights programs. The panel would also evaluate the impact of various means of financing infrastructure. Much effort would be required to work out the details of concrete proposals.

Such a panel could be established as a non-governmental initiative perhaps by organizations representing the key stakeholders, particularly the agriculture and real estate development industries. It could report on topics individually in accord with the ease of reaching agreement on them. The panel would require some technical assistance which could come from trade associations, local professional volunteers, the University or local governments.

Other Actions

- Appoint a representative from the unincorporated 1.5-mile extra-territorial jurisdiction area (ETJ), nominated by appropriate townships, to each municipal planning & zoning commission.
- Bring the County and municipalities together to negotiate agreements to ensure measured and coordinated municipal annexation policies.



- Investigate county-wide use of a uniform impact model and/or assessment system that might incorporate all or part of one or more standard models or systems, such as the Land Transformation Model (LTM), the Land Use Evolution and Impact Assessment Model (LEAM), the NAHB Housing Benefits Model, FISCALS GIS™ system, etc.
- Create a program to promote the advantages of compact design approaches to design professionals, the development industry, local governments and consumers.

Parks and Natural Areas

The availability of parks, preserves and outdoor recreation opportunities is an important element of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the community. This is especially important for young adults. The remaining natural areas in the county continue to be lost to development and opportunities to expand park acreage in those areas are dissipating.



Objective

The acreage of urban and county parks and protected natural areas will at least double, the ecological integrity of their natural areas will be restored, and the sites will be protected from disturbance by neighboring land uses.

Starting Point

Protect, enhance and increase the acreage of parks, public green space, and natural areas.

This initiative would begin by identifying potential public and private means for financing the acquisition and development of parks and preserves. It would also go on to address priority needs and opportunities, perhaps through development of a county-wide park and recreation plan.

A central organization of professionals and advocates, with the support of community leaders and the participation of key interests, can develop a list of attractive and feasible funding options together with a targeted list of projects.

Other Actions

- Increase educational opportunities for citizens of Champaign County to learn about the importance of enhancing, restoring, and creating habitat reflective of the natural history of Champaign County.
- Consider the development of land dedication ordinances.
- Create new and improve existing environmental education programs and opportunities in public schools, at all grade levels, to ensure that every student is exposed to nature.
- Implement recommendations from the Champaign County Board Environmental Advisory Panel Blue Ribbon Report (November 2004) that specifically address the lack of public green space and natural areas.
- Provide educational opportunities and incentives to homeowners to develop more wildlife-friendly backyard habitats utilizing native plant materials.

Groundwater Supply

An abundant safe water supply is a key and increasingly important asset to the county. This supply is critical to business, agriculture, domestic use, and for maintenance of streamflow.



Objective

Policies will be in place that protect the county's groundwater resources and ensure a safe sustainable water supply for humans and wildlife.

Starting Point

Determine the sustainable maximum annual yield for the Mahomet Aquifer, limit withdrawals accordingly, and set policies to ensure cost effective allocation among cities, industry, and irrigation.

Identify means to fund and support the Mahomet Aquifer Consortium so that it can continue to study the Mahomet Aquifer to determine the aquifer's sustainable maximum annual yield.

The County and its municipalities will adopt policies from the Consortium's recommendations to ensure cost effective allocation among cities, industry, and irrigation.

Other Actions

- Accelerate the participation of all municipal and county governments and affected businesses in the cooperative funding of the Comprehensive Mahomet Aquifer Model.
- Guard the Mahomet Aquifer from contamination and overuse.
- Implement a program that requires wells to be tested before property is sold, in order to inform homebuyers of the presence of agrichemicals or other contaminants.

Energy Use

Non-renewable energy supplies are finite and increasing in cost. Renewable energy use depletes fewer resources and can be cost effective. Increasing use of renewable energy sources reduces the nation's reliance on insecure foreign energy sources, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Objective

Champaign County will significantly reduce non-renewable energy use.

Starting Point

Increase use of regionally available renewable energy sources, such as biofuels, geothermal, wind, and solar energies, to support 25 percent of our energy needs within 30 years.

Identify opportunities to expand the use of renewable energy by public and private entities, and the means to encourage greater use in buildings and operations.

A panel of advocates and professionals can undertake the assessment and work with various public and private entities to implement key initiatives.

