

Have you weighed in on the Monroe County Development Ordinance (CDO)? The CDO is currently being updated and will shape land use and regulations for years to come across unincorporated areas of Monroe County. It impacts what housing, business and other uses are allowed.

You can learn how your property is affected and weigh in at a public meeting at 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 5, at the Monroe County Government Center, 501 N. Morton St., Bloomington, in Room 100B or on Zoom. Visit Monroe County CDO (monroecdo.com) for more details.

While there are many good updates, such as CDO simplification and streamlining, a holistic approach to plan for future housing and employment needs is still needed.

Monroe County residential land is slated to decrease, while housing remains challenging for workers. The CDO proposes converting 9,000-plus acres of residential land to a rural designation, due partly to flood zones in some areas, which will decrease allowable housing. This can pose challenges to the development of affordable housing given land costs. \$72,000 was the median cost of residential land per acre in Monroe County in spring of 2023.

Housing costs and availability remain a challenge, especially for single family homes. Monroe County's July 2023 median year-to-date sales price for homes was \$290,900, compared to \$193,150 in Owen County and \$175,950 in Lawrence County. This is challenging for families, as the Monroe County median household income was about \$54,000 from 2017 to 2021 (based on latest available data from U.S. Census Bureau). Home sales inventory has remained low, with an average of 2.8 months inventory in July. (Source for housing data: Indiana Association of Realtors.)

Workers and employers both lose due to lack of attainable housing. Monroe County's largest employers report pulling half of their employees from outside the county. Commuting employees pay more in transit and time when moving outward to find attainable housing. This challenges employers that are seeking staff. Commuting has an environmental impact. Monroe County also loses the income taxes of these individuals, which are paid based on where individuals live.

Land and buildings remain limited for employment growth. We must support the space needs of our existing employers while working to attract future employers. Both activities are important for diversifying our employment base. Industries shift over time, as we have seen with the past departure of companies like RCA, Thomson Consumer Electronics and Otis Elevator Co.

Properties with proper zoning and infrastructure must exist to capture employment and wage growth opportunities in key industries for Monroe County. These include biosciences, technology, advanced manufacturing and defense among others. Overall, our target industries have grown significantly over the five-year period of 2017 to 2021 — 180 new establishments, 1100 new jobs and an increase of \$18,000 in the average wage per job (source: Indiana Business Research Center analysis).

Monroe County may address these challenges through: (1) Vision: Create a vision for our future which balances the needs of residents and employers while preserving our quality of place. (2) Housing: Retain and expand land of suitable sizes to meet housing needs, especially for owner-occupied workforce housing. Understanding some zoning changes are due to flood areas, we can look at other land for possibilities. (3) Employment: Designate sufficient land zoned for business and industry, to prepare for current and future employment in key sectors. This will enable us to capture more of the opportunities we have seen stemming from investments like the US CHIPS and Science Act and Indiana READI. (4) Infrastructure: Monitor and expand critical infrastructure like broadband, sewer, and water. This ensures we remain competitive for both housing and employment development. (5) Development processes: Streamline, communicate, and digitize development processes to lower development costs and local government administrative burdens.

The CDO is a critical element of preparing for a strong future. Our appreciation goes to Monroe County, the

planning department, and local officials for launching this significant undertaking. Learn more at: <https://monroecdo.com>.

Jennifer Pearl is president of the Bloomington Economic Development Corp. (BEDC).

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

Jennifer Pearl, 'It's Your Business: Give your opinion of what Monroe County should become on Sept. 5', *Herald-Times* (online), 1 Sep 2023 <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.monroe.lib.in.us/apps/news/document-view?p=AWNB&docref=news/193C9B3BA50FAFA8>>

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