

Preservation and Placemaking as Community Stabilization Strategy

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Abstract

Over the last two decades there has been a lot of discussion – out of necessity – about our Legacy Cities (former industrial centers) rightsizing to deal with the negative effects of population loss. This has mostly been in response to vacant and abandoned buildings. Conversely, as farming (which is also a large industry) – has evolved, our small rural towns in Indiana have seen the negative consequences of shrinking and shifting populations. Although the negatives associated with these cultural shifts have not been as evident as they are in our larger industrial cities, they have been just as impactful. Rural communities, in order to halt the trend of brain drain - population loss - and compete in the future economy, must be proactive in responding to these demographic shifts. The data on rural population loss is very worrisome, and many communities are not having honest conversations about what the future holds for them.

Wabash, IN (pop. 10,200) is shrinking just like the majority of rural communities in Indiana. What it does (or doesn't do) today will have far reaching consequences in the future. While understanding the future consequences of population loss, Wabash has aggressively and strategically focused its efforts on historic preservation, placemaking, and downtown revitalization as a way to counteract the negative effects of brain drain, attract necessary knowledge based talent, and strengthen and fine-tune a tourism-based economy. By making incremental public and private improvements in the existing historic downtown infrastructure - as opposed to smokestack chasing strategies of the past - small towns like Wabash can improve the quality of life of existing residents, increase their prospects of attracting necessary talent, improve tourism, and increase their resiliency over time.

Wabash has decided that people are its most important asset, and has shifted towards a place-based and people-based economy. By investing in places, projects, and infrastructure at the human scale, the community has directly and indirectly focused on improving the quality of life of residents and has doubled down on becoming a regional destination for the arts. This will have economic ramifications. The benefits of these actions will take years to realize, but might have beneficial consequences for this shrinking community. This paper acts an informational marker and hopefully the data and research within it, can be commandeered twenty years from now to evaluate the value of Wabash's placemaking initiatives on the future of the community.

Defining the Predicament

As a majority of the ninety-two counties in Indiana continue to shrink in population over the next fifty years, small cities and towns will be faced with the accelerating problems associated with vacant and abandoned property, a decrease in employment opportunities, financially distressed schools, and diminishing resources to assist with aging and failing infrastructure. This has the potential to have cross-generational consequences. Population trends in Indiana show that only a few regions in the state are actually stabilizing, or growing over the next half century. As these regional hubs draw and attract young and emerging talent from smaller cities and rural counties, the void – in the form of diminishing quality leadership, capital, and entrepreneurship - will have devastating consequences for the future health, resiliency, and stability of rural Indiana.

Resiliency, a current buzz word in academic circles, has a variety of definitions and is often times applied to communities that face future environmental challenges. However, resiliency is also an important concept when applied to the future stability of rural communities. For the purposes of this paper, resiliency is defined as a community's ability to withstand economic, cultural, and environmental shocks. As rural Indiana continues to hemorrhage population – in addition to dealing with issues associated with an aging demographic - their ability to deal with both internal problems (aging infrastructure, vacant and abandoned property, lack of leadership, struggling school corporations), and external influences (economic recessions, inflation, environmental catastrophe) will test their resiliency. Some communities will be better positioned than others.

In a culture - and country - that places great importance on growth, the old economic development paradigms will no longer serve the purposes of counties that are explicitly faced with complications that arise from shrinking populations, economies, and tax base. Rural communities must invest their limited financial resources into projects - and programs - that will produce the greatest amount of return on investment, retain population, and attract visitors with their disposable incomes. With these ideas in mind, the community and civic leadership in the City of Wabash, a rural community located in north central Indiana, has effectively shifted its focus towards a place-based economic model.

As a result of post industrialization, brain drain, and aging and migrating populations, Wabash, the county seat and largest city in Wabash County, is typical of many rural communities, having seen significant declines in population. By making incremental, but meaningful improvements in the existing historic downtown infrastructure, and creatively improving public space and public engagement by utilizing the arts, Wabash has shifted away from the smokestack-chasing of past economic development strategies. These efforts have coalesced around robust public-private partnerships. Focusing on improving place as an economic development model - as opposed to solely fixating energies on business recruitment - small towns like Wabash can improve the quality of life of existing residents, increase their prospects of retaining necessary talent, capitalize on destination tourism as an economic development strategy, and as an ancillary benefit, increase community resiliency over time.

Additionally, by focusing on improving place, Wabash has a better chance of creating place-attachment, or the emotional bonds that connect people with place. By strengthening these psychological attachments to place, Wabash will hopefully increase its potential to attract and retain the human capital necessary within the 21st century knowledge-economy and lessen

population out-migration. Growth is just not an option for many communities, but population stabilization can be a reality. Placemaking and place attachment have the potential of creating a beneficial cycle that stabilizes population loss. This paper is an exploratory case study centered on Wabash's unique placemaking and historic preservation initiatives. By utilizing qualitative data gathering, this paper hopes to build upon the existing research centered on the economic and community benefits of historic preservation and place-based interventions. As a first pass, research will include interviews with selective community members involved in local placemaking endeavors, in conjunction with archival material and organizational documents.

