



SMALL CITIES THINK BIG

Connecting Housing, Talent, Place

By Symone C. Skrzycki and Rebecca Patrick

Small, but mighty.

Those words characterize three Hoosier communities – Greensburg, Huntingburg and Loogootee – that are driving growth through downtown development, entrepreneurship, housing, talent initiatives and quality of place strategies.

In Loogootee, Oak Street Village combines workforce housing, childcare and residential development to address several community needs at once.

In Greensburg, two projects reshaping downtown are Preserving Main Street and Ironwood Apartments. The initiatives received Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) 1.0 and READI 2.0 funding, respectively.

"I think the READI program has provided us a historic opportunity to take on some projects – specifically quality of life projects – that previously would be very difficult and take much longer," asserts Bryan Robbins, executive director of the Economic Development Corporation of Greensburg/Decatur County.

Huntingburg is also paving the way for growth through Poplar Ridge Apartments, a $16 million READI 2.0 project that broke ground in July 2025. The development encompasses 126 high-efficiency residences.

Although each city's projects are unique, they share a common goal: enhancing quality of place and attracting business investment to assist local employers in recruiting and retaining workers.

Greensburg: Preserving Main Street, Ironwood Apartments

Population: 12,319

The Preserving Main Street project focuses on historic downtown Greensburg. It involves renovating the Odd Fellows building, a condemned three-story structure, as well as parking and streetscape improvements along five downtown blocks.

Regarding the Odd Fellows structure at 112 South Franklin, Robbins says, "We're looking for an occupant for that building, and then they'll build out the rest. It will have retail in the bottom and residences above. A developer came in and teamed with the city." He further explains, "We were able to leverage those investments for the READI funds, which were then put toward finishing out our streetscape. After finishing off the downtown streetscape, we were able to have enough money left over to tackle two (additional) properties."

One of the buildings is a two-story facility the City of Greensburg is partnering on with Indiana Landmarks.

"They've got some money to help fix the roof and kind of white box it," Robbins notes. "It was sitting empty for a long time. Main Street here locally is going to be taking it over. That's a great step for them as an organization to be able to tackle actual property development. The READI dollars and the support of the city have really enabled them to do that – and that's in process. So, they're looking to (potentially) utilize the building as a retail spot, possibly an office upstairs, that sort of thing to really put that building back to use."

The second building once housed a bank.

"It has all the old bank features," Robbins marvels. "Gigantic ceilings. A walk-in safe. It has a neoclassic architecture on the south side. It's right on the alley in a prominent location. It was originally built probably in the 1920s or so. We've had a lot of developers try to come in and take it on and just not be able to do it. So, there's both a public benefit and a private benefit (that the project is moving forward). And on top of that, we get a beautiful building renovated and back on the tax rolls, so to speak."

Greensburg's downtown development efforts also extend to housing. Ironwood Apartments represents the first new residences in the city's downtown historic district since around the 1950s.

"It's very exciting, and it sits on an old jail lot that was leveled," Robbins





A sensory-rich park, Alley Activation project and Oak Street Village development welcome residents and visitors to Greensburg, Huntingburg and Loogootee, respectively.

relates. "There'll be 88 market-rate units bringing first-class living to the heart of our community, to the historic downtown, which we feel will help the businesses. We already have a very healthy downtown mix of restaurants and independent shops and services, but this is just going to hopefully be yet another trigger to kind of enhance that experience downtown."

The market-rate apartments are intended for new graduates, returning residents, empty nesters and employees of major local industries, including Honda and the regional healthcare sector.

"Like a lot of other rural areas, we have some seniors that kind of want to downsize and still want to be close," he shares. "Being able to walk down the street to grab a cup of coffee and stuff, I think that would be just as attractive for them."

Huntingburg: Downtown Connections, Poplar Ridge Apartments and Workforce Development

Population: Less than 7,000

Huntingburg's growth strategy integrates housing, downtown amenities, entertainment and workforce development. Poplar Ridge Apartments, a $16 million READI 2.0 project launched in July 2025, will add 126 high-efficiency residences, including one- to three-bedroom apartments and two- to three-bedroom townhomes. The city supported the development with a five-year tax abatement for each of three construction phases.

Mayor Neil Elkins reports that investment builds on projects completed through Stellar Communities, a state-led community development program, including the 2020 renovation of Fourth Street. "That's been a big plus to our community," he remarks. "We brought in other higher-end restaurants and breweries and a lot of stuff in that area." New parking behind downtown buildings led to the READI 1.0 Alley Activation Project, which converted two alleys into pedestrian connections and outdoor seating areas.

"It all ties together," Elkins affirms. The activated alleys link Fourth Street and Market Street Park, which can host concerts for up to 2,000 people, with Huntingburg Memorial Gymnasium two blocks away. A planned $10 million renovation of the 6,500-seat gymnasium would further strengthen that corridor. Public fundraising is expected to begin in November, coinciding with the facility's 75th anniversary, with completion anticipated within two to three years.

Along with Market Street Park and historic League Stadium, built in 1894, the projects are helping Huntingburg become a destination. "We always have something going on (at those locations) that brings thousands of people in every year," Elkins shares. "I think the stadium itself brought about 25,000 people in over the summer."