Other Actions

- Require government buildings in Champaign County to exceed established energy standards.
- Create incentives, expand technical assistance and develop policies to induce private developments to meet the same ambitious energy standards as those proposed for government buildings.
- Expand energy conservation programs such as those funded by the clean energy technology fee at the University of Illinois and establish similar programs in other institutions.

Waste Reduction

Waste reduction through increased efficiency, reuse, and recycling reduces the consumption of natural resources and energy, reduces pollution, and conserves available landfill capacity. It also offers opportunities to reduce costs associated with waste collection, transport and disposal.

Objective

Champaign County will significantly reduce the tonnage of waste disposed of in landfills and increase the volume and type of materials that are reused or recycled.

Starting Point

Develop comprehensive, county-wide recycling and reuse programs with the ultimate goal of zero waste.

Revamp solid waste plans with attention to expanding reuse and recycling programs throughout the community and in expanding the range of materials handled. Revive public education programs on waste reduction and recycling.

The County, municipalities and major institutions can act jointly or separately. This initiative would include the involvement of stakeholders and technical expertise from local sources including the University.

Other Actions

- Implement recycling best practices and cutting edge technology policies at the local level.
- Implement expanded hazardous waste separation programs to separate oils and fluids, batteries, cleaning fluids, paints, etc. from general waste.
- Reduce casual waste disposal (littering as well as unregulated dumping and burning) to negligible levels through regulation, educational programs, and convenient pickup and disposal options.

Alternative Transportation

Increased use of alternative modes of transportation will reduce dependence on foreign energy sources, reduce pollution, lessen traffic congestion, reduce the need for street and parking infrastructure, and contribute to more active and healthier life styles. Wider availability of alternatives can expand consumer choice and increase the mobility of those who cannot or who prefer not to drive.



Objective

Land use patterns, infrastructure investments, programs, and policies will provide most people with convenient and safe transportation choices and encourage walking, biking, and public transit.

Starting Point

A county-wide coalition of interests would organize to work, on an ongoing basis, to support:

- a. inclusion of alternative transportation options in relevant plans and policies,**
- b. ensure that those elements of specific plans are implemented,**
- c. educate officials and the general public about the advantages of expanding alternative transportation options, and**
- d. develop new policies and programs.**

Many of the specific action proposals that have been identified are already included in various public plans including the urbanized area Long Range Transportation Plan and the county-wide Greenways and Trails Plan. What is needed, then, is to see to it that alternative transportation initiatives are implemented and to have them included in other plans and policies. An organized coalition with its own expertise and resources would be an effective advocate in the various forums in which related decisions are made.

Such a coalition could include bicyclists, environmental organizations, neighborhood and school groups, and public health advocates among other interested parties.

Other Actions

- Work with major employers and public agencies to develop programs that create opportunities and provide incentives to employees so that more of them can live within walking distance of work. Employers can also promote carpools, provide bike parking and employee shower facilities, and subsidize employee transit use.
- Conduct a market study, explore financing options, and otherwise facilitate establishment of commercial or non-profit car and bike sharing enterprises.
- Work with public and private entities to construct park and ride / walk facilities in new and existing development.

- Review existing development regulations to relax parking requirements for walkable and transit served development, develop public policies to create incentives for transit oriented developments, and review parking policies to control parking in key areas.
- Develop and implement policies that provide parking preferences and incentives for people who carpool or use low-emission or fuel-efficient vehicles.

Mixed Use Development

Mixed use neighborhoods permit people to meet more of their day-to-day needs by walking, allowing healthier and more convivial lifestyles as well as lessening the need to drive and to provide additional street and parking infrastructure. Mixing uses can create more compact forms of development, thereby reducing the consumption of natural resources and generation of pollution.



Objective

Public and private initiatives will significantly increase the development and redevelopment of mixed use neighborhoods that include strong local businesses.

Starting Point

Develop policies to encourage mixed use communities and quality urban design through incentives and revised development regulations that incorporate best planning practices to allow higher density mixed use developments both as infill and as greenfield development.

This could be done by reviewing state-of-the-art practices and the experiences of similar communities. Measures would include the use of incentives, regulatory relief and streamlining, flexible zoning techniques, and zoning overlay districts.

The initiative could be undertaken jointly in the form of model policy and code provisions or individually by various municipal governments. In either case it would best be done in consultation with affected stakeholders. Technical assistance may be available from trade or professional organizations, professional volunteers, and/or the University.

