



# Rome City

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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INDIANA OFFICE OF  
**Community & Rural Affairs**

*The Town of Rome City's Comprehensive Plan was funded, in part, by a planning grant administered by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs through the Small Cities and Towns Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.*

*Primary Planning Assistance provided by:*



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## Introduction

The act of planning reflects Rome City's fundamental desire for a better future. By updating the town's Comprehensive Plan, Rome City recognizes the strategic advantage of anticipating change and capitalizing on opportunities. Ultimately, the Comprehensive Plan seeks to make the most efficient use of land and capital investments, while balancing the impacts of the built environment with the protection of the natural environment.

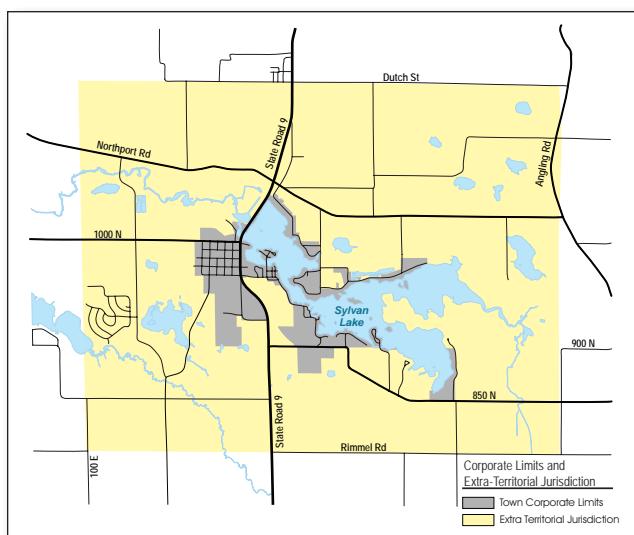
### **Past Comprehensive Plan**

Rome City's first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1971 and has been revisited twice since then. Below is a description of each of those plans:

- ♦ **1971 Plan:** This was the town's original plan and was called the Master Plan.
- ♦ **1983 Plan:** A replacement plan was adopted by ordinance, thus repealing the original Master Plan.
- ♦ **2005 Plan:** This plan made only minor changes. The changes were limited to grammatical corrections and removal of obsolete data.

### **Planning Jurisdiction**

This Comprehensive Plan applies to Rome City's corporate limits and extra-territorial jurisdiction, hereafter referred to as "planning jurisdiction."



### **Effective Timeframe**

- ♦ The content, excluding the Transportation Plan, should be relevant for ten (10) years.
- ♦ The Transportation Plan content should be relevant for twenty (20) years.

### **Annual Review**

- ♦ The Plan should be reviewed annually by the town's leadership. When necessary, minor amendments should be made and adopted.

### **Beneficiaries**

The Rome City Comprehensive Plan is designed to benefit the town, as a whole, as opposed to a single or small number of property owners. As a result, from time to time, implementing the Comprehensive Plan may not be supported by a small group of property owners. Even though it may be difficult or controversial, the greater good of the community will be served through the implementation of this Plan. Communities rarely improve themselves without some controversy, opposition, or minor impact to a small number of property owners. When implementation of the Comprehensive Plan would result in significant adverse impact to one or more property owners, the town should work to mitigate those impacts while achieving the intent of the plan through creative adaptations.

### **Limitations**

It is important to keep in mind that this Comprehensive Plan is not enforceable in itself and should not be mistaken as a zoning ordinance or as a substitute for other regulatory ordinances. This Comprehensive Plan has been designed to serve as a guideline for current and future leaders in Rome City. The town will utilize its zoning and subdivision control ordinances as the primary means of implementation. The town will also use department policies, along with its capital, intellectual, political, volunteer, and staff resources to help in its implementation.

### Comprehensive Plan Mandate

The State of Indiana, through Indiana Statutes, Title 36, Article 7, as amended, empowers communities to plan with the purpose of improving “the health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the citizens and to plan for the future development of their communities to the end:

1. That highway systems be carefully planned;
2. That new communities grow only with adequate public way, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities;
3. That the needs of agriculture, industry, and business be recognized in future growth;
4. That residential areas provide healthful surroundings for family life; and
5. That the growth of the community is commensurate with and promotive of the efficient and economical use of public funds” [IC 36-7-4-201].

Indiana Statutes state that units of government may establish planning and zoning entities to fulfill that purpose [IC 36-7-4-201]. The Plan Commission is the body responsible for maintaining a comprehensive plan, which is required by state law to be developed and maintained [IC 36-7-4-501] if the community wishes to exercise zoning powers.

Indiana Code 36-7-4-502 and 503 state the required and permissible contents of a comprehensive plan. The required plan elements are listed below.

1. A statement of objectives for the future development of the jurisdiction.
2. A statement of policy for the land use development of the jurisdiction.
3. A statement of policy for the development of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, and public utilities.

Public law further states that a community may establish planning and zoning entities to fulfill this purpose [IC 36-7-4-201].

This mandate serves as the foundation for the Rome City Comprehensive Plan. Throughout the planning process and within the Comprehensive Plan, all State of Indiana minimum requirements have been met or exceeded.

- ◆ The Rome City Comprehensive Plan analyzes the physical characteristics of the town including existing land use, transportation systems, community facilities, the built environment, and natural land features.
- ◆ Public involvement provided the foundation for this Comprehensive Plan. The public input exceeds the State’s requirements by providing several opportunities for input during the initial stages of the planning process. That input is integrated into the content of this document with a record of the input in the *Appendix* (page 59). The public was given the opportunity to review a draft version of the document and provide feedback prior to the State-required public hearing.
- ◆ The Rome City Comprehensive Plan has an overall theme of improving the health, safety, and welfare of residents and contains the State required elements, and permitted/allowed elements.