Placemaking and Place Attachment – Why does it Matter?

The act of creating, developing and designing public spaces, in order to improve the wellbeing of citizens, strengthen emotional ties, and improve quality of life, is the growing multidisciplinary field of placemaking. Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advocating for the intelligent design and effective reuse of the public sphere, argues that, “an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and wellbeing.”¹ Improving public parks, wayfinding, public art, and streetscape enhancements are all forms of placemaking.

Why would a community want to focus scarce resources on improving the public realm? One such advantage is the increase in place attachment. Place attachment – or the emotional bonds that people have with a specific place - is an untraditional, but beneficial way to assess

¹ “What is Placemaking,” *Project for Public Spaces*, Last modified March 2018, Accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking>.

overall economic and community health. The emotional relationship we have with our environment has gained considerable attention over the last couple of decades, primarily within the academic field of environmental psychology, but minor advancements have been made in integrating the concept of place attachment into the fields of economic development and the design professions. A 2010 study - by Gallup Poll and the Knight Foundation (Knight Study) - found that what attaches people to a specific place can be understood by focusing on three distinct variables, “an area’s physical beauty, a place’s opportunities for socializing, and a community’s openness to all people.”² The study also found a correlation between a community’s specific attachment level and the community’s overall GDP growth.³ Whether this correlation is direct - or indirect - is still to be determined, but evaluating people’s attachment to place could be a very good indicator of the overall economic health of a community. As place becomes increasingly important in the context of local, regional, and global economies, old models of economic development will become more irrelevant, and assessing a place’s attachment value might prove useful.

Two out of the three variables within the Knight Study were directly related to the built environment. One of the variables was a place’s aesthetic value – or beauty. The definition of beauty could include the natural environment, but for the purposes of this paper the correlation between well-designed historic buildings and districts, as well as perception of their aesthetic value should be highlighted. The study does not explicitly mention the aesthetic value of historic buildings or environments, but the correlation exists. People are intuitively attracted to old buildings. A study conducted on behalf of the Commission for Architecture and the Built

² Knight Foundation and Gallup, “Why People Love Where They Live and Why It Matters: A National Perspective” (comparative community attachment study, 2010).

<http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/wsd/neighborhoods/SoulOfCommunity.pdf>

³ Ibid.

Environment in England found that people's perceptions and appreciation of old buildings was found to be connected to their beauty and aesthetic value.

Across all age groups, older buildings were invariably favored as being more beautiful. Whilst this could be interpreted solely as visual preference for certain architectural styles, findings from the qualitative research again point to a more complex interpretation. The most common reason people gave for this was the fact they considered older buildings conveyed a sense of longevity and 'grandeur' that actually made them more pleasing to look at...Another finding on modern buildings was the fact people said they were less likely to feel any sense of pride and affiliation with an area if it looked like it had been made cheaply or with little concern for individual character.⁴

Due to their human scale and a past appreciation of precedent-design-language, preeminence was placed on beauty and aesthetics over efficient construction and inexpensiveness of building materials. If a community's historic buildings rate higher in beauty (aesthetics), a potential indirect benefit is the creation of emotional connections with residents and visitors. These emotional connections create place attachment which could have economic and community benefits. Further study should be conducted to access this correlation.

The other environmentally influenced variable in the Knight Study was a community's social offerings. These could be the existence of a vibrant nightlife, places where people congregate, the availability of arts and cultural opportunities, and community events.⁵ Historic districts provide greater opportunities for individuals to come together and engage and interact with one another. Historic downtowns are archetypally the location of a community's institutional, civic, and cultural resources, and these assets foster community relations. Typically they provide pedestrian friendly environments that foster citizen interaction.⁶ These settings

⁴Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, "People and Places: Public Attitudes to Beauty" (Study commissioned by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, 2010), 35.

⁵*Knight Soul of the Community 2010*, 11.

⁶Donovan D. Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leaders Guide* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2014), 53, 57.

encourage human interfacing because historic districts - designed for people, rather than automobiles - evolved over many generations within a period where social interaction was both a necessity and a virtue. We lost this human scale and beauty over the second half of the 20th century as a result of programing our communities for efficient car-oriented travel. By improving our historic downtowns and districts via placemaking, we provide opportunities for people to congregate and commune and psychologically strengthen place attachment as a result. Historic Preservation provides dual benefit by improving the quality of place, and at the same time creating emotional connections. These environmental variables also have the potential to forge and strengthen community identity in an increasingly chaotic and globalized world.