Other Actions

- Educate the general public, public officials and the development community on what successful mixed use communities look like.
- Compile information on the market forces that support or prevent mixed use development and identify potential sites and conditions where mixed use projects could succeed.
- Establish an ongoing forum where innovative and creative development ideas can be considered by public officials and the development community for potential incorporation into local projects, plans, and policies.

Urban Redevelopment

Existing neighborhoods represent substantial sunk investment in private buildings and public infrastructure. Reinvestment and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods captures more value from these investments, preserves historic structures and neighborhoods, fosters more compact growth patterns, and makes for more lively and convivial communities.



Objective

Existing neighborhoods and downtowns will see significant new investment and become desirable locations where older buildings are preserved and complemented by new development.

Starting Point

Integrate, expand and intensify marketing of existing programs that help fund home repair and building renovation.

Local governments and agencies operate numerous programs that help fund home repair and building renovation including home weatherization, residential rehabilitation loan programs, façade grants, etc. These are operated by several different agencies and are funded from a variety of sources.

The agencies operating existing programs can review the scope of existing programs and mechanisms for streamlining and coordinating administration, obtaining additional funds, and broadening and strengthening marketing efforts.

Other Actions

- Identify existing and devise new financial incentives (tax credits, grants, funds, etc.) for the restoration and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Clean up neighborhoods and communities in the county through volunteer programs such as “adopt a block”, “Christmas in October”, etc.
- Create a county-wide advisory commission to: (1) promote historic preservation; and (2) develop recommendations regarding beautification and development for all downtown areas in the county.
- Find better ways to accumulate and consolidate lots in areas where fragmented land holdings are an impediment to redevelopment, eg. development of a land bank.
- Inventory the existing historic buildings of Champaign County and document their current condition and uses.
- Develop programs to support neighborhood beautification efforts including murals, monuments, public art, and gardens.

A Supportive County

The objectives gathered here reflect a commitment to ensuring that everyone in Champaign County has access to the basic necessities of a secure, happy and dignified life in which they can contribute to larger life of the community.

- Health and Well-Being
- Healthcare Access
- Access to Services
- A Safe Community
- Affordable Housing
- Accessible Housing

Health and Well-Being

Apart from a simple concern for the well-being of county residents, these factors are a measure of prosperity and quality of life. Site selectors use statistical measures of well-being to identify good locations for business establishment and new investment. The county's ranking with respect to key measures affects the way it is viewed from outside by businesses and investors.



Objective

Key measures of health and safety will significantly improve for all residents in Champaign County.

Starting Point

Identify key health and safety factors that can be measured and establish a county baseline.

This would consider the statistics usually considered in competitive place rankings along with other measures identified by health professionals.

This could be a joint project between the business community, health sector and the University of Illinois. See also the Strategic Thinking action strategy on page 3.6.

Other Actions

- Provide assistance to local businesses to provide a healthy work environment and family-friendly policies.
- Promote healthy lifestyles and physical activity in schools and workplaces.

Healthcare Access

Physical and mental healthcare are key measures of well-being and happiness. A healthier community imposes fewer costs on business and government and is a more competitive location for new investment. Access to healthcare is uneven and subject to disruption by the vicissitudes of life. Wider access helps keep everyone on a footing where they can live more satisfying lives and participate more constructively in society.



Credit: Darrell Hoemann

Objective

Champaign County will be a national model for providing access to an affordable, integrated, comprehensive, and seamless model of healthcare.

Starting Point

Bring together relevant stakeholders to identify the most critical gaps in access to healthcare in the county and ways that those gaps can be addressed locally.

Overarching healthcare reform requires action at the state or federal level in an extremely difficult and politically charged context. Locally, we can address specific key service delivery issues and implement focused programs that contribute to better health and healthcare.

A body of healthcare professionals, social service agencies, civic groups, and business groups, could periodically formulate a set of broadly supported proposals to address key access or service delivery gaps.

Other Actions

- Promote constructive dialogue between healthcare providers, citizens, and healthcare advocacy groups.
- Increase awareness of preventative care and of healthcare programs and services.
- Expand information and referral services to create a county-wide assistance program modeled after an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to provide resource information to people in need throughout the county.
- Expand and ensure support for the Frances Nelson Health Center.

Access to Services

All residents, those in poverty and youth especially, need convenient nearby access to an array of services. Minimizing the costs of service delivery should include the costs borne by private individuals as well the costs to service providers.

Objective

Residents of every community will have convenient access to information, education, recreation, supportive services, and crisis intervention.