## The Planning Process

Several opportunities to participate in the Rome City Comprehensive Plan were presented to residents and businesses in Rome City. Meetings designed to obtain input from town leadership, interest groups, and the general public were held during the initial phase of the project. A summary of each of these input opportunities follows. Refer to the *Appendix* (page 59) for further documentation of the input.

### Community Leaders

**Event:** Town leaders meeting.

**Invitations:** The Town Council, Plan Commission Members, Board of Zoning Appeals Members, and the Chamber of Commerce President were invited to participate.

#### Meeting Content:

- ♦ Reviewed the purpose, process, and timeline for the project;
- ♦ Identified planning-related issues;
- ♦ Completed a Values Survey;
- ♦ Completed a Development Regulations Survey; and
- ♦ Shared advice on preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

### Interest Groups

**Event:** Chamber of Commerce and Noble County Visitors Bureau meeting.

**Invitations:** Formal invitations were sent via email to the Chamber of Commerce members, the Economic Development department, and others with business interests in the town.

#### Meeting Content:

- ♦ Interviewed participants;
- ♦ Reviewed the purpose, process, and timeline for the project;
- ♦ Identified planning-related issues;
- ♦ Completed a Values Survey;
- ♦ Identified liabilities, assets, and needs; and
- ♦ Described interest group specific concerns and issues.

### Public Engagement

**Event:** Public planning workshop.

**Invitations:** Nearly 400 post card invitations were sent via US Mail to a random sample of residents within the town's planning jurisdiction. The public workshop was also announced in newspapers, websites, on the message board in front of Town Hall, and church bulletins that cover happenings in Rome City.

#### Meeting Content:

- ♦ Completed a Values Survey;
- ♦ Completed a Development Regulations Survey;
- ♦ Identified liabilities, assets, and needs; and
- ♦ Provided additional comments and information about issues, Sylvan Lake, and life in Rome City.

### Additional Opportunities

Residents who were unable to attend the public workshop were encouraged to send in comments or suggestions via email or phone.

### Steering Committee

The town utilized the most knowledgeable persons to serve as a Steering Committee for the Comprehensive Plan. The Committee included the Town Manager, the Vice President of Town Council, the Vice President of Plan Commission, and a town resident.

This Steering Committee was given the opportunity to provide initial input on planning-related issues in Rome City; identify and discuss the town's liabilities, assets, and needs; and participate in the Values Survey.

The Steering Committee was also charged with reviewing the initial draft of the Comprehensive Plan on a page-by-page basis, as well as reviewing subsequent drafts and changes recommended by interest groups and the public.



## **Draft Development**

The first full draft (i.e. Draft A) of the Rome City Comprehensive Plan was developed based on all input received from town leaders, interest groups, the general public, and the Steering Committee, as well as community research and physical analysis. Draft A was reviewed on a page-by-page basis by the Steering Committee.

The input received on Draft A, along with additional research, resulted in a second draft (i.e. Draft B) of the Rome City Comprehensive Plan. Draft B was reviewed on a page-by-page basis by the Steering Committee and Plan Commission.

The input received on Draft B resulted in a third draft (i.e. Draft C) of the Rome City Comprehensive Plan. That draft was made available to the general public, interest groups, and community leaders for review prior to the Plan Commission Public Hearing.

## **Adoption**

A legally advertised public hearing was held by the Town of Rome City Plan Commission on June 30, 2011. The Plan Commission certified the proposed Rome City Comprehensive Plan, with minor amendments.

The Rome City Town Council adopted the Rome City Comprehensive Plan as certified by resolution on July 11, 2011, at a regularly scheduled and properly noticed meeting.

## **Document Parts**

The Rome City Comprehensive Plan is organized into the following five (5) parts:

**Part 1 - Community Profile:** The Community Profile highlights general information about the town, demographic data, and summarizes the results of the community's input.

**Part 2 - Planning Principles:** The Planning Principles address and explain the underlying principles that, when implemented, will help Rome City achieve its greatest potential. Each Planning Principle is followed by a series of objectives, a description of the foundation for the principle and objectives, and a list of benefits that can be realized by implementing the principle and objectives.

**Part 3 - Land Classification Plan:** The Land Classification Plan describes nine (9) different land classifications and then applies them to the land within the town. Each of the land classifications address land use and development characteristics. As applied to the jurisdiction they will effectively guide patterns, types, and placement of future development throughout Rome City.

**Part 4 - Transportation Plan:** The Transportation Plan classifies all roads within the town's planning jurisdiction into a hierachal system based on function. Each of these road classifications are described in detail and a map indicates the applied classification.

**Part 5 - Historical Perspective:** Provides a full historical perspective for the Town of Rome City.

**Part 6 - Appendix:** Provides an account of the public input and more detailed results of the Community Values Survey and the 2005 Comprehensive Plan Physical Perspective.







# **Part 1: Community Profile**

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## *Introduction*

The following sections provide the physical attributes, community values, and other essential input.

## PART 1: COMMUNITY PROFILE

### *The Land and Waters*

#### **Land Area**

The Town of Rome City is located in Orange Township, Noble County, Indiana. It is 2.2 square miles in area, 1.2 square miles is land and 1.0 square miles is water. A full physical perspective is in *Part 6: Appendix* (page 59).

#### **Topography**

Rome City's landscape is unique in Indiana. The topography of the land is variable and provides a natural rolling terrain, which is conducive to openspace, agriculture, conservation, homesteads, and recreation.