Historic Preservation as Placemaker

Historic preservation *is* a placemaking endeavor. Preservation was doing placemaking before that term was defined. The practice of historic preservation is a multidisciplinary approach which focuses on studying, researching, planning, advocating, and regularly intervening to save what is deemed important to the nation and/or local community.⁷

Determining which resources should be saved is frequently debated. The historiography of a particular place, or its architectural significance, is most commonly utilized as the justification for retaining the existing and historic built environment. The benefits of historic preservation are revealed after years of tireless advocating and redevelopment. Often times championed by a complex interwoven system of public and private interests, when preservation efforts finally pay off, the final product is almost entirely supported by the majority of stakeholders. Time and time

⁷ The National Register of Historic Places, established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, outlines the parameters of what is deemed historic by the federal government. Administered by the National Park Service, the Register lists properties that are deemed worthy of preservation at all levels of society.

again, revitalized districts, and buildings, are seen as true assets within their communities, and these resources typically further leverage private investment.

Shrinking and rightsizing communities cannot afford to funnel dwindling financial resources towards the destruction of existing infrastructure including historic buildings and landscapes.⁸ Most rural communities are already stretched too thin and are unable to invest in existing infrastructure. Additionally, as a result of business- as-usual economic development efforts, dwindling financial resources are misallocated towards enticing nonexistent businesses into vacant and underutilized industrial parks. A shift in community priorities, and the way we view and use public space, must change if rural communities are going to become resilient in the face of increasing challenges presented by shifting financial, industrial, and environmental pressures. The time-tested way in which we historically programed our walkable historic neighborhoods - and commercial centers - are an untapped and beneficial systemic asset that should be leveraged to the fullest. Reinvesting in existing infrastructure is historic preservation.

Extensive research has been conducted on the economic benefits of historic preservation. Donavan Rypkema, principal of Placeconomics, an international expert in the cross section of economics and the historic built environment, has researched and written comprehensively about the benefits incurred from repurposing and rethinking historic buildings and districts. In, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*, Rypkema argues that:

Economic impact is generally measured in three ways: jobs created, increase in household income, and demand created on other industries. Very few of the 500 or so

⁸ Shrinking cities are cities that have seen considerable population loss over a long period of time while retaining the same geographical footprint. Rightsizing is the planned shrinkage of a city/town. Due to its political nature, people's attachment to place, rightsizing has not been accepted widely as a beneficial planning tool for shrinking communities. Detroit, MI and Youngstown, OH have both utilized rightsizing tools to different degrees and with varying success.

categories of economic activity have as potent a local impact, balanced among these three criteria, as does the rehabilitation of historic buildings.⁹

Although the economic benefits of reusing existing historic resources is positive, few rural communities fail to comprehensively enact and support local historic preservation efforts. There are exceptions of course, but many opportunities are being missed, or misunderstood. Communities would greatly profit from reinvesting in existing infrastructure, and would reap double-benefit from reinvesting in existing historic infrastructure. Historic Preservation provides dual benefit by improving the quality of place, and at the same time creating emotional connections. This dual benefit is occurring in many of our urban cities around the country – after decades of urban sprawl. However, this realignment does not seem to be taking place in many of our rural communities, which are hemorrhaging populations to urban centers.

Wabash, IN: A Case Study

As a typical rural community in Indiana, Wabash is a good case study to research the benefits of placemaking, historic preservation, and place attachment, because the community has aggressively undertaken many placemaking endeavors over the last 20 years. These efforts are occurring, concurrently as Wabash faces the typical calamities associated with deindustrialization and shrinking population. Upon first visiting Wabash, a typical visitor might remark on the overall quality and “sense of place” they feel. Sense of place, or the feeling one gets within a specific environment, has been used to describe locations that trigger strong emotional responses. Sense of place is related to place attachment in regards to it being a psychological phenomenon associated with feelings and emotions. Although hard to describe, we have all been somewhere that evokes a strong sense of place. Wabash seems to evoke a higher

⁹ Rypkema, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leaders Guide*, 2.

emotional response, or sense of place, because of the way that the historic portion of the city was laid out. Utilizing the gentle sloping topography (courthouse sited on a hill overlooking downtown), the diversity of architectural styles present within the commercial buildings, and the intact street walls on Market and Canal Streets, impart a pleasant and enjoyable experience. This experience is a commodity that can, and should be leveraged for the benefit of residents. Further study needs to be done to evaluate this emotional connection - or sense of place. Wabash is taking a much different approach than its demographically rural counterparts around the state. Its focus on historic preservation, placemaking, and place-based economic development, will assist in stabilizing the population loss that has occurred over the last forty plus years by capitalizing community on its inherent sense of place.

Early Developmental History

Wabash has borne witness to some significant national and historical events despite being in rural Indiana. The colonization of the area, by Euro-American interests, was prompted by the signing of the Mississinewa Treaty of 1826, which ceded most of the lands in Indiana north of the Wabash River. The location of Treaty Grounds, as it is vernacularly and locally known, propagated what would eventually become the City of Wabash. Early business developed steadily, and the location saw another boom when it became a major stopover on the important Wabash & Erie Canal. The logistical and economic benefits of the Canal were short lived, as the project almost bankrupted the state in the 1850s. Fortuitously, the failed Canal project laid way, literally and figuratively, for an important stop on a major rail-road artery, eventually evolving into the Big Four Rail Road yard and depot at Treaty Grounds. The presence of the Big Four would provide stability during the rough economically depressed years of the later part of the 19th century.

