



An aerial view of State Road 28 illustrates the entryway into Frankfort, the government seat in Clinton County.



What's Old is New: Town's History Pivotal in Its Reinvention

By Symone Salisbury

Railroads gained early fame from the outlaws who robbed passenger trains during the 1800s. But as Old West figures faded away and industry advanced, railroads gained prominence for more positive pursuits.

They became economic staples in some communities and an envied symbol of social status in others. Forty five percent of Clinton County's population was employed by the railroads in the 1930s. Today, the rails' presence remains an economic factor.

Along with agriculture and manufacturing, railroads were instrumental in Clinton County's development. One initiative contained in Frankfort's newly updated community plan (first drafted nearly 40 years ago) revolves around the restoration of an abandoned roundhouse.

A different travel option -- expanding State Road 28 to four lanes to help create businesses along the Indianapolis/Lafayette corridor -- is another goal.

Separate from the community plan but equally significant is construction of a new biodiesel plant in Frankfort that will utilize railroads and State Road 28 to ship its products. It will help convert 15% of the state's soybean production to fuel.

In spring 2007, the finalized State Road 28 expansion, biodiesel plant and Frankfort comprehensive plan are scheduled to be unveiled.

On the road again

What obstacles does the State Road 28 expansion, launched last fall, pose?

"It's more opportunity than obstacle," asserts Mark Mills, community planner and executive director of the Clinton County Area Plan Commission. "We already have our overlay district in

place. The standards are pretty strict. We know what's going in there is going to be aesthetically pleasing."

He acknowledges, however, that the project will present challenges, such as an increase in traffic that will necessitate additional stoplights. Another hurdle concerns the sewage line, which currently ends about one mile east of nearby Jefferson. A debate centers on how to extend the line to Interstate 65.

Moreover, many residents are concerned that the expansion will encourage individuals and businesses to relocate to Lafayette (20 miles to the north) or Indianapolis (45 miles south down the interstate).

"I think it could go both ways," Mills reflects.

Rather than view the corridor as a potential departure point, however, he considers it a gateway to Clinton County.

"We can still do what's called smart growth – protect our agricultural land base," he states. "With State Road 28 being made into four lanes, it's going to be a real front door (to the community). There's a lot of things being done in anticipation of the road and what we see as unique opportunities to really do things right."

One positive utility issue revolves around wind farms. Plans are underway to build a wind farm on the eastern side of the county.

"Clinton County is one of the few counties that has Class 3 winds, which will allow us to provide long-term better utility rates," Mills shares. "That would be my dream. I don't know if state law allows that, but it's something I would like to see."

Fueling job creation

The Frankfort biodiesel plant will reside on the north side of the city's industrial park and cost an estimated \$43 million. It will produce 60,000 gallons of biodiesel per year.

Construction on the plant will commence this year.

Located across the street from the plant, soybean processor Archer Daniels Midland will supply soy oil. Both will benefit from reduced transportation costs and natural gas needs to heat feed stock.

"Basically, they (the Indiana Clean Energy, LLC board of directors) decided the issue they needed to cover first was location, location, location," recalls Mark Bunner, CFO, Indiana Clean Energy. "They looked for a place or two in a couple of counties north of here initially, but they did not have rail service.

"One positive for our location is the expansion of State Road 28, which will help tremendously," he continues. "Our output of the biodiesel will be shipped by rail and by truck."

Smaller plants currently operate in Hammond and Morristown. A biodiesel plant under construction in Warsaw will emerge as one of the world's largest, built to generate 80,000 gallons of biodiesel fuel annually.

"Our technology will be state-of-the-art," Bunner proclaims.

Indiana Clean Energy board members preview the location of the facility expected to annually produce 60,000 gallons of biodiesel.



Business and economic efforts are led by the Clinton County Chamber of Commerce staff: assistant director Shan Sheridan, executive director Gina Sheets and office manager Cheryl King.

"We will employ about 35 new people. It's not as many jobs as some industries maybe would bring in, but the quality of the people we hire will be on a little higher level because they will have to be trained on higher technology."

Not only will the facility create jobs, but also protect the environment. It will emit negligible hydrocarbon emissions, which will help improve air quality.

Scripting change

Joe Doan, president of Coapstick Insurance Agency, Inc., and Partners in Progress (PIP), describes the organization as the "economic development wing of the community."

"Our (PIP's) objectives are not only related to industrial recruitment, but to doing what we can to facilitate the prosperity of existing industry here in the county," he comments. "We keep pretty close tabs on existing industry, to see what their



Frankfort's abandoned roundhouse promises to emerge as a thriving tourist attraction.

wants and needs are.

"Of course, we would like to bring in more commercial and retail business," he adds. "We encourage entrepreneurial development."

PIP is involved in nearly all facets of Frankfort's economic development. It is leading efforts to update the Frankfort comprehensive plan. In addition to the State Road 28 expansion, issues explored in the plan include zoning ordinances, downtown revitalization and industrial development.

PIP also has created a health sciences technology plan. Current studies involve future development at the Frankfort Municipal Airport and implementation of an agrisciences business plan.

Also, the group aspires to develop a certified technology park (separate from Frankfort's industrial park), which would complement the State Road 28 expansion.

"The State Road 28 expansion to four lanes is going to make access from (Interstate) 65 so much more convenient," Doan predicts. "It's going to make this area more user friendly for trucking and support-type industry that might be providing goods and materials.

"I'm optimistic about our economic future," he observes. "It all hinges on our ability to increase the supply of above average wage jobs, and that in turn is going to bode well for the community based on what we are targeting (biorefinery, medical and manufacturing industries, for example).

Cohesion is key

Gina Sheets is the Clinton County economic development director and CEO of the Clinton County Chamber of Commerce.

She emphasizes that more cohesive standards between the county and city are among desired outcomes of the Frankfort comprehensive plan.

"Right now, the industrial park is not in the city boundaries,

but in future years, it will be," Sheets stresses. "The county has a little higher expectation of zoning practices. Sign standards are different. Landscaping standards are different."

Frankfort's industrial park spans 1,000 acres. It will house the biodiesel plant and encompass State Road 28.

"We are creating in our industrial park what we are calling industrial symbiosis," Sheets reveals, "and it's going to be a great retention and attraction tool for newer industries, especially for industries in food processing."

"If you look at Clinton County, we are often in the top five (never below the top seven) for corn and soybean production in Indiana," Sheets points out. "So it makes sense that we continue to position ourselves as a place where food processors would like to locate. And the city's plan is addressing that issue."

All aboard

Frankfort's deserted roundhouse hasn't been forgotten.

Norfolk Southern is donating the property to the Frankfort-Midwest Rail Heritage Trust.

Just as it did over 50 years ago, the site will soon connect people pursuing various destinations. Renovation ideas include transforming the location into a museum, concert and conference center.

Originally rebuilt in 1925 following a fire, the roundhouse is one of only two remaining in the state. Restoration will begin this fall.

"Clinton County is an exciting place to live," Sheets proclaims. "Technology and manufacturing is critical to the state of Indiana and Clinton County is positioning itself to be leaders in those areas, and we're also working to improve the quality of life for the residents in our community."

INFORMATION LINK

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