

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

Allen County Strategic Plan

Beginning in 2008, the elected officials, department heads, and staff of Allen County collaborated to create a Strategic Plan for the county. Participation in the project was voluntary and demonstrated cooperation among separately elected office holders and appointed department heads, working towards a shared community vision and mission, and common County-wide goals. Twenty-five offices and department participated in the plan.

As the project progressed with the help of an outside consultant, it did not take long for this to become an internally driven project with the creation of a Strategic Plan Executive Committee. Most traditional local government strategic plans are community development plans; this initial plan took the path of being an internal "business" plan for each department. This resulted in over 400 department-level objectives proposed to be completed over the next five years. All of the submitted department and office objectives, activities and tasks, and measures have been compiled and the strategic plan document is to be updated yearly. Allen County was recognized by the Indiana Association of Counties for these efforts, and it was cited as the first Strategic Plan of its kind with respect to county government in Indiana. However, future strategic planning efforts should address challenges that arose as part of this process, as discussed on page six.

Past versions of the Strategic Plan can be viewed at: www.allencounty.us/2-uncategorised/56-strategic-plan.

Strategic Plan Executive Committee Members (2008)

Jeff Baxter, Superintendent, Parks and Recreation
Therese Brown, County Commissioner
Chris Cloud, Commissioners' Office Staff
Dave Fuller, Building Commissioner
Tom Harris, County Council

Larry Brown, County Council
Nelson Peters, County Commissioner
Mike Talbott, Purdue Cooperative Extension
Bev Zuber, Wayne Township Assessor
Tera Klutz, Auditor
Pat Fahey, Department of Planning Services (Chairman)

Indiana Association of Counties

The Indiana Association of Counties produces an annual Guide to Indiana County Government, which is an invaluable primer. It includes an overview of the power of Indiana counties and the sources of authority, the powers and duties of elected county officials, county finances, and meetings and records.

International City/County Management Association

ICMA is a professional development resource for local government professionals. Best practices, documents from counties around the country, and other resources can be found at www.icma.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the Allen County Board of Commissioners at 260-449-7555 or commissioner@co.allen.in.us.



ALLEN COUNTY

EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS TASKFORCE

RECOMMENDATIONS, JANUARY 2016

Purpose of the Task Force

In November 2014, a referendum was placed on the Allen County ballot to replace the current three county commissioner structure with (1) a single county executive and (2) an expanded county council, adding two members (from seven to nine). During the public dialog that occurred to debate the issue, both those in favor of and opposed to the proposal conceded that improved efficiencies within Allen County government could be made. The proposal was voted down, 70.6 (no) to 29.4 percent (yes).

Subsequently, Commissioners Therese Brown and Nelson Peters requested assistance from the IPFW Community Research Institute (CRI) to help continue the conversation. The Allen County Efficiency and Effectiveness Task Force was formed to explore how improvements could be made within the organization *without* contradicting the message that Allen County voters sent in November. The Commissioners asked community and business leaders with differing points of view to collaborate, study the issues, and present specific recommendations.

The Process

- ◆ **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted to gather inquiries and an assessment of issues and opportunities. This was used to frame the discussion for the initial Task Force meetings.
- ◆ **Reference Material Review:** Materials related to local government structure, ongoing efforts in Allen County, the budget process, and recommendations from previous task forces were reviewed and relevant information was summarized for the Task Force members.
- ◆ **Creation of an Organizational Chart for Allen County:** Prior to this process, a comprehensive organizational chart outlining reporting structures and accountability did not exist. CRI staff created an Allen County organizational chart over the course of several weeks in consultation with state statute, the Commissioners, and senior county staff.
- ◆ **Task Force Meetings:** A series of six meetings were held between March 2015 and January 2016 at locations across Allen County. The meetings were publicized in advance and open to the public. All Task Force materials are available online at www.ipfw.edu/centers/cri/allen-county-task-force/.
- ◆ **Discussion of Potential Recommendations:** Based on key organizational issues identified, potential recommendations were discussed by Task Force members. Areas with little consensus fell out of discussion in favor of areas where Task Force Members agreed would be acceptable *and* would improve the organization for the Allen County citizenry.
- ◆ **Finalization of Recommendations and Implementation:** The Task Force finalized these recommendations and delivered them to the Board of Commissioners, who are charged with convening the appropriate stakeholders to explore implementation in 2016.

