

MEMORANDUM



TO: MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
FROM: JAMES HILL, PLANNER
SUBJECT: VISIT TO FISHERS AND CARMEL, INDIANA
DATE: AUGUST 3, 2022

On July 14 and 15, planners Lindsay Bell and Barb McBeth, consultant Rowan Brady, Commissioner Ramesh Verma, Economic Development Director Mike McCreedy, Assistant City Manager Victor Cardenas, and Community Development Director Charles Boulard, made a trip to two communities in Indiana to see the latest developments of the cities of Fishers and Carmel. The two cities are both suburbs of Indianapolis and have populations near 100,000 people according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This memo shares observations by the planners; other committee members or those participating in the visit may have other thoughts they may wish to share with the Steering Committee.

This memo recounts the visit, including observations of the districts, features and patterns that caught their attention, challenges that these Indiana communities faced, and potential relevance for Novi. Additional research and documents are provided through links in this memo.

Fishers, Indiana

The group's first stop was Fishers Indiana, where they visited two distinct areas – the Fishers District and the Nickel Plate District.

[The Fishers District](#) is home to new mixed-use development that centers around an outdoor greenspace flanked by restaurants, hotels, retail/service and residential. This area was the most car-oriented place the group visited, due to it basically being a shopping district off the main thoroughfare with plenty of parking in both surface spaces and in a 2-story garage. It appeared convenient for visitors to park, shop and get lunch or dinner. Residents have convenient access to shopping, including a grocery store, a dog park, and restaurants.

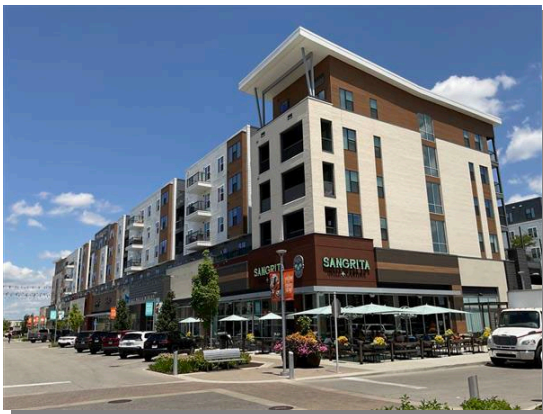


Observations from the Fishers District:

- Mixed-use development that includes stand-alone 1-2 story buildings, along with 4-5 story buildings with retail or restaurant on street level and residential on top
- Provide connections, parking, etc. for cars while still maintaining a pedestrian-focused layout (signage, lighting, streetscapes)
- Attractive mix of building materials
- Outdoor dining patios and roof decks, central gathering space with amenities and seating

- Missing sidewalk connections to adjacent developments that would tie projects together
- Nearly everything within the district was built in the last 5 years – very recent, very fast development:
 - 18 acres
 - High-end luxury apartments, also more moderate townhomes built separately on adjacent parcels
 - Chain and local/regional restaurants along with breweries
 - Two 6-story hotels
 - Located in proximity to Top Golf, Ikea, Kroger, vacant farmland, and single-family residential
 - Future development may be spurred in the areas around this district, given the current development's ability to attract residents and customers but pedestrian connections with future developments will be a challenge

[The Nickel Plate District](#) sits 1 mile to the west of Fishers District on the other side of Interstate 69 and is considered downtown Fishers. This district is home to a large greenspace with an amphitheater, civic buildings, many restaurants, stores and the newly-opened [Nickel Plate Trail](#). With the trail running through the Nickel Plate District, this area is more pedestrian-oriented than Fishers District while still providing the ability for users to park and explore the very walkable streetscapes. A challenge that was noted by City of Novi staff was how difficult it was at times to make connections while travelling by automobile. There are a large number of mixed-use residential buildings scattered throughout the District, in addition to strictly commercial buildings, strictly residential townhomes, parking garages, and public buildings such as the library, fire station, police department, city services building, and municipal complex.



Left – mixed-use development in Fishers District
 Right – First Internet Bank in Nickel Plate

Observations from the Nickel Plate District:

- Central green space and amphitheater creates gathering area for concerts & performances as well as the weekly farmer's market
- Providing outdoor seating, hammocks, umbrellas, etc. to create an inviting outdoor area around a “splash pad” water feature

- Organized effort towards engagement in the trail-making process led to a very successful outcome – see [Nickel Plate Trail Master Plan](#). Trail is built in former rail line ROW and goes under the main thoroughfare. Trail is located on the back side of the buildings.
- Limited pedestrian crossings into the district from the south at the street level, but trail provides below grade access.
- Maximum four-story buildings in downtown district, with 2 exceptions granted by a review committee – the 6-story First Internet Bank office building and a 5-story luxury hotel that is planned to go to City Council soon
 - For the First Internet Bank building that has been constructed, the city reimbursed the bank for the land acquisition costs
 - This cost was covered by the city by issuing a bond paid back with tax increment financing
- Possibility of development around civic space and buildings
 - Novi planners noted that something of that scale is unlikely to occur near Novi's civic campus due to our location surrounded by established single-family neighborhoods, not a commercial district
- Landscaping that provides shade serves aesthetic and functional purpose throughout streetscapes
- Fire Station location can cause irregular disruption to events and surrounding residents, and the route to the main thoroughfare could slow emergency response during busy times. It is likely that the City has a plan in place to address emergencies within and around the community when special events are taking place.