Starting Point

Assess the availability of services throughout the county. Identify critical deficiencies and gaps and develop a plan to address them.

Starting with the Community Needs Assessment and utilizing GIS technology assess the geographic distribution of families and individuals with particular needs along with the locations of service providers. Assess the need and potential means of better aligning service delivery with locations of greatest need.

A central agency could undertake this as an extension of the Community Needs Assessment process with technical assistance provided by local agencies and potentially by one or more academic units at the University of Illinois and/or Parkland College.

Other Actions

- Consider alternative means of service delivery including development of multi-function community centers or clusters throughout the county including, but not limited to: teen and family recreation and activities; clearing houses for information, employment, and services; education; healthcare; libraries; computer access; child care; and crisis intervention.
- Implement the Developmental Assets Model™, or an equivalent program, through Champaign County schools, churches, neighborhood organizations, community organizations, and social service providers.
- Expand temporary, emergency shelter and short-term housing options for families and individuals in conjunction with job training, counseling, and placement to promote self-sufficiency.



Credit: Darrell Hoemann

A Safe Community

The incidence of crime is a key element of the actual and perceived quality of life. It imposes costs on individuals and on the larger community and creates a special burden on low-income persons and at-risk youth who are most likely to be crime victims.



Credit: Darrell Hoemann

Objective

Champaign County's communities will be safe environments that effectively deter drug use, criminal activity, and inmate recidivism through an integrated county-wide system of evidence-based practices.

Starting Point

Create a county-wide interagency system to deter incarceration and/or recidivism; standardize screening between agencies; identify risk factors; make referrals to appropriate agencies; provide case management oversight; train first responders; train caregivers in cultural competency; identify community barriers to implementation; and develop an action plan for overcoming barriers to action.

Prioritize the various components of an integrated system and focus efforts on incrementally building the component parts.

A panel of key stakeholders can review the relevant criminal justice and social service delivery programs, prioritize them, and identify means to implement improvements with technical assistance from police, court, social service, and other agencies.

Other Actions

- Determine which community services are in need of improvement and what services are most valued.
- Identify social concerns throughout Champaign County, with special focus on unique needs in each locality, and formulate an appropriate response.
- Provide each community with an advocate to link individuals with agencies or organizations.
- Improve coordination between social service agencies to increase access and improve community well being.

Affordable Housing

Safe sound housing is a basic requirement for pursuing a livelihood, raising children, and participating productively in society. It is, therefore, in everyone's interest to try to ensure that all residents can find housing that meets their needs without putting undue strain on their household income.

Objective

All persons at every income level will be able to afford safe, quality housing.

Starting Point

Convene a panel of stakeholders to develop an agreed upon definition of affordable housing county-wide.

The concept of affordable housing has different meanings to different people depending on their circumstances. Development and implementation of policies to ensure affordability requires a common understanding of what is meant by the term “affordable”. The panel could be convened by a public or private entity with representation from the private sector, tenant groups, social service providers and government entities.

Other Actions

- Create a panel of stakeholders to review local regulations and identify barriers to the construction of affordable housing.
- Provide financial relief, such as reduced fees and tax incentives, to developers who build affordable housing on contiguous undeveloped sites and built-up areas in the county.
- Extend and expand programs to promote owner-occupied housing, e.g., first time home buyer funding, non-profit mortgage company, etc.
- Create a panel of stakeholders to identify and evaluate creative methods for promoting the creation of affordable housing, such as housing trusts, limited dividend corporations, development exactions and incentives.
- Create a panel of stakeholders to develop rental property upkeep standards to be used throughout the county that balance the cost and benefits of higher standards.

Accessible Housing

Broad housing options for persons with disabilities ensures that the benefits of good, sound, supportive housing are available to everyone, thereby enabling effective participation in civic life. This goal will become even more important as the population ages.

Objective

All persons with disabilities will be able to purchase or rent quality housing that is accessible, supportive, and meets their needs, at an affordable cost.

Starting Point

Revise local government regulations to require that a minimum share of new multi-family housing be accessible or adaptable.

Work with stakeholders to identify the most flexible and cost effective means to ensure availability of accessible units. This would result in specific proposals to amend local building regulations. Stakeholders would include persons with disabilities, home builders, design professionals, developers, and local government officials.

Other Actions

- Promote the construction of small senior communities with affordable assisted living support throughout the county.