INFORMATION GATHERED AND DISCUSSED

Meeting Dates	Task Force Members
<p>Wednesday, March 25, 2015 (2 p.m. – 4 p.m.) Cornerstone Youth Center in Monroeville</p>	<p>Kent Castleman, President, NewAllen Alliance Michael Eikenberry, Former Dean, IPFW Doermer School of Business Ben Eisbart, Board Member, Greater Fort Wayne Inc. Roger Hadley, President, Allen County Farm Bureau Terry McDonald, Mayor, City of New Haven Bob Taylor, President and CEO, Do it Best Corp.</p>
<p>Wednesday, April 29, 2015 (2 p.m. – 4 p.m.) Police Training Room at New Haven City Hall</p>	<p>Facilitator Ellen Cutter, Director, IPFW Community Research Institute</p>
<p>Tuesday, July 28, 2015 (2 p.m. – 4 p.m.) Main Branch of the Allen County Library</p>	<p>Interviews Conducted Linda Bloom, Allen County Commissioner (District 3) Therese Brown, Allen County Commissioner (District 2) Kent Castleman, President, NewAllen Alliance Chris Cloud, Executive Assistant, Allen County Board of Commissioners Michael Eikenberry, Former Dean, IPFW Doermer School of Business Ben Eisbart, Board Member, Greater Fort Wayne Inc. G. William Fishering, Attorney, Allen County Roger Hadley, President, Allen County Farm Bureau Tom Harris, Allen County Council President Terry McDonald, Mayor, City of New Haven Nelson Peters, Allen County Commissioner (District 1) Bob Taylor, President and CEO, Do it Best Corp.</p>
<p>Wednesday, August 26, 2015 (2 p.m. – 4 p.m.) Police Training Room at New Haven City Hall</p>	<p>Reference Materials Allen County Organizational Chart (drafted by CRI), 2015 Allen County Strategic Plan, 2009 Allen County Strategic Plan update, 2011 Concepts to Improve the Efficiency of Local Government in Allen County, 2008 County Government Structure: A State by State Report (NACO), 2010 Guide to Indiana County Government, Association of Indiana Counties, 2009 Indiana Code 36-2-5: County Budget Procedures The Structure of Local Government in Allen County, IPFW, 2004 Streamlining Local Government, Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform, 2007 Summary of Departments and Authority, Allen County Board of Commissioners, 2015</p>
<p>Tuesday, September 15, 2015 (6 p.m. – 8 p.m.) Dupont Branch of the Allen County Library</p>	
<p>Thursday, January 7, 2016 (2 p.m. – 4 p.m.) Police Training Room at New Haven City Hall</p>	



Action 1.3: Allow the Board of Commissioners (or a Budget Committee convened by the Commissioners) to recommend a budget to County Council, based on the Strategic Plan.

- Again, the common thread uniting all elected officials and department heads is the budget.
- While there has been support for the Strategic Plan from Council, the reality is that County Council are part-time positions. As such, there has been no consistently demonstrated capacity to verify that requested expenditures align with the Strategic Plan.
- The power to recommend a budget, based on the Strategic Plan, would move the county toward priority-driven budgeting and encourage a higher level of collaboration and cross-departmental initiatives.
- The ability to recommend a budget would not override Council’s fiscal authority in any way.

Recommendation #2: Coordinate employee performance reviews across the organization and consider implementing merit pay.

Issue: Approximately 80 percent of costs in Allen County government are associated with personnel.

Issue : Some county departments utilize county Human Resources services, while others do not. Even if departments have their own performance reviews, rather than using those from Human Resources, a coordinated “10,000 foot view” across the entire organization is impossible to glean.

The Task Force recommends two actions to coordinate performance reviews and incentivize quality performance.

Action 2.1: Coordinate employee performance review standards.

- Like most other things in county government, participation in performance reviews are voluntary and at the discretion of the elected official.
- Challenges arise with unique circumstances when broaching the topic of coordinating performance reviews; however, a core set of performance standards can and should be adopted by every department.
- Every Allen County employee should be appraised of their performance on an annual basis and given feedback to promote continuous improvement throughout the organization.

Action 2.2: Link employee performance reviews and merit pay to the Commissioner/Budget Committee recommended budget.

- A small, flat percentage of the County’s budget could be reserved each year for merit pay with the expectation that managers disperse the funds based on performance reviews.
- The organization-wide recommended budget could provide recommendations on the level of funding available to each manager, based on the quality and progress of their department’s Strategic Plan.