Carmel, Indiana

Located directly west of Fishers, Carmel is known as the “roundabout capital of the U.S.” in addition to being known for its [Monon Trail](#) and [Carmel Arts and Design District](#). Downtown Carmel consists of many mixed-use multi-family buildings in addition to multi-level commercial buildings that house multiple businesses. The Monon Trail is accompanied by amenities that give people a reason to stay to spend time and money on food, shopping, and entertainment. These amenities include playgrounds, seated areas with tables and umbrellas, bike racks and fix stations, and splash pads.

Many developments were a creation of partnerships between the City's Carmel Redevelopment Commission (CRC) and property development companies. The Midtown East project, for example, was an \$87 million mixed-use development that brought in office space, retail space, apartments, and free public parking spaces. The CRC made use of TIFs to finance the two parking garages and a portion of Midtown Plaza. Carmel's mayor, Jim Brainard, has been leading the city for over 20 years. Since being elected, he has tried to steer the community away from urban sprawl and pushed for denser development and greenways like the Monon Trail. The practice of intensely seeking out development by providing financial incentives for developers has put the city in over \$1 billion of debt. In comparison, Fishers has a little over half a billion dollars in debt, [according to the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance](#).

Observations from Carmel:

- The condition of much of the amenities, pavers, and streetscapes is pristine

- Cost of maintenance of these features is likely high
- A lot of these features were recently installed/constructed, how will it look in 5-10 years?
- Businesses along Monon Trail tailored to recreation, biking
- Businesses in arts and design district tailored towards eclectic audience
- Emphasis by municipal government to feature the greenway, making it a staple of Carmel, with many new developments fronting on the trail
- No curbs in many areas, including intersections. Different color paving stones used to differentiate access lanes, pedestrian realm, and even pavement markings
- Vehicles are de-emphasized by allocation of less than ½ of the ROW cross-section



Left – mixed-use multi-family apartments



Right – shaded seating along greenway

How City of Novi could use lessons from Fishers and Carmel

- The districts provide good models for denser, mixed-use, low-rise development that Novi may want to eventually emulate in areas like City West, Town Center, etc.
- Utilizing non-motorized amenities to bolster economic development
 - Ensuring that community engagement is a part of that process
 - Making smart connections that link residents to businesses, parks, and recreation opportunities
 - *Could the ITC trail or other existing or planned routes become something like the Monon trail or the Nickel Plate trail?*
- Varying levels of accommodation for automobiles vs. pedestrians
 - The Fishers District was more of a place people drive to while both the Nickel Plate District and the Arts and Design District/Midtown in Carmel had non-motorized connections and more bike/pedestrian infrastructure to make it possible to get there using alternative options
 - Possible to shape a place based on the sort of mobility/traffic we want to see there
- The ability for municipal governments to attract investors and developers so long as they aren't afraid to go into debt

- Many of the other municipalities in Hamilton County (where both Fishers and Carmel are located) also have several million dollars in debt
- It is likely that Michigan has different economic development tools and opportunities than are provided in Indiana.

Take a look at this [interactive map](#) to see more pictures of the trip. We look forward to discussing this topic with the Steering Committee at the next meeting.

Carmel



[Midtown Flats](#)

Mixed use multi-family apartments

Studio, 1, 2, and 3 bedroom apartments

1 bed - \$1650





Commercial building with office space

Occupants: recruiting agencies, real estate company, [Serendipity labs](#) (flexible office space and coworking)



Designated bike lanes, benches, landscaping



Outdoor, shaded seating along bike and pedestrian greenway, with small splash pad feature and climbing rocks for children



Public Parking garage with brick façade, financed through TIF



Merchant's Mortgage/Merchants Capital Corp offices. Variations in brick paving on the street denote driving lanes, crosswalks, "curb" and pedestrian realm without changes in grade or painting.