An Enriching County

These objectives relate to all the things we do to enable individuals to flourish and to reach their full potential and lead lives that are healthy, stimulating and fulfilling.

- Funding Quality Education
- Alternative Education
- Arts Education
- Regional Arts Center
- Access to Open Space
- Open Access for Recreation

Funding Quality Education

A quality education is critical to ensuring that all children have opportunities to lead successful and fulfilling lives. A well-prepared and skilled workforce is essential to the economic growth and competitiveness of the county as well (see the Workforce Development objective). All Champaign County school districts need the resources required to provide a quality education to the children that they serve. The ability to provide quality education to all students requires political support for raising sufficient revenues. This is difficult under the current funding system, which relies very heavily on a regressive and unpopular property tax and creates great discrepancies in the tax base available to different school districts.



Objective

All public schools will provide excellent instruction and student services in state-of-the-art facilities to all children, and will have the necessary financial resources, funded from a balance of sources that significantly reduce dependence on property taxes.

Starting Point

Develop a strong county-wide coalition to work for systematic reform of public education funding by means that reduce or eliminate reliance on property taxes.

Significant reform of the school funding system will require action by the state legislature. Legislative proposals to address this issue will arise from many quarters. What is needed is the ability to formulate our own proposals and to respond effectively to those put forward by others. The coalition would identify the principles and basic features an alternative school funding system must have to be broadly supported in the county. It could then seek widespread endorsement of those principles. The coalition would also provide the organizational framework to act effectively to support or oppose legislation based on this shared set of principles.

To be effective, the coalition would need to include educators, parents, business leaders, University of Illinois and Parkland College representatives, those engaged in agriculture, elected representatives, local government leaders, and civic groups. The coalition could be part of a broader state effort aligned with the same goals.

Other Actions

- Evaluate the local impact of tax-exempt properties and work to mitigate their impact.
- Develop a program for consolidating health insurance costs for all county public and private K-12 employees.
- Support the University of Illinois master teacher program as described in the University of Illinois Strategic Plan.

Alternative Education

Students come to school from varied settings and with widely divergent skills. A wide array of learning options can best accommodate these varied needs.

Objective

All students will have access to a range of alternative forms of schooling that meet their educational needs and enrich the learning environment.

Starting Point

Develop more individualized learning programs for diverse student populations that incorporate a variety of learning styles and take place both in formal classroom settings and community-based learning centers.

Work within the system of existing learning institutions to identify opportunities to add or expand program options or make existing alternatives more widely available.

A volunteer team of advocates would work in specific settings to develop proposals utilizing technical assistance from expert sources including the University of Illinois and Parkland College.

Other Actions

- Create an “apprenticeship” program with opportunities in a broad range of job settings where technology, computer, and basic skills are infused into the apprenticeship experience, especially at the middle school level.
- Allow individuals to move forward in learning environments according to their developmental readiness.
- Explore multiple approaches to student evaluation that includes parent and student input.
- Offer team teaching at all ages. At younger ages, teachers’ skills will span multiple ages, at older ages, teachers’ skills will span multiple subjects.



Arts Education

Experiences in and development of skills in the visual, literary, and performing arts enhance participants' quality of life, prepare individuals for employment in an economy reliant upon creativity, and nurture life skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, leadership, discipline, and positive self esteem. Study of the arts also enhances learning in other subject areas. Arts education supports the broader importance of the arts in the community and local economy. Arts programs are often undervalued and their funding is vulnerable to cuts due to school funding limitations and decisions.



Objective

A consecutive program in all arts disciplines will be an integral part of the curriculum at every grade level in all Champaign County schools.

Starting Point

Develop a plan and program to support and expand arts education.

Determine the current level of arts education offered in Champaign County districts and the public funding currently available and being used. Solicit administrative input as to the best course of action to take to improve funding and arts education county-wide.

A panel of knowledgeable advocates could develop the plan with the participation of the Regional Office of Education, school district administrators, and art teachers.

Other Actions

- Plan and conduct a series of teacher in-service training programs to encourage a broader, multicultural arts focus in the schools.
- Conduct an assessment of other providers of arts education in the county to determine the scope of their programs and identify other areas of focus.
- Identify private funding sources for arts education and create a database of information to assist districts with applying for grants.
- Fund and hire a Champaign County Arts Grants Coordinator to work with various districts and look for funding to meet their various needs.
- Create a web-based portal where information can be accessed with respect to grant opportunities, resources, programs, and experts in the field.