Wabash would demonstrate to be a resilient town. Not to be outdone by bigger and more sophisticated communities, Wabash became the breeding ground to several industrious and innovative individuals and industries. In placing a Brush Arc Lamp on top of the Courthouse cupula in 1880, Wabash would forever be known as the first electrically lit city in the world. Additionally, Mark C. Honeywell, the inventor of one of the first mass produced hot water heating elements, and Ford Meter Box Company, an early industry associated with water meter boxes, left a philanthropic legacy that is still felt today. Like so many cities and towns in Indiana, Wabash's economy eventually catered to, and become overly dependent on the automotive industry.

Population Decline, Current Stats, and Projections

Starting in 1970, its peak population year (13,379), the City of Wabash has experienced a steady decrease in population.¹⁰ As deindustrialization swept the Midwest, major industries in Wabash began to adapt, close, or relocate to larger urban areas. The last large scale industrial loss in Wabash happened in 2007; the closure of GDX Automotive Plant, the second largest employer in the county at that time, laid off over 700 workers.¹¹ This closure had a devastating impact on the community as demonstrated by census data, which shows a decrease in over 9% of the total population of the city between 2000 and 2010. Additionally, as reported in 2015, “employment fell by nearly 15% during the recession, mostly in manufacturing. The workforce in the city and surrounding county of 30,000 remains down by 1,000, or about 10%, from its

¹⁰ Data for population totals 1850-1990: <http://population.us/in/wabash/>; population totals 2000 & 2010: U.S. Census Bureau using American FactFinder; Estimate population total 2017: Business Analyst, Esri.

¹¹ Linda Lipp, “Something for Everyone: Despite Closing of GDX Plant, Wabash County Officials are Optimistic about the Future,” *KPC News* (Kendallville, IN), January 25, 2008, Accessed February 12, 2018, http://www.kpcnews.com/article_c5281ed8-f100-5908-9cdd-0ac7f3e443f8.html.

level, before the GDX closure in 2007 as workers retired, moved away or left the labor force.”¹²

With a projection of a total of 10,420 people in 2017, the population is comparable to the population in 1950. (See table 1 &2).

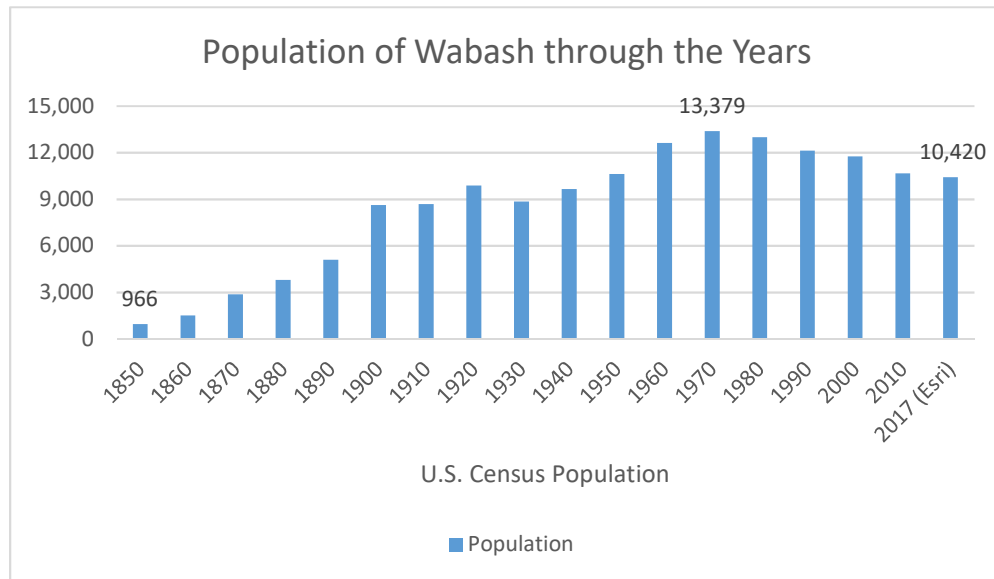


Table 1. Sources: Data for population totals 1850-1990: <http://population.us/in/wabash/>; population totals 2000 & 2010: U.S. Census Bureau using American FactFinder; Estimate population total 2017: Business Analyst, Esri.

¹² Josh Zumbrun, “Wabash 2.0: Indiana City Reinvents Itself,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2015, Accessed April 21, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/wabash-2-0-indiana-city-reinvents-itself-1427296470>.