He also points to local business investment, new restaurants, an airport terminal expansion and retirees choosing Huntingburg for its affordability, safety and amenities. Four not-for-profit utilities and city-owned gas and water systems help keep utility costs among the lowest in Indiana.

That quality of place also supports OFS, Huntingburg's largest employer. Founded in 1937 and owned by the Menke family, the company makes furniture for workplace, healthcare and hospitality settings worldwide and owns Styline Logistics. Annual investments in warehousing and assembly expand its manufacturing footprint and create jobs beyond construction – a continuing source of pride for the company, notes Aaron Estabrook, OFS senior director of digital and communication strategy.

The area's wood-manufacturing tradition has created a skilled, committed workforce; some employees have spent more than 40 years with OFS. The company is nurturing the next generation through Crafted, an accredited, multi-semester high school program focused on engineering and advanced manufacturing.

"We have the opportunity to invest in students right down the road," Estabrook offers. "Not only did we work with the state to have an accredited course, but we also have our own people" as instructors. Students learn skills such as programming and operating CNC machines.

"A lot of our focus is on youth," Estabrook



Greensburg: The Decatur County Youth Sports Complex is one of the city's biggest tourism draws, hosting baseball and softball tournaments throughout the year.



Huntingburg: OFS and Southridge High School's Crafted (Career Routes Around Furniture, Technology, Engineering and Design) program is "shaping the next generation of makers."



Loogootee: Martin County Alliance Destination Identity Workshop, held in October. Pictured are facilitator Shellie Phelps of Biggest Fish Consulting LLC (Phelps previously appeared on HGTV's *Home Town Take Over* for Wetumpka, Alabama) with the Alliance's executive director Jessica Potts and administrative assistant Tierlan Norris.

emphasizes. He says OFS President and CEO Hank Menke views that commitment as an investment in Huntingburg's future – an approach captured in Menke's philosophy: "What you make people feel is as important as what you make."

From gathering spaces and housing to employer-led talent development, Huntingburg's initiatives help attract residents, visitors and workers while sustaining momentum for the next generation.

Loogootee: Oak Street Village, Country Court Five and Downtown Park Pavilion

Population: Approximately 2,700

Loogootee is expanding its housing and amenities to attract residents, support workers and strengthen community ties. The centerpiece is Oak Street Village, a $15 million development with 50 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments featuring Class A finishes and free Wi-Fi. It also includes a 4,800-square-foot licensed childcare center operated by Kid City USA for approximately 58 children ages two to five.

Jessica Potts, executive director of the Martin County Alliance for Economic Growth, stresses that the public childcare facility is important in a rural county with limited options. Oak Street Village also will feature a public playground, pavilion and pickleball court, extending its reach beyond residents.

"It's so unique because it encompasses a childcare need," Potts remarks. "It really hits on so many things that economic developers work on every day – quality of place, housing, childcare." The apartments also offer affordable, modern housing for the local workforce and younger residents who want to return home.

Joe White, president and CEO of developer JBH Ventures, relays that the project grew from a shared desire among local leaders to advance Loogootee's growth. A market study found 99.8% housing occupancy, leaving few choices. More than 110 prospective residents had expressed interest as construction approached completion.

"There were a lot of important pieces that came together intentionally and thoughtfully, and that's what made this project possible," White relates. "Although the housing is affordable for Martin County, the finishes – the product itself – are what I would consider Class A." He credits local and regional partners with bringing the plan to fruition.

White envisions Oak Street Village as more than housing. JBH Ventures is developing support that could include workplace skills, certification training, financial literacy and homeownership preparation. An on-site gathering space will allow classes at the property. The goal is to help residents advance in their careers, manage finances and ultimately become homeowners.

"We're not just bringing high-quality housing to Loogootee," White underscores. "As part of our commitment, we'll help provide training toward financial independence and homeownership."

Other projects reinforce that effort. Country Court Five, the city's first new subdivision in many years, includes 41 lots; six homes had been built and 13 lots sold after sales began in the spring. READI funding supported its infrastructure. Shaded Lane Estates offers duplexes for residents age 55 and older and plans to expand beyond its initial six units.

Quality of place investments complement the housing growth. READI funding helped transform a vacant downtown lot into a green space with a pavilion and stage hosting concerts, Summerfest activities and community movie nights. The strategy also positions Loogootee and Martin County to benefit from growth tied to Naval Support Activity Crane and the WestGate Technology Park.

"We're really quality of place driven," Potts comments. "One of our goals at the Alliance is bringing people together and reminding everyone why we love home."

By pairing new residences with childcare, resident education and public gathering spaces, Loogootee is creating more reasons for people to return, remain and build their futures there.

RESOURCES: Neil Elkins, City of Huntingburg, at www.huntingburg-in.gov | Aaron Estabrook, OFS, at www.ofs.com | Jessica Potts, Martin County Alliance for Economic Growth, at www.martinalliance.org | Bryan Robbins, Economic Development Corporation of Greensburg/Decatur County, at www.edcgdc.com | Joe White, JBH Ventures, at www.jbhventures.com