#### **Sylvan Lake**

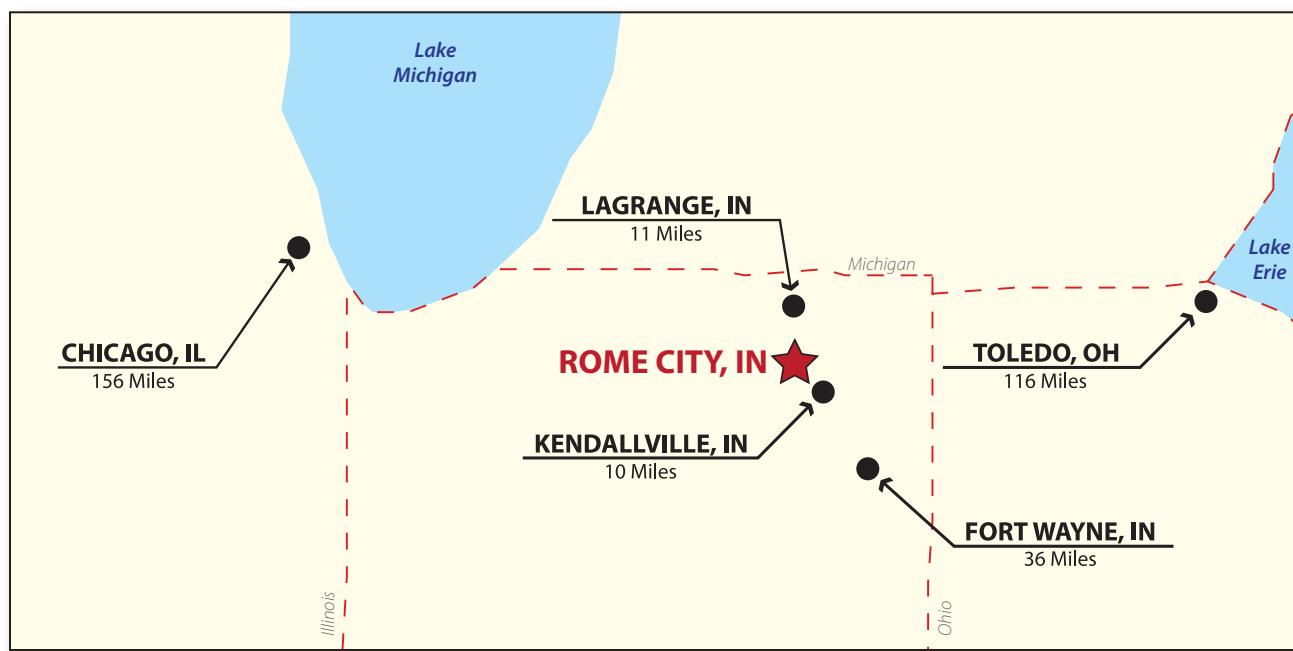
- ◆ Fourteen (14) miles of shore line;
- ◆ 32% of the land adjacent to Sylvan lake is developed and 68% is natural;
- ◆ 630 acres of water; and
- ◆ Fifteen (15) islands.

#### **Other Nearby Water Bodies**

- ◆ Barr Lake
- ◆ Latta Lake
- ◆ Moore Lake
- ◆ Axel Lake
- ◆ Grannis Lake
- ◆ Needham Lake
- ◆ Newman Lake

#### **Regional Location**

The Town of Rome City's regional location is shown below:



### *Profile Summary*

#### **Features to Preserve**

The following are features that the town residents are most proud of and want to see preserved and maintained:

- ◆ Sylvan Lake;
- ◆ Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site; and
- ◆ Kneipp Sanitarium (aka Sylvan Springs).

#### **Primary Needs Identified**

Top five (5) identified needs are:

- ◆ Need to clean-up the eye-sores in the community, both buildings and lots;
- ◆ Need bike and pedestrian routes;
- ◆ Need more restaurants;
- ◆ Need sidewalks; and
- ◆ Need to diminish the town verses lake mind-set.

## PART 1: COMMUNITY PROFILE

### Community Values

#### **Community Values Survey**

The Community Values Survey was offered to everyone that attended a meeting or workshop, and was available at the Rome City Town Hall. A total of fifty (50) surveys were completed.

The Community Values Survey indicated that Rome City residents value the following:

- ◆ Preserving the environmental features of the town;
- ◆ Making changes that not only benefit the existing residents and businesses, but also prepare the town for future populations and commerce;
- ◆ Being a pedestrian-friendly community;
- ◆ Having superior water quality in Sylvan Lake; and
- ◆ Working to improve quality-of-life.

#### **Responses**

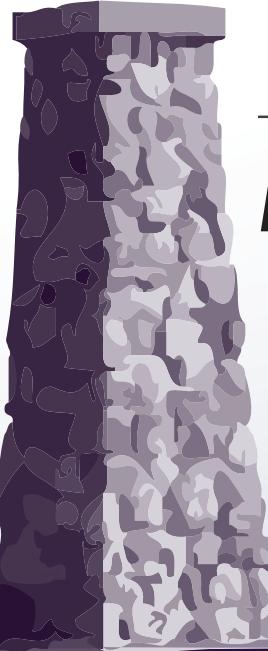
A summary of the survey question responses is in *Part 6: Appendix* (page 59).

### Vision for Rome City

To be a friendly community-minded town with a thriving lake community; ensuring economic vitality for businesses, a high quality-of-life for residents, and historical and recreational assets for all citizens and visitors alike.







# **Part 2: Planning Principles**

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## *Introduction*

Part 2 contains five (5) Planning Principles which, together, form the basis of this plan for Rome City. These Planning Principles also create a framework for decision-making, while allowing flexibility on a case-by-case basis.

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### *Planning Principles*

This Comprehensive Plan and its Planning Principles adopt a long-term view and are generally intended to be proactive. The Planning Principles are not site specific, nor do they anticipate all the special circumstances that may apply to a particular project.

The Planning Principles are as follows:

- ◆ Promote a Sustainable Community;
- ◆ Enhance Image and Identity;
- ◆ Connect People and Places;
- ◆ Nurture the Natural Environment; and
- ◆ Invite Commercial Vibrancy.

When evaluating a particular project for compliance or consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, decision-makers should recognize that the determination will not be black and white. It is feasible that projects will comply with some principles, contradict some principles, and be unrelated to others.