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

As the Task Force explored potential recommendations, it was determined that a small set of high-impact recommendations would be preferable to a longer, more comprehensive list. Although there are many actions that could be undertaken to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Allen County government, the Task Force recommendations reflect the highest priority efforts that should be considered by its elected leadership.

Recommendation #1: Enhance and integrate strategic planning and budgeting processes.

Issue : While lauded for blazing a trail of strategic planning at the county level (the first in the State), Allen County’s efforts of strategic planning have stalled out due to key challenges including:

- Weak linkage between the Strategic Plan and the budget process
- Wide variety in effort and level of detail provided between departments
- Need for professional development resources related to effective strategic planning
- Need for a “10,000 foot view” that explores cross-departmental strategies
- No consistently applied accountability structure from County Council or citizenry
- Need to transition from a collection of discrete plans to include articulation of goals for the entire organization

Issue: The State of Indiana requires that counties submit a line-item budget. Line-item budgets do not always provide the context necessary to understand how expenditures are bundled to provide existing or proposed new services. The current budget process projects the revenues for the coming fiscal year and departmental budgets are adjusted accordingly. This approach to budgeting promotes the status quo rather than innovation in programming and services.

The Task Force recommends three actions to enhance and integrate strategic planning and budgeting processes.

Action 1.1: Implement an annual strategic planning retreat that engages elected officials and citizens.

- Voter participation is very weak (12 percent participation) in Allen County elections. A retreat would serve the dual purpose of improving citizen involvement and setting citizens’ objectives for the Strategic Plan. This would also potentially improve confidence in elected officials, because there would be a clear mechanism in place for citizens to express their priorities.
- The retreat would include elected officials and a group of citizen leaders. Each elected official would be encouraged to invite 10 Allen County residents. Elected officials would be given the opportunity to propose fundable ideas for programming and service improvements.
- A professional facilitator would help the group determine a key set of goals and priorities for the County. This would serve as the basis for each department’s strategy.

Action 1.2: Adopt a zero-based budget for Allen County.

- Zero-based budgeting brings the budget for each department back down to \$0 at the start of each year. Expenditures are typically considered in program or service groups. Every expenditure is assessed and justified on an annual basis.
- By adopting a zero-based budget, the County could better coordinate across units to realize efficiencies.
- Any savings identified could be redistributed to the best proposals, aligned with stated organizational priorities, put forth at the Strategic Planning retreat and contained within the annual Strategic Plan.

CRITICAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED

County government is uniquely structured in the State of Indiana.

- Indiana is the only state with a separate fiscal body. In other states there is some executive board that holds both legislative (overseen in Indiana by the Board of Commissioners) and fiscal functions (overseen in Indiana by County Councils).
- Executive and administrative functions are dispersed across 19 separate elected officials — this *does not* include an additional 11 state-employed, locally-elected judges and prosecutors. Each elected official has statutorily vested powers and duties. There are no requirements for hours worked, only duties accomplished.
- Within this structure, coordination across the departments under the prevue of differing elected officials relies on goodwill. For County government to be effective and efficient, cooperative attitudes and a spirit of genuine teamwork among all elected officials must be accomplished.

Accountability and coordination can be difficult to achieve.

- Because each elected official is free to set his or her own priorities , identifying and implementing organization-wide strategies can be difficult to accomplish. Take, for example, something as simple as creating an organizational chart. Allen County government employs over 1,600, making it the 7th largest employer in the county. It has a total operating budget of nearly \$169 million. However, no organizational chart to delineate structure and accountability existed prior to the convening of this Task Force.
- The pancake structure, with a great number of elected officials and governing boards, makes accountability difficult to understand. This can create a frustrating and confusing dynamic, particularly for citizens and businesses who have received subpar customer service.

The common thread across all elected officials and managers is the budget. Efforts must be made to link strategic planning with the budgeting process.