Table 1:
Wabash Annual Growth Rate Through the Years

Year	Annual Growth Rate
1850-1860	4.64%
1860-1870	6.60%
1870-1880	2.81%
1880-1890	3.00%
1890-1900	5.38%
1900-1910	0.08%
1910-1920	1.29%
1920-1930	-1.10%
1930-1940	0.88%
1940-1950	0.96%
1950-1960	1.74%
1960-1970	0.58%
1970-1980	-0.30%
1980-1990	-0.68%
1990-2000	-0.32%
2000-2010	-0.96%
2010-2017	-0.23%

Sources: Data for population totals 1850-1990: <http://population.us/in/wabash/>; population totals 2000 & 2010: U.S. Census Bureau using American FactFinder; Estimate population total 2017: Business Analyst, Esri.

Downtown Revitalization as Placemaking

A small volunteer organization was founded in 1981 comprising interested stakeholders including nonprofits, downtown merchants, and individuals. Named Wabash Marketplace, Inc. (WMI), its mission aimed to thwart - and combat - the disinvestment that the historic downtown was experiencing. As a membership driven organization, the group advocated for place-based economic development, historic preservation, adaptive re-use of existing historic buildings, and

downtown streetscape improvements.¹³ Wabash's downtown economy had suffered immensely as a result of sprawling car-dependent development on N. Cass Street and State Highway 24, and this developmental vacuum left a void within the historic commercial core. The shifting landscape of the retail economy created many vacant or underutilized buildings, increased the number of struggling small businesses, and perpetuated a negative perception of downtown that would last well into the 21st century. WMI was initially structured utilizing the Main Street Approach to downtown revitalization, an organizational framework created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and is still organized around these original principles.

Working with city leadership, downtown merchants, and other nonprofit organizations, WMI focused on highlighting the importance of reinvestment in the historic core. In 1998, WMI was successful in acquiring a \$500,000 grant from the State of Indiana, while leveraging \$100,000 of local capital by selling bricks, plaques and other sponsorships, to complete a much needed downtown streetscape project.¹⁴ For a small organization, within a small rural town, this was an impressive necessary achievement and was one of the group's first comprehensive placemaking endeavors. In 2004 and 2005, WMI, again in conjunction with the city, received a grant in the amount of \$550,000 from the Indiana Dept. of Transportation (INDOT) and a grant of \$511,613 from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), for continuation of downtown streetscape improvements.¹⁵ In 2011, the city finished the remainder of the streetscape improvements within the Wabash Marketplace Historic District (National Register

¹³ WMI is an accredited Main Street Organization. The Main Street Approach to downtown revitalization was created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Based on the Four Point Approach - Design, Promotion, Economic Restructuring, and Organization, this redevelopment strategy has proved incredibly useful to many communities around the country.

¹⁴ Wabash Marketplace, Inc., Promotional Pamphlet (Wabash Marketplace, Inc., 2007) Author's collection.

¹⁵ Ibid.

District).¹⁶ At the time of this writing, the city is redoing the 1998 streetscape and extending further streetscape enhancements outside of the National Register District.

In 2007, WMI was chosen as a pilot community by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) and OCRA, receiving \$364,500 to create a matching 50/50 façade grant program and low interest loan program for businesses and property owners within the downtown district. Between 2007 and 2011, the façade grant program leveraged a significant amount of private capital and contributed to the façade rehabilitations of over 11 historic buildings within the district. Low interest loans also contributed to façade work, property rehabilitation, and the creation of new businesses.

These improvements coincided with a successful marketing campaign and an overall increase in awareness of the importance and value of downtown. This all translated into growth in membership and financial support over the last ten years. In 2008-2009, WMI membership dues were approximately \$3,305.¹⁷ By the summer of 2016, WMI increased their membership support to \$28,000, and by the end of 2017, membership rounded out at \$32,000.¹⁸ This included roughly 132 business and individual members.¹⁹ As of the writing of this paper membership dues are expected to top off at \$40,000 in 2018, with total income reaching around \$129,000.²⁰ Additionally, on top of membership dues, over the last year and a half, community partners have supported the efforts of WMI, and their downtown mission, to the amount of \$25,000.²¹ This

¹⁶ The Wabash Marketplace District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 and is roughly bounded to the south by Canal Street, Wabash Street to the east, Hill Street to the north, and Miami Street to the west.

¹⁷ Tyler Karst, Program Manager, Wabash Marketplace, Inc., e-mail correspondence to the author, March 2018.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

increase in support is the financial materialization of an engaged and supportive community towards the revitalization of their downtown.

Public- private partnerships, have been the building blocks of the stabilization and strengthening a downtown real estate market that was very soft at the turn of the millennium. Vacant and underutilized storefronts have been transformed into eclectic small businesses, while whole empty buildings are being rehabilitated into market rate and affordable residential units. By focusing on the historic preservation downtown, the city has leveraged millions of dollars in private investment.