Bike racks/ bike fix station



Series of businesses immediately off the trail – cake shop, electric bike shop, others



[Old Town on the Monon
Apartments](#)

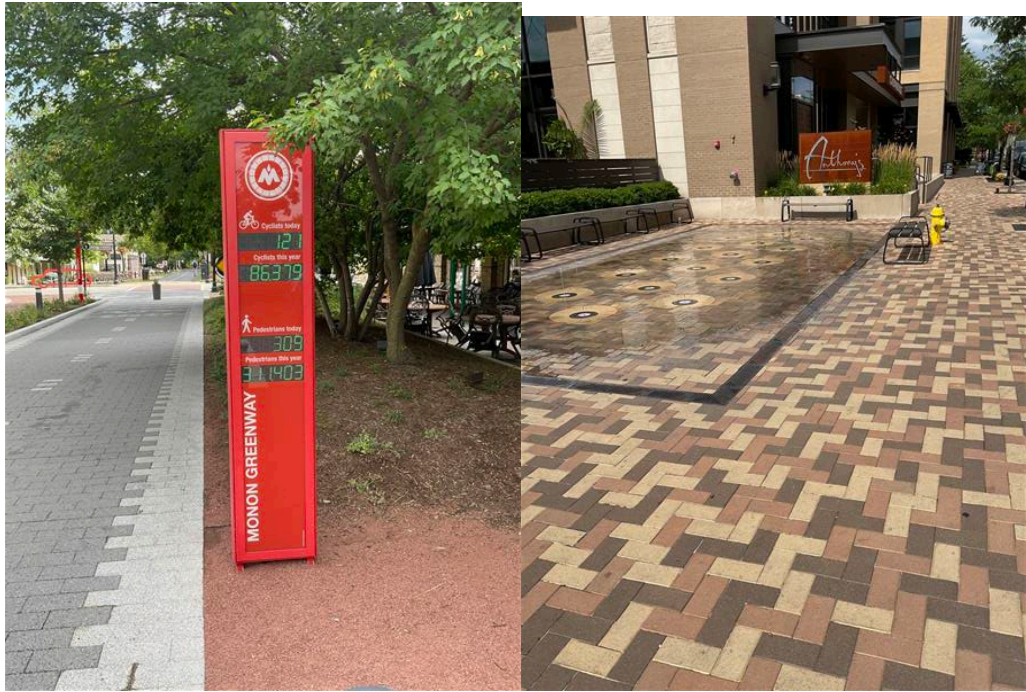
Multi family
1,2-, and 3-bedroom
apartments and
townhomes



Single family condos/apartments – one unit sells for over 1 million dollars



Mixed use restaurant/retail on bottom residential on top in the Art & Design District/Main Street in Carmel with bike-sharing service



Bicycle and pedestrian counter on the trail, splashpad outside a restaurant



Outdoor seating space and tables along Monon greenway



3-bedroom 3-bathroom condos with offices/businesses at street level

Townhomes for live/work



Large mixed use building; commercial/retail occupants include bars, Anytime fitness, law firm, ice cream, real estate

Fishers



Recently constructed townhomes, 37 units



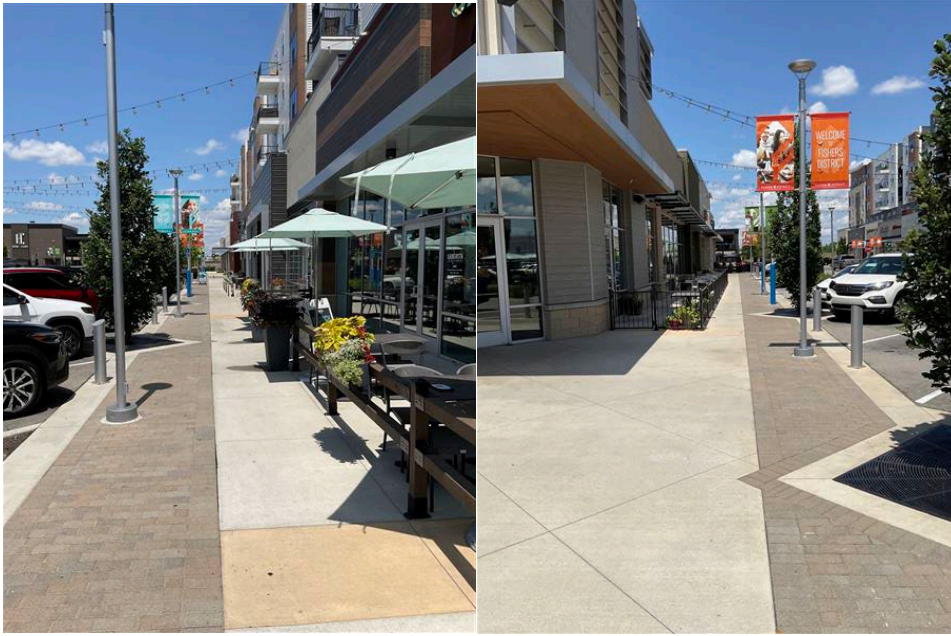
Restaurant and brewery



Restaurants/bars surrounding green public space with seating, shade



Games in public space



streetscape



Restaurant, bakery



Mixed use, upper residential; street level tenants include bars/wineries, restaurants, butcher shop, pet supply store, dry cleaners, retail



signage



signage



Large office/bank in the process of construction

First Internet bank



Streetscape/sidewalk + mixed use



Mixed use residential on top, bank on bottom



Four Day Ray Brewery



Decorative and embedded signage identifying and branding the district



Commercial building



Commercial; occupants include business consulting, real estate, and fitness



fire station



Amphitheatre