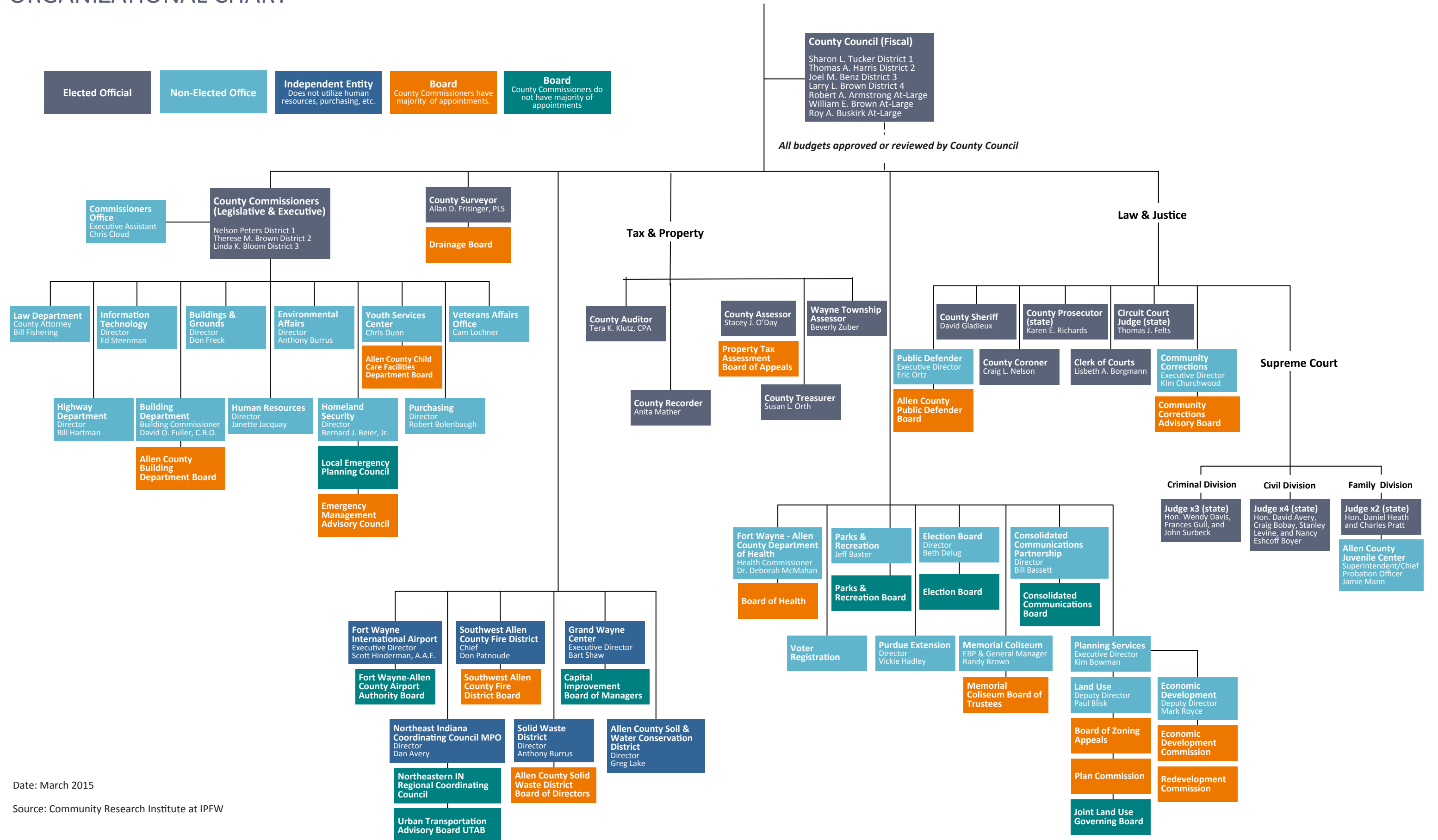
- The county produces a line-item budget, as required by the State of Indiana. County Council reviews and approves the budgets of all county government units. County Council seats are part-time positions.
- Commissioners are engaged with the day-to-day management of county government and are full-time positions. The Board of Commissioners manage roughly one-third of county employees and one-third of the county budget.
- In 2009, the Commissioners initiated a Strategic Planning process and sought participation from units representing the other two-thirds in order to set a unified course for the entire organization. Because the Strategic Plan was not effectively linked to the budget process, participation fell off because it became an exercise rather than a tool for managers. Additionally, adequate professional development resources for writing an effective strategic plan were not available for managers.
- Strategic planning has great potential to improve effectiveness and identify cross-departmental efficiencies; however, there is no current way to ensure participation and quality across all units managed by numerous elected officials.

Without a more engaged constituency, little pressure is put on elected officials to raise the bar.

- Task Force members noted that Allen County’s constituency is apathetic, with only 12 percent voter turnout at the last county election.
- Care must be paid to building trust with constituents throughout the county, in particular those of towns, cities, and communities outside of Fort Wayne.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Citizenry of Allen County, Indiana



Date: March 2015
 Source: Community Research Institute at IPFW