#### ***Two-page Layout***

Each Planning Principle has a two-page layout dedicated to its description.

- ◆ A short introduction in the left column of the left page explains and characterizes the Planning Principle.
- ◆ The call-out box on the bottom of the left page identifies the foundation for the Planning Principle. Included are facts, studies, findings, trends, and other basis for the Planning Principle.
- ◆ A call-out box on the bottom of the right page identifies benefits of implementing the Planning Principle.
- ◆ The remainder of the two-page spread contains a series of objectives that further the implementation of the Planning Principle.
- ◆ Following each objective, icons are used to communicate the type, priority, and cost associated with each objective. See the next page for more information about the icons.



## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### Icons

The descriptions below apply to the icons following each objective.

#### Objective Type Icons

To illustrate the means for implementation, the following icons are used after each objective.



**Policy:** This icon indicates the objective is a policy to be implemented by resolution, ordinance, or directive to town staff.



**Program:** This icon indicates the objective is a program to be implemented by town staff, community leaders, or local organizations.



**Project:** This icon indicates the objective is a construction, installation, or cleanup project.

#### Priority Icons

To illustrate the level of priority, the following icons are used after each objective.



**1<sup>st</sup> Star Icon (High Priority):** The 1<sup>st</sup> star icon represents the highest priority. These projects will either have the greatest impact on achieving the Planning Principle, or are necessary to precede another high priority project.



**2<sup>nd</sup> Star Icon (Moderate Priority):** The 2<sup>nd</sup> star icon represents moderate priority. These projects will have a significant impact on achieving the Planning Principle.



**3<sup>rd</sup> Star Icon (Low Priority):** The 3<sup>rd</sup> star icon represents low priority. Although these projects are the lowest priority, they are still important for achieving the Planning Principle. Often these objectives are simply not as time sensitive as higher priority objectives.

#### Degree of Cost

To illustrate the level of resources necessary to implement the objective, the following icons are used after each objective.



**1 Dollar Sign (Minimal Resources):** The single dollar sign icon represents low resources are necessary to complete the objective. For example, a minimal amount of staff time and/or a nominal amount of funding is necessary.



**2 Dollar Signs (Moderate Resources):** The double dollar sign icon represents moderate resources are necessary to complete the objective. For example, a moderate amount of staff time and/or a notable amount of funding is necessary.



**3 Dollar Signs (High Resources):** The triple dollar sign icon represents significant resources are necessary to complete the objective. For example, a lot of staff time and/or funding typically in excess of normal budgets is necessary.

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### Principle 1: Promote A Sustainable Community

The principle of promoting a sustainable community includes:

- ♦ Managing land use;
- ♦ Providing adequate public services and facilities;
- ♦ Protecting property values;
- ♦ Strengthening quality-of-life; and
- ♦ Recognizing market potential.

**Manage Land Use:** Assure improvements are consistent with the land uses depicted on the *Land Classification Plan Map* (page 37).

**Provide Adequate Public Services and Facilities:** Provide essential services, infrastructure, and leadership at a level that meets property owners expectations.

**Protect Property Values:** Utilize the Zoning and Subdivision Control Ordinances to enforce regulations that will enhance and protect individual property value.

**Strengthen Quality-of-life:** Meet or exceed the citizens needs for personal advancement, enrichment, fitness, and social connection.

**Recognize Market Potential:** Utilize market information for Noble County, and learn from other towns with similar historic and lake assets.

**Objective 1.1:** Minimize land use conflicts by strengthening buffering requirements after careful deliberation of proposed developments that are not consistent with the *Land Classification Plan*.



**Objective 1.2:** Utilize *Part 3: Land Classification Plan* and the *Land Classification Plan Map* as the foundation for zoning decisions.



**Objective 1.3:** Develop and maintain strong partnerships between and among various levels of government agencies, quasi-public agencies, and non-profit agencies to ensure the most efficient use of resources.



**Objective 1.4:** Investigate innovative uses of the local water table, the dam for power generation, and community-wide geothermal energy for heat and air (e.g. small power generator or solar power at the dam for street lighting with new LED technology).



### Promote A Sustainable Community - Foundation

- The Town of Rome City does not have a public water utility.
- The entire town is connected to public sewer utility except for homes on Limberlost Trail and some island homes.
- The need to "clean up" properties in the town ranked number one (1) at the Public Planning Workshop.
- Nearly all of the lakeshore on Sylvan Lake that is viable for home sites has been developed.
- The majority of remaining natural shoreline on Sylvan Lake is undevelopable due to soils, water table, wetlands, and inaccessibility.

- The existing commercial lots along State Road 9 and Front Street are more than sufficient to accommodate commercial needs for the town for the next ten (10) years.



## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

**Objective 1.5:** Investigate the installation of dry hydrants around Sylvan Lake to protect personal property and to lower fire rates.



**Objective 1.6:** Maintain strict “anti-funneling” regulations in the Rome City Zoning Ordinance to minimize or eliminate the potential for lakefront lots to be used for lake access to non-lakefront properties.



**Objective 1.7:** Periodically evaluate the costs and benefits of expanding the town’s corporate limits through annexation.



**Objective 1.8:** Every five (5) years evaluate the *Land Classification Plan* for consistency with community values and market forces.



**Objective 1.9:** Require new development within the corporate limits to connect to public sanitary sewers. Require connections when within reasonable proximity to a sewer main elsewhere in the planning jurisdiction.



**Objective 1.10:** Encourage growth inside the corporate limits especially when redeveloping.



**Objective 1.11:** Allow growth in areas outside the corporate limits when it is contiguous, desires voluntary annexation, and can be serviced by the town’s sanitary sewers.



### Promote A Sustainable Community - Benefits

- Minimize land use conflicts
- Increase visibility of development
- Provide residents with predictability and property value security
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas
- Organize the business district to maximize commercial vitality

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### *Principle 2: Enhance Image and Identity*

The principle of enhancing image and identity includes:

- ♦ Improving community character;
- ♦ Creating a brand;
- ♦ Promoting assets;
- ♦ Celebrating successes; and
- ♦ Enhancing communication.