A great example of private investment in downtown over the last ten years is the work of Redemption Development, LLC. a consulting and redevelopment firm. Between 2011 and 2016, Redemption Development has redeveloped six high end market rate apartments and added three additional storefronts to the downtown streetscape. With the exception of local façade grants, and the benefits of the Federal historic Tax Credit, these projects were financed privately.²² Currently, Redemption Development is rehabilitating three additional buildings which will result in the addition of five more market rate units, and three more commercial spaces.²³ Lisa Gilman, principal of Redemption Development stated, “I mean look at all of the stuff that’s going on downtown... Warsaw, South Bend and Elkhart don’t have that. I mean, they have some of the components, but Wabash has so much right downtown...more than most communities I’ve ever seen.”²⁴ Gilman, has also sees the great value of the arts and education. Gilman’s latest endeavor, Wabash Woollen Works, is a repurposed historic building that, “will serve as a space for textile

²² Redemption Development, LLC. utilized the 10% and 20% Federal Historic Rehabilitation tax credit administered by the National Park Service, and the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology.

²³ Lisa Gilman, email message to author, March 27, 2018.

²⁴ Eric Seaman, “Downtown Wabash Buildings Have Bright Future, Developer Says,” *Wabash Plain Dealer* (Wabash, IN), March 22, 2014.

education, community outreach and will include a focus on the cultural side of textile arts.”²⁵ In addition to Redemption Development, LLC’s market-rate rehabs, an additional four market-rate units have been introduced within downtown over the last seven years utilizing private equity.

Downtown has also seen a considerable amount of investment into its commercial space with a decrease in storefront vacancies. In the last eight years, the downtown district has seen at least twenty-seven new small businesses open up or relocate downtown.²⁶ These businesses have been diverse, ranging from boutiques, artistic galleries, antique stores, breweries, toy stores, barbers, accounting firms, gun shops, salons, and bakeries.²⁷

In 2014, Wabash was designated a Stellar Community by the State of Indiana. The Stellar Communities Designation is a multi-year, multi-million dollar investment initiative funded by three state agencies: the Indiana Housing and Community Economic Development Authority, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs and the Indiana Department of Transportation. These funds are currently facilitating additional redevelopment downtown by assisting in streetscape improvements, the rehabilitation of the Rock City Lofts, a forty-one unit senior housing complex, and seed money for additional façade work. WMI, is currently administering a second round of facade grants. WMI received \$1.3 million to offer as matching grants for downtown building owners to spend on improving their facades. Twenty two buildings owners took advantage of the program, leveraging over \$32 million in private investment.²⁸ The lengthy

²⁵ Dan McGowan, “Wabash Entrepreneur Investing in Downtown Artistry,” *Inside Indiana Business*, July 14, 2017, <http://www.insideindianabusiness.com/story/35881350/wabash-entrepreneur-investing-in-downtown-artistry>.

²⁶ Tyler Karst, Program Manager, Wabash Marketplace, Inc., in discussion with author, March 2018.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Meghan White, “Wabash, Indiana: The Revival of an American Town,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, November 28, 2017, Accessed January, 2018, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/wabash-indiana-revival-of-an-american-town#.WrqCF7pFxPb>.

Stellar Community Strategic Investment Plan, required for the designation, is a comprehensive placemaking document.

Preservation Policy as Stabilizer

The City Council, and several consecutive mayoral administrations, have been very supportive of historic preservation and placemaking efforts within the city. With support and backing from WMI and Indiana Landmarks, Indiana's statewide non-profit preservation organization, the Wabash City Council adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 2005.²⁹ This ordinance created a Historic Preservation Commission with the goals of educating the public about the benefits of historic preservation, in addition to advocating for the appropriate rehabilitation of downtown buildings, and provided the legal framework for the Historic Preservation Commission to create local historic districts.³⁰ The purpose of the ordinance was:

To promote the educational, cultural and general welfare of the citizens of Wabash and to insure the harmonious and orderly growth and development of the municipality; to maintain established residential neighborhoods in danger of having their distinctiveness destroyed; to enhance property values and attract new residents; to ensure the viability of the traditional downtown area and to enhance tourism within the city; and to that purpose it is deemed essential by the city that qualities relating to its history and harmonious outward appearance of its structures be preserved.³¹

In 2009, the Historic Preservation Commission created a local historic district centered on the historic downtown area. The geographical limits of the local district are larger than the National Register Historic District boundaries and include many more historic resources. This

²⁹ Indiana Landmarks, which has an office in Wabash, is the largest statewide historic preservation organization in the country. It is a private nonprofit organization that revitalizes communities, reconnects communities with their heritage, and saves meaningful places.

³⁰ Local historic districts are distinct from National Historic Districts in many ways. In Indiana, the authority afforded local Historic Preservation Commissions to create local historic districts, is granted by State enabling legislation.

³¹ Wabash, Indiana, Municipal Code art. 5, Sec. 10-171 (2005).

designation created a design review process for all buildings located within the local district, and as a result, all façade work, incentivized or otherwise, needs approval from the historic preservation commission prior to starting work.³² This review process has the dual benefit of making sure that all rehabilitation efforts in view from the public right of way, is in keeping with the historic character of the existing built environment. The review process also makes sure that any public money utilized in the form of façade grants benefits the public good by encouraging good compatible design.