Regional Arts Center

Art and creativity in all forms enrich the quality of life. The arts are also a catalyst for economic development and a vehicle for social change, collaboration, education, and more. The arts are essential to building an attractive, healthy and vibrant community.



Objective

Champaign County will have a reputation throughout the Midwest as a center for art and entertainment and will be a model for its public and private financial support of the arts.

Starting Point

Generate sustainable public and private funding for the arts through increased public support and awareness.

Recognize arts funding as an economic development engine and incorporate it into the plans, policies, and programs of all relevant local governments and other entities. Use public incentives to leverage additional private sector support and identify expanded arts support as a community priority with philanthropic organizations. Publicly recognize private support for the arts as a valued civic contribution. Incorporate public art into major public works or publicly-financed private development.

Other Actions

- Create and nurture a geographic nexus of the arts with arts districts, gallery walks, and music venues.
- Provide services that are supportive to artists including a central news source, listservs, and a central calendar.

Access to Open Space

Access to parks is a key element of the quality of life and helps promote a more active and healthy life style especially for children. A connected network enhances the value of existing parks and open spaces and provides for additional trail-based recreational opportunities.



Objective

All communities and residents will have access to quality neighborhood and regional parks that are connected through trails, greenways, and public sidewalks to all major cultural facilities and schools throughout the county and adjacent locales.

Starting Point

Create public/private partnerships and incentive programs to connect and integrate green space, open space, parks, greenways and trails with new and existing development.

A panel of stakeholders can develop a set of recommendations for local and regional development of an expanded network of open spaces with technical assistance from trade associations, local park agencies and other governments.

A working group would include representatives from municipalities, park districts, the forest preserve district, developers and other interests.

Other Actions

- Implement the Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan.
- Complete the C-U to Danville trail.

Open Access for Recreation

Meeting the demand for recreational facilities is increasingly difficult. Cooperative use of existing facilities can maximize the community's return on investments in existing facilities while improving the quality of life and encouraging healthy active lifestyles.



Credit: Georgeanne Hume

Objective

Government entities will cooperate to provide all county residents with open access for recreation at all appropriate public facilities.

Starting Point

Provide residents county-wide with open access to appropriate public facilities for recreation through intergovernmental agreements.

Identify areas of greatest need and facilities that could help meet unmet demand. Develop model agreements that meet the needs of facility owners while providing significant recreational opportunities.

Park and recreational professionals can undertake the assessment of potential shared use and opportunities to develop agreements with facility owners.

Other Actions

- Conduct a county-wide assessment of recreational facility needs to identify resources and gaps in active recreation.
- Provide incentives for property owners to offer easements for walking trails and natural areas.
- Develop green space or recreation space guidelines specific to the community.
- Increase activities for the 12-15 year old age group.



4. Our Job Now: Implementing the Vision

our future. here. is an agenda for common action for the entire county. The initiative is built on a broad and inclusive community dialogue. It is the result of an unprecedented effort that involved more than 1,100 Champaign County residents over the course of 15 months. The goals and action strategies that make up this vision for Champaign County are a testimonial to the remarkable interest and commitment of those who participated.

Constructing a Shared Future

Many individuals and organizations stepped forward to formulate **our future. here.** As **big.small.all.** turns from talk to action, the energy and excitement of those who participated and many others must be harnessed towards achieving the vision.

our future. here. did not emerge in a vacuum. The vision was developed in the context of ongoing and emerging initiatives by many organizations. It should be seen as a complement to and extension of existing strategic plans and organizational agendas. Much of it will be achieved by supporting, extending, and building on those initiatives.

Implementation will require the coordinated efforts of individuals and organizations representing the public, private, and civic sectors of the

community. Of the vision's 145 action strategies, 29 percent require action by government bodies. Another 26 percent will require action jointly by both public and private entities. Twelve percent can only be implemented by the private sector. The remaining 33 percent can be implemented by either public or private entities or both

It is important to note that the vision is not, nor is it intended to be, a government policy document. Even those action strategies that require public sector involvement need an active citizenry to place them on the agendas of government agencies and ensure that the agencies follow through.

Implementation can be structured in several ways, and no single approach is relevant to every initiative.