**Improve Community Character:** Assure a positive impression of the Town of Rome City.

**Create a Brand:** Create a brand strategy for the town.

**Promote Assets:** Establish the means to promote the town's historic, environmental, and recreational assets.

**Celebrate Successes:** Improve the awareness of the town's successes to increase citizen pride.

**Enhance Communication:** Keep people in and around the town involved and connected utilizing multiple means.

**Objective 2.1:** Identify and enhance main "entrances" into the town with a unique physical feature or monument, thus establishing a gateway.



**Objective 2.2:** Coordinate with local organizations to proactively provide or supplement community service programs.



**Objective 2.3:** Support the efforts to restore Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island) and promote its historic significance.



**Objective 2.4:** Update the town's Zoning Ordinance to improve the quality of signage in the downtown commercial areas.



**Objective 2.5:** Coordinate regular meetings with appropriate leaders and personnel from applicable jurisdictions and/or agencies.



### Enhance Image and Identity - Foundation

- The need to "clean up" properties in the town ranked number one (1) at the Public Planning Workshop.
- The Town of Rome City has a rich history and multiple historic attributes such as: Sylvan Lake, Gene Stratton-Porter, Kneipp Sanitarium (aka Sylvan Springs), and Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island).
- 27% of the survey respondents strongly agree, that they live in Rome City because they prefer living in a small town. A total of 63% voted above neutral on the "agree" side of the survey scale.

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

**Objective 2.6:** Create a brand strategy with Plan Commission assistance. The strategy should include a color scheme, graphic, and a key fieldstone feature (e.g. walls and architectural elements) to utilize and incorporate throughout the town.



**Objective 2.7:** Implement a wayfinding system to provide direction to the various town assets. The wayfinding system signs and materials should utilize the town's brand strategy in its design.



**Objective 2.8:** Develop and maintain a town website to promote local assets and to commemorate the town's values and brand.



**Objective 2.9:** Utilize the town's future website to communicate with and educate the public about upcoming projects and events.



**Objective 2.10:** Support the town's desire to increase tourism and develop a plan to achieve the town's goals.



**Objective 2.11:** Provide parks and recreational facilities that accommodate places to go hiking, biking, fishing, and boating; and that include places where one can experience the outdoors in its natural state.



**Objective 2.12:** Support local festivals (e.g. annual Fun on Sylvan Fourth of July Celebration, Holiday House Walk, and Chautauqua Days at the Gene Stratton-Porter State Historical Site), farmers' markets, art shows, and other public interest events because of the role these events play in enhancing quality-of-life.



### Enhance Image and Identity - Benefits

- Improve the quality-of-life of residents
- Help retain residents
- Attract new residents
- Attract new desired businesses
- Attract tourists

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### Principle 3: Connect People and Places

The principle of connecting people and places is providing facilities that:

- ♦ Are safe;
- ♦ Accommodate multiple modes of travel;
- ♦ Compliment land use; and
- ♦ Link common destinations.

**Safe:** Establish facilities that are designed, constructed, and installed to convey people safely.

**Accommodate Multiple Modes of Travel:** Provide travel options for pedestrians, bicycles, watercraft, golf carts, and motor vehicles.

**Compliment Land Use:** Coordinate complimentary land uses on or adjacent to pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares.

**Link Common Destinations:** Create linkages between recreational, historical, and municipal destinations within the town.

**Objective 3.1:** Periodically review the need for, and systematically make improvements to, the town's roadways.



**Objective 3.2:** Refer to the *Transportation Plan Map* when approving new development.



**Objective 3.3:** Develop a multi-purpose pathway network for pedestrians that connects popular destinations in the town (e.g. school, library, parks, Gene Stratton-Porter, and Town Hall).



**Objective 3.4:** Encourage the use of alternative transportation modes including: water transportation, biking, and walking.



### Connect People and Places - Foundation

- The need for bicycle and pedestrian routes ranked number two (2) at the Public Planning Workshop.
- The need for sidewalks on State Road 9 ranked number four (4) at the Public Planning Workshop.
- 41% of the survey respondents strongly agree, that being a "walkable" community is important. A total of 82% voted above neutral on the "agree" side of the survey scale.
- The town currently has a golf cart ordinance that permits golf cart travel within designated areas.



## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

**Objective 3.5:** Utilize the town's future website and town hall sign as a way to improve communication about road issues and inform the public about upcoming projects.



**Objective 3.6:** Ensure accessibility for police, fire, emergency services, and town street department services for new development and redeveloped properties.



**Objective 3.7:** Update the Zoning Ordinance to prohibit tall vegetation that obstructs visibility at intersections.



**Objective 3.8:** Continue to work with the State of Indiana to acquire right-of-way, design, and construct the rail-to-trail project connecting the Town of Rome City to the City of Kendallville.



**Objective 3.9:** Identify, designate, and promote an integrated system of routes that will connect major recreational areas and cultural focal points within the Rome City community.



**Objective 3.10:** Utilize important access management practices to reduce the number of curb cuts on major roadways. Require an interior circulation system for larger developments and require internal linkages between adjacent developments.



### Connect People and Places - Benefits

- Lessen congestion
- Prepare for changes in facility demands
- Improve accessibility
- Provide for safe travel
- Enhance quality-of-life
- Conserve energy

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### *Principle 4: Nurture the Natural Environment*

The principle of nurturing the natural environment includes:

- Protecting environmental features;
- Enhancing natural systems; and
- Promoting sustainability.

**Protect Environmental Features:** Conserve, preserve, and/or minimize impacts to environmental systems.

**Enhance Natural Systems:** Continually put forth efforts to enhance the rivers, lakes, streams, and wetlands in the community.

**Promote Sustainability:** Leadership and continuing education to improve awareness and dedication to protecting the natural features of the town.

**Objective 4.1:** Protect and enhance the character and water quality of Sylvan Lake, working collaboratively with the Sylvan Lake Improvement Association and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).



**Objective 4.2:** Continue efforts to restore Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island) to a natural state and develop a "vision" for the property.



**Objective 4.3:** Prohibit private development (buildings and structures) in any wetland, floodplain, or land designated as "conservation" through the zoning ordinance.



**Objective 4.4:** Include incentives for conservation and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas in the town's zoning and subdivision control ordinances.



### Nurture the Natural Environment - Foundation

- The rehabilitation of the dam and the improvement of the water quality in Sylvan Lake provided a clean, safe recreational and environmental asset to the town.
- The Sylvan Lake Improvement Association owns Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island).
- 46% of the survey respondents strongly agree, that they live in Rome City because of Sylvan Lake. A total of 71% voted above neutral on the "agree" side of the survey scale.



## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

**Objective 4.5:** Strongly discourage the use of septic systems and encourage connection to the municipal sanitary sewer system.



**Objective 4.6:** Inventory environmental features that are unique, large in size, irreplaceable, or contain a rich diversity of plants and wildlife.



**Objective 4.7:** Work in collaboration with the Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site to leverage greater benefit from their annual events.



**Objective 4.8:** Increase visitorship and awareness of Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site.



**Objective 4.9:** Target environmentally sensitive areas for conservation and/or preservation.



**Objective 4.10:** Continue upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant to include the addition of a third wastewater lagoon to prevent overflows during the winter holding months.



### Nurture the Natural Environment - Benefits

- Maintain natural resources for future generations to enjoy
- Purify surface water running into water bodies
- Minimize losses resulting from flooding, per the town's flood control ordinance
- Minimize land use conflicts
- Provide opportunities for environmental education
- Create recreational benefits
- Attract eco-tourists
- Improve quality-of-life

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

### Principle 5: Invite Commercial Vibrancy

The principle of inviting commercial vibrancy includes:

- Clustering complementary businesses;
- Redeveloping vacant or underutilized property;
- Encouraging public amenities; and
- Capitalizing on local opportunities.

**Cluster Complementary Businesses:** Realize gains that occur when like uses are established next to one another.

**Redevelop Vacant or Underutilized Property:** Strive to fully utilize properties already established for commercial purposes.

**Leverage Public Amenities:** Utilize public amenities to stimulate investment.

**Capitalize on Local Opportunities:** Encourage businesses to establish themselves at the most optimal location.

**Objective 5.1:** Attract new businesses and residents.



**Objective 5.2:** Require new commercial development to face State Road 9 or Front Street (the first block west of State Road 9).



**Objective 5.3:** Encourage the redevelopment of existing properties on State Road 9 as a priority over allowing new development.



**Objective 5.4:** Strengthen existing areas of business by creating a more concentrated and pedestrian-friendly commercial cluster. This cluster would include the first block of Front Street, just west of State Road 9, and the State Road 9 corridor from Front Street to Grant Street.



**Objective 5.5:** Encourage a commercial cluster with restaurants, retail, and services.



#### Invite Commercial Vibrancy - Foundation

- 10% of the survey respondents voted that they strongly agree, that the Rome City government effectively provides laws, services, facilities, and infrastructure for the community as a whole. A total of 65% voted above neutral on the "agree" side of the survey scale.
- 41% of the survey respondents strongly agree, that being a "walkable" community is important. A total of 82% voted above neutral on the "agree" side of the survey scale.

## PART 2: PLANNING PRINCIPLES

**Objective 5.6:** Actively work with the Noble County Economic Development Corporation to promote Rome City's industrial areas.



**Objective 5.7:** Identify the vacant and underutilized properties along State Road 9 and Front Street and focus initial redevelopment efforts there first.



**Objective 5.8:** Continue coordination with the Rome City Chamber of Commerce to help maintain an inventory of existing businesses and build working relationships with business owners.



**Objective 5.9:** Update the town's Zoning Ordinance to include a downtown commercial zoning district to ensure infill and redevelopment that is sensitive to the context of the area.



**Objective 5.10:** Strengthen and enforce zoning regulations including property maintenance.



**Objective 5.11:** Enhance the public access site with public restrooms, picnic area, vending, and a public staircase that will connect people to downtown Rome City.



**Objective 5.12:** Redevelop Kneipp Sanitarium (aka Sylvan Springs).



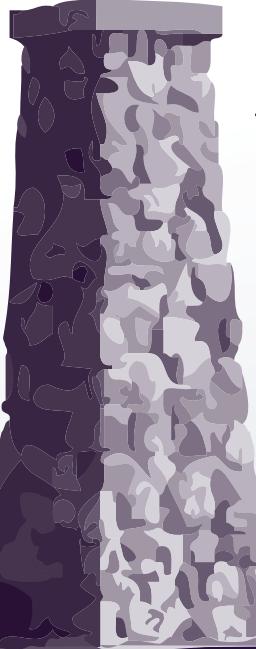
**Objective 5.13:** Study the feasibility of creating a public beach area.



### Invite Commercial Vibrancy - Benefits

- Enhance quality-of-life
- Attract new residents
- Help retain residents and businesses
- Attract new desired businesses
- Create a positive impression for tourists and visitors
- Maximize commercial vitality
- Reduce trips by residents to outside communities for meals, goods, and services





# ***Part 3: Land Classification Plan***

**Preface**  
page 2

**Part 1: Community Profile**  
page 7

**Part 2: Planning Principles**  
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**Part 3: Land Classification Plan**  
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page 59

## *Introduction*

The Land Classification Plan represents the town's policy for future land use and the type of development. The Land Classification Plan strives to communicate a sustainable mix of uses and geographic distribution that supports the five Planning Principles described in Part 2.

## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Land Classification Plan*

The Land Classification Plan applies the following land classifications across the town's planning jurisdiction to depict land use and development form.

See the *Land Classification Plan Map* (page 37) for the application of each classification.

- ◆ Conservation Area;
- ◆ Recreation and Open Space;
- ◆ Agricultural;
- ◆ Low Density Residential;
- ◆ High Density Residential;
- ◆ Lake Residential;
- ◆ Government/Institutional;
- ◆ Commercial; and
- ◆ Industrial.

#### ***Land Classification and Description***

Each of the land classifications listed above has a page dedicated to describing how it is intended to be utilized and its primary characteristics. The headings listed below are used to convey important information about each classification.

**Purpose:** This section gives a brief description of why the land classification has been established.

**Geographic Location:** This section conveys where each land classification is best utilized within Rome City's planning jurisdiction. Some descriptions are conceptual for wide applicability, while others are very specific to certain geographic locations.

**Land Uses:** This section describes the land uses that would generally be the most appropriate in the classification.

**Examples:** This section identifies one or more developments in Rome City that is representative of the classification. Some examples may not be exact matches, but still represent key features.

**Appropriate Adjacent Classifications:** This section describes the most appropriate adjacent land classifications to the subject land classification. There are three (3) categories of compatibility that are recognized. "Best Fit" are classifications that are most suited for adjacency. "Conditional Fit" indicates land classifications that are suitable for adjacency if certain conditions exist. Land classifications that are not listed represent classifications that are generally not appropriate for adjacency.

**Structure and Development Features:** This section identifies building features (e.g. height, mass, and architecture); the utilization of the site; and features of development that are representative of the land classification.

**Note:** Land classifications should not be confused with zoning districts. They are more conceptual and broad guidelines while zoning is lot-specific and contains legally binding regulations.



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### Conservation

#### **Purpose**

To preserve natural amenities, historic properties and structures, and to provide passive recreation when appropriate

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Natural areas owned by land trusts, the State of Indiana, the lake association, or other governmental entities.

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Nature preserve
- ◆ Nature center
- ◆ Protected wetlands
- ◆ Unimproved trails
- ◆ Eco-tourism

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island)
- ◆ Sylvan Lake
- ◆ The Sylvan Lake Dam
- ◆ Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site

#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, Agricultural, Low Density Residential, High Density Residential, Lake Residential, Government/Institutional, and Commercial
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Industrial

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Preserve historic buildings and structures
- ◆ No new enclosed structures, except for restroom facilities
- ◆ Site designed to protect and enhance environmental features
- ◆ Use of fieldstone columns, walls, and markers
- ◆ Generally, un-subdivided parcels



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Recreation and Open Space*

#### **Purpose**

To establish land for private and public park and recreational facilities

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Distributed throughout the town

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Parks
- ◆ Sport courts/fields
- ◆ Golf course
- ◆ Unimproved trails
- ◆ Public lake access site



#### **Examples**

- ◆ Gaff Park
- ◆ Grant Park
- ◆ Kelly Park
- ◆ Lakeside Park
- ◆ Sycamore Park
- ◆ Limberlost Golf Course



#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: All land classifications

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Outdoor lighting sensitive to neighboring properties
- ◆ Use of fieldstone columns, walls, markers, and architectural features on structures



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Agricultural*

#### **Purpose**

To maintain large, undeveloped areas for productive agricultural uses

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Distributed generally outside the town's corporate limits

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Farmstead
- ◆ Single-family detached residential
- ◆ Crop production
- ◆ Pasture
- ◆ Ag tourism
- ◆ Hobby farm
- ◆ Roadside stand
- ◆ Orchard
- ◆ Forestry

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Local farms
- ◆ Lavender farm

#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, and Agricultural
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Low Density Residential, High Density Residential, Lake Residential, Government/Institutional, Commercial, and Industrial

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Single-family home on permanent foundation



*Photo Credit: Dawn McCreery, The Lavender Lane*

## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Low Density Residential*

#### **Purpose**

To establish single family areas near public amenities served by municipal sewers

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Residential blocks west of State Road 9
- ◆ Residential lots without lake frontage
- ◆ Platted subdivisions

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Single-family detached residential
- ◆ Home-based businesses

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Homes located west of State Road 9
- ◆ Oakshore Subdivision

#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, Low Density Residential, Lake Residential, and Government/Institutional
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Agricultural, High Density Residential, and Commercial

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Front facades facing a local street
- ◆ Protect pre-development (existing) environmental features (e.g. trees)
- ◆ Connect to public sanitary sewer utility
- ◆ One (1) or two (2) story homes



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *High Density Residential*

#### **Purpose**

To establish stable apartment or lease lot developments near public amenities and served by public sewer

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Sites that can support high density

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Retirement community
- ◆ Assisted living facility
- ◆ Mobile home park
- ◆ Apartment complex



#### **Examples**

- ◆ Warrener Court Apartments
- ◆ Sylvan Manor



#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, Lake Residential, Government/Institutional, and Commercial
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Agricultural, Low Density Residential, High Density Residential, and Industrial

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Promote internal road network within development as opposed to individual driveway access directly onto public streets
- ◆ Protect pre-development (existing) environmental features (e.g. trees)
- ◆ Connect to public sanitary sewer utility
- ◆ One (1) or two (2) stories
- ◆ Entryway feature using fieldstone



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Lake Residential*

#### **Purpose**

To promote environmentally responsible residential development and redevelopment within the town's planning jurisdiction

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Lots around the perimeter and on the islands of Sylvan Lake
- ◆ Lots around the perimeter of Latta Lake and Tamarack Lake
- ◆ Lots on islands



#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Single-family detached residential
- ◆ Home-based businesses

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Pleasant Point
- ◆ North Shore Drive
- ◆ Sylvan Point



#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, Low Density Residential, High Density Residential, and Lake Residential
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Agricultural, Government/Institutional, and Commercial