Additionally, the City of Wabash has assisted WMI with a small annual financial allocation. This incentive allowed WMI to hire and retain valuable staff. Since 2009, with city support, WMI grew from a single part-time staff person, to two full-time staff members. The availability of full-time staff has been transformative in allowing the organization to effectively promote its mission, improve the perception of downtown, and increase the number of small businesses in the district. A small public investment towards WMI staff salaries has turned out to be a wise allocation and has effectively leveraged millions of dollars of private capital.

The city has also financially supported brick-and-mortar projects downtown. In 2015 the City Redevelopment Commission created a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district to cover a majority of the historic downtown area, in order to financially support a myriad of projects associated with Wabash's designation as a Stellar Community by the State of Indiana. This new TIF district, would assist in helping finance four large downtown rehabilitation projects - the

³² Adopted on February 23, 2009, the Design Guidelines for the Downtown Wabash Local Historic District were developed by the Wabash Historic Preservation Commission to provide guidance to property owners within the locally designated downtown district. Guidelines can be found at www.wabashmarketplace.org.

Rock City Lofts, The Eagles Theatre renovation, the façade grant program, and the expanded streetscape project.³³

Furthermore, as part of the Stellar Designation, Wabash focused on providing affordable housing options for seniors. A public- private partnership was established to leverage public monies in order to entice a developer to invest in the rehabilitation of a mostly vacant building into forty-one affordable senior apartments. Developed by the nonprofit organization, Partnership for Affordable Housing (PAH), the Rock City Lofts would utilize Affordable Housing tax Credits to save and repurpose a derelict downtown building. PAH was able to accomplish this in partnership with AP Development, Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority, CREA, Merchants Bank of Indiana, City of Wabash, Wabash Marketplace, Indiana Stellar Communities Program, HI Management, Community Construction, and R&B Architects.³⁴

Creative Placemaking

In a paper sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, creative placemaking is defined when the, “public, private, not-for-profit, and community sectors partner to strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.”³⁵ Considering its size and rural geographic location, Wabash has an overabundance of cultural and creative capital and has leveraged it in many ways. Also, public-private partnerships have developed to push the creative placemaking agenda forward.

³³ Lauren Winterfield, “Wabash City Plan Commission Approves Expansion of TIF district,” *Wabash Plain Dealer* (Wabash, IN), February 16, 2015.

³⁴ “Ground Breaking of Rock City Lofts,” Wabash Stellar, December 14, 2016, Accessed February 2, 2018 <http://wabashstellar.cityofwabash.com/ground-breaking-of-rock-city-lofts/>.

³⁵ Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, “Creative Placemaking” (white paper, Washington D.C., 2010), <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>

The Honeywell Center and Ford Theatre, an arts related anchor institution, is a significant property located in downtown and managed by the nonprofit Honeywell Foundation. The Honeywell Center was originally built in the late 1940s' and early 1950's as a community center but has been instrumental in making Wabash a destination for arts and entertainment, with the addition of a 1500 seat theatre in the 1990's - christened the Ford Theatre.³⁶ The Honeywell Foundation also programs several other sites around the city, mostly historic, including the Honeywell House, the Dr. James Ford Historic House, and most recently the Eagles Theatre.

The Honeywell Foundation took a bold move by acquiring the long-neglected Eagles Theatre in 2010. The Eagles is the only first-run indoor movie theatre left in the County. Since acquiring the building, the Foundation has made significant improvements to the space, adding live performance programming and updating the projection system in order to continue the theatre's first-run offerings. In 2014, as a result of the Stellar Designation, the Foundation underwent a massive capital campaign to transform the Eagles Theatre into a state of the art venue for live performances and media related educational offerings. The \$18 million campaign was successful within a year. The Foundation, with the assistance of their leadership team and board of directors were able to leverage Stellar funding to raise over \$11 million dollars in private funding. The funding break down is as follows:

- Office of Community and Rural Affairs Grant: \$1,700,000 (part of the Stellar Designation)
- City of Wabash: \$1,300,000 (part of the Stellar Designation)
- Wabash Marketplace Grant: \$200,000 (part of the Stellar Designation)
- Regional Cities Initiative Grant: \$976,635
- Private donations: \$11,100,000³⁷

³⁶ Commissioned and financed by Mark C. Honeywell, founder of Honeywell International, Inc., the Center was built as a tribute to his late wife and family.