- Action can be taken by private and public entities working independently.
- Task Forces can be organized centrally but operate independently.
- A central entity can take action or work to coordinate and assist existing and new initiatives.

our future. here. contemplates a mix of approaches adjusted to the characteristics of each action strategy and the differing financial, institutional, and technical circumstances within which each action takes place. To a great degree implementation can be structured around existing organizations and initiatives.

big.small.all. Can Help

While individuals and organizations can take on one or more action strategies independently, more can be accomplished if these initiatives are coordinated. A central entity can help disseminate and share information, provide clearinghouse services, and promote initiatives to the general public. It can also be a means by which citizens and community leaders develop a broader view of community programs and projects and, so, reinforce efforts to make the initiatives mutually supporting.

The importance of motivating the community to take effective action and the need to synchronize a multiplicity of efforts creates an ongoing responsibility for **big.small.all.**

In the long run, the details of **big.small.all.'s** organizational structure and the means by which it is funded should reflect the extent of the implementation-related functions **big.small.all.** takes on. The greater the responsibilities the more important a formal structure will be. The future character of **big.small.all.** will evolve as the vision evolves. The elements of the vision that have the strongest support will shape the optimal arrangements for the ongoing effort.

As an informal organization **big.small.all.** has no assets and no liabilities. It exists as a responsibility that existing organizations may choose to take on jointly or individually.

The functions of **big.small.all.** could be absorbed into the operations of an existing organization. It would become an ongoing program of that organization. In that case, it would operate under the governance and financial structure of the parent organization.

big.small.all. could also continue to operate under its current arrangements with the support of an existing organization, which would have to assume its financial liabilities. Several models already exist for supporting informal coordinating bodies such as the Metropolitan Intergovernmental Council. These can be adapted to support **big.small.all.**

Depending on the scope of its responsibilities, at some point it might be most convenient to incorporate **big.small.all.** In some form incorporation may be the simplest means to create a public/private entity that has a clear cut governance and financial structure. This wouldn't have to create a new bureaucracy. The effort, in fact, could remain pretty much as it has with significant volunteer contributions and staff support from an existing entity like the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission.

In the short term, **big.small.all.** will remain informally organized and will continue to operate under the terms of its charter (Appendix A). It will remain unincorporated with its day-to-day activities and finances being handled by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. The organizational structure need not be altered to start implementation. Under current arrangements **big.small.all.** will take a range of steps to coordinate, support, and monitor implementation.

big.small.all. will:

1. Maintain a contact list of interested individuals developed from implementation interest cards submitted at the Community Choice Workshops, project participant lists, and new contacts;
2. Recruit individuals and entities to implement specific action strategies or integrate them into ongoing initiatives;
3. Link interested persons with new and ongoing efforts and vice versa;
4. Provide implementers with limited technical assistance primarily by linking them with appropriate sources of expertise and facilitating meetings;
5. Disseminate information about new and existing initiatives to decision makers and the general public;
6. Promote the vision and related initiatives through:
 - a. news media;
 - b. presentations to business and civic groups, government bodies, etc; and
 - c. distributing the vision document; and
7. Monitor and report on implementation efforts.

Possible Implementation Roles for big.small.all.

big.small.all. could take responsibility for the first three objectives' starting points which are fundamental to the visioning process and can jump start all of the other elements of the vision..

- **County Identity:** Organize an annual event intended to bring all the people of the county together in a comfortable and fun setting that also helps broaden understanding and mutual appreciation of every element of the county community.
- **A Tolerant Community:** Develop specific proactive strategies to operate on an ongoing basis to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.
- **Strategic Thinking:** Develop a set of agreed upon countywide statistical indicators that track conditions relevant to the objectives contained in the vision.

With appropriate resources **big.small.all.** could also:

8. Promote the vision through:
 - a. an updated website with up-to-date information and links to agencies with new or ongoing initiatives;
 - b. develop materials for display in public venues; and
 - c. mount displays at fairs and festivals.
9. Undertake follow-on actions such as:
 - a. mounting exhibitions;
 - b. sponsoring speakers; and
 - c. conducting forums on particular questions, etc.

big.small.all. could also take responsibility for implementing, directly, one or more key action strategies (see sidebar).

Actions Not Intentions

In the end, it is the actions that we take as citizens in our roles in business, the professions, civic groups, government, and as individuals that will make this vision a reality. So, it is really up to you.

To link up with others working on objectives you care about call 328-3313 or email contact@bigsmallall.cc.



collaborative



prosperous



sustainable



supportive



enriching

our future. **here.**