#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Lots with lake frontage
- ◆ Water-side structure setbacks that preserve water quality
- ◆ Maximum two and one-half (2 1/2) stories
- ◆ Finished facade facing the lake
- ◆ Strict anti-funneling regulations
- ◆ Structures, site features, ground cover, and land alterations should be sensitive to the water quality of the lake and the line of sight of adjacent property owners
- ◆ Promote development consistent with floodplain regulations



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Government /Institutional*

#### **Purpose**

To establish land for government offices and facilities, churches, schools, and other institutions where they serve the public's needs

#### **Geographic Location**

- ♦ Integrated carefully into residential and commercial areas

#### **Land Uses**

- ♦ Place of worship
- ♦ Library
- ♦ School
- ♦ Community center
- ♦ Government office
- ♦ Post office
- ♦ Cemetery



#### **Examples**

- ♦ Rome City Town Hall
- ♦ Limberlost Public Library
- ♦ Rome City Elementary School
- ♦ United Methodist Church

#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ♦ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, Low Density Residential, High Density Residential, Government/Institutional, and Commercial
- ♦ Conditional Fit: Agricultural, Lake Residential, and Industrial

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ♦ Protect pre-development (existing) environmental features (e.g. trees)
- ♦ Sensitive to the surrounding context
- ♦ Integrate fieldstone into the facade of new buildings



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### Commercial

#### Purpose

To establish land for businesses to provide goods and services to the community and visitors

#### Geographic Location

- ◆ Primarily along State Road 9 and Front Street
- ◆ Remote lots when they clearly benefit the community

#### Land Uses

- ◆ Indoor retail
- ◆ Restaurant
- ◆ Hotel
- ◆ Office
- ◆ Entertainment
- ◆ Coffee shop
- ◆ Gas station
- ◆ Services

#### Examples

- ◆ Subway
- ◆ R and S Boats
- ◆ Millers
- ◆ Super Valu

#### Appropriate Adjacent Classifications

- ◆ Best Fit: Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, High Density Residential, Government/Institutional, Commercial, and Industrial
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Agricultural, Low Density Residential, and Lake Residential

#### Structure and Development Features

- ◆ Manage direct access onto State Road 9
- ◆ Reduce curb cut widths
- ◆ Buffer less intense adjacent development
- ◆ Promote quality development including non-monotonous facades, landscaped parking lots, and use of quality materials
- ◆ Screen outdoor storage areas when adjacent to roadways or residential development
- ◆ Connect to public sanitary sewer utility
- ◆ Integrate fieldstone into the facade of new buildings



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### *Industrial*

#### **Purpose**

To establish opportunities for industrial businesses that provide employment for Rome City residents

#### **Geographic Location**

- ◆ Located in the “industrial park”
- ◆ Former Pepsi facility

#### **Land Uses**

- ◆ Manufacturing and production
- ◆ Warehousing and distribution
- ◆ Science and technology based companies

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Aggregate Systems
- ◆ Group Dekko
- ◆ Former Pepsi facility

#### **Appropriate Adjacent Classifications**

- ◆ Best Fit: Recreation and Open Space, Commercial, and Industrial
- ◆ Conditional Fit: Conservation, Agricultural, High Density Residential, and Government/Institutional

#### **Structure and Development Features**

- ◆ Discourage multiple curb cuts onto State Road 9
- ◆ Screen outdoor storage areas when adjacent to roadways or residential development
- ◆ Connect to public sanitary sewer utility



## PART 3: LAND CLASSIFICATION PLAN

### Land Classification Plan: Map Methodology

The following factors have been used to assign land classifications to the town's jurisdiction:

- ♦ Existing land uses;
- ♦ Suitability of land;
- ♦ Impact to the natural environment;
- ♦ Adjacent or nearby land uses;
- ♦ Suitability of roads;
- ♦ Availability of utilities; and
- ♦ Effect on health, safety and welfare of the community as a whole.

Additional consideration includes:

**Industrial Buffering:** Utilize the recreation and open space, and agricultural classifications to buffer the industrial park from other classifications.

### Appropriate Adjacent Land Classification Table

The table below provides a quick reference for determining land classification compatibility. The information in this table mirrors the content in each of the land classification descriptions on the previous pages. "B" stands for Best Fit and "C" stands for Conditional Fit, meaning it is appropriate when the more intensive development is installed with sensitivity to the adjacent land classification.

**Appropriate Adjacent Land Classifications Table**

	Conservation	Recreation and Open Space	Agricultural	Low Density Residential	High Density Residential	Lake Residential	Government/ Institutional	Commercial	Industrial
Conservation	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	C
Recreation and Open Space	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Agricultural	B	B	B	C	C	C	C	C	C
Low Density Residential	B	B	C	B	C	B	B	C	
High Density Residential	B	B	C	C	C	B	B	B	C
Lake Residential	B	B	C	B	B	B	C	C	
Government / Institutional	B	B	C	B	B	C	B	B	C
Commercial	B	B	C	C	B	C	B	B	B
Industrial	C	B	C		C		C	B	B

B = Best Fit : C = Conditional Fit

### Land Classification Plan: Map Description

The *Land Classification Plan* on the following page shows the geographic applicability of Rome City's land classifications. As shown, this map will help manage land uses, encourage redevelopment, protect property value, and improve quality-of-life.

The map is a conceptual depiction of the town's land use goals. It should not be construed as representing the precise location of each land classification. Interpretations of this map should be used to support local decisions about proposed rezoning, redevelopment, and changes to buildings and lots.

The *Land Classification Plan* does not establish the right to develop any parcel, nor to establish a certain density or intensity. The *Rome City Comprehensive Plan* is a broad-brush approach to future land planning. Each development and redevelopment proposal should be reviewed with consideration of all sections within the *Rome City Comprehensive Plan* in addition to site features, context, subdivision standards, and zoning standards.