³⁷ The Honeywell Foundation, "Achieving an Impossible Goal: The Eagles Renovation Project" (case study report, 2017). https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/78bfaa_baa15ab80bb94db58f0dce298a67dcb1.pdf

Additionally, “300 individual donors made contributions to the campaign. Of those, 118 were first-time donors to The Honeywell Foundation. Impressively, 132 private donors increased their donations or gave their largest gifts to date.”³⁸

In addition to the Honeywell Foundation’s incredible economic and creative placemaking contributions to the city, WMI has also seen the value and has capitalized on creative placemaking by promoting and extolling the benefits of public art within the district. One of the more successful projects was the Market-Canal Alley Art Walk. The Art-Walk was a public-private partnership between the city, four building owners, six vendors, and was funded by the Indiana Office of Tourism, OCRA’s Place-Based Investment Fund, and Deluxe Corporation³⁹ Additional projects included the transformation of a primary gateway into downtown by creating a public meeting space with art mural representing the heritage of the city, and the improvement of an existing public gathering space, Veteran’s Plaza, with the introduction of an artist designed canopy.

Tourism – Destination Placemaking

As a result of all of these placemaking endeavors over the last decade, Wabash as positioned itself to be a regional destination. Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world, and can be a beneficial place-based economic development strategy. Wabash has focused significant energy and vision towards making downtown a destination. Building on the Honeywell Center anchor, downtown has become populated with boutique shops, and antique stores, and has become a regional mecca for the arts. Visit Wabash County, the county visitor’s

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Wabash Marketplace, Inc., “Creative Placemaking” (multiple project review, 2017).
https://www.wabashmarketplace.org/uploads/4/9/0/7/49071891/creative_placemaking_wabash_marketplace.pdf

bureau, sees great value in packaging the community's authentic heritage-cultural offerings as a means to bring people to town and spend their disposable income.

Downtown as an overnight destination was solidified in 2010. Visitors can now stay in the unique Charley Creek Inn, an approximately \$15 million boutique hotel. Transformed from a former affordable housing property, the Charley Creek Inn offers guests comfortable accommodation in the heart of the historic downtown district. Underwritten by the generous local philanthropist Richard Ford, this development, in conjunction with the Honeywell Center and Ford Theatre, has contributed to making downtown an overnight destination.

The tourist economy sets Wabash apart from other communities its size. Visit Wabash County, in an economic study conducted in 2016, assess the benefits of tourism and states that 7.5% of all jobs in Wabash County were related to tourism.⁴⁰ These jobs include hotels, B&B's, restaurants, retail, transportation, and arts and entertainment.⁴¹ Also, tourism was the 4th largest industry, not including government, in terms of jobs.⁴² The study also claims that, "of every dollar spent by visitors in Wabash County, 67¢ in economic impact is retained in the local area."⁴³ The study also found that:

- Spending by Visitors to Wabash County totaled \$51 million in 2016, up 2.2% over 2015.
- Visitors spent \$4.75 million on lodging, \$14.1 million on food & beverages, \$15.75 million on retail, \$6 million on entertainment and recreation, and \$10.9 million on transportation.
- Visitor Spending in Wabash County supported 968 jobs and \$19.5 million in labor income.
- Tourism-Initiated Tax Revenue generated \$4.1 million in Federal tax collections, \$6.1 million in State & local taxes including \$2.7 million in sales taxes and \$2.2 million in property taxes supporting the local tax base.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Rockport Analytics, "2016 Economic Impact of Tourism in Wabash County: Methodology, Metrics and Evaluation" (report presentation, 2017).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to outline the significant amount of investment that rural and shrinking Wabash has allocated towards placemaking, historic preservation, and the arts, and this initial investigation raises many important questions. By conducting further surveys, perhaps a quantitative value can be established for evaluating place attachment and a comparative study between Wabash and other Cities – or Counties - around the state could be undertaken. This might assist in better understanding if there are correlations between population loss and economies. Additionally, how the retention and redevelopment of well-designed, and aesthetically pleasing older buildings and districts, contribute to the creation and development of place attachment, has yet to be studied in a meaningful way. Future study is needed to make a quantifiable connection between historic districts – and their relationship to the intangible concept of attachment. One way to do this is to research whether there is a correlation between attachment and the designation of local historic districts.

Additionally, it was uncovered during this investigation, that Wabash is a very philanthropic community, despite the real economic challenges it faces. The Chronicle of Philanthropy noted in 2012 that Wabash was the second most generous county out of all 92 counties in the state.⁴⁵ This type of philanthropy points to another piece of the puzzle. If place attachment can be quantified than an interesting investigation might study the correlation between local generosity and place attachment.

By focusing on the virtues of place, Wabash has a better chance of creating an environment/community worth living in and being a part of. By creating and fostering

⁴⁵ Karla Bowsher, “Grant County Trails Wells and Wabash as Most Generous Among Indiana's 92 Counties,” *Chronicle-Tribune* (Marion, IN), October 19, 2014.

aesthetically pleasing community spaces (downtown), Wabash will forge emotional and psychological connections that will improve their resiliency over time. Faced with similar challenges as other shrinking rural communities, Wabash seems to be dedicated to forging a different path. They have doubled down on their efforts to improve their community materially in hopes of strengthening meaning and relevancy. This is extolled in the many partnerships that have formed and exist, in all the projects mentioned in this study. The partnerships are perhaps the most important piece of the puzzle and point to a high degree of attachment between Wabash and its residents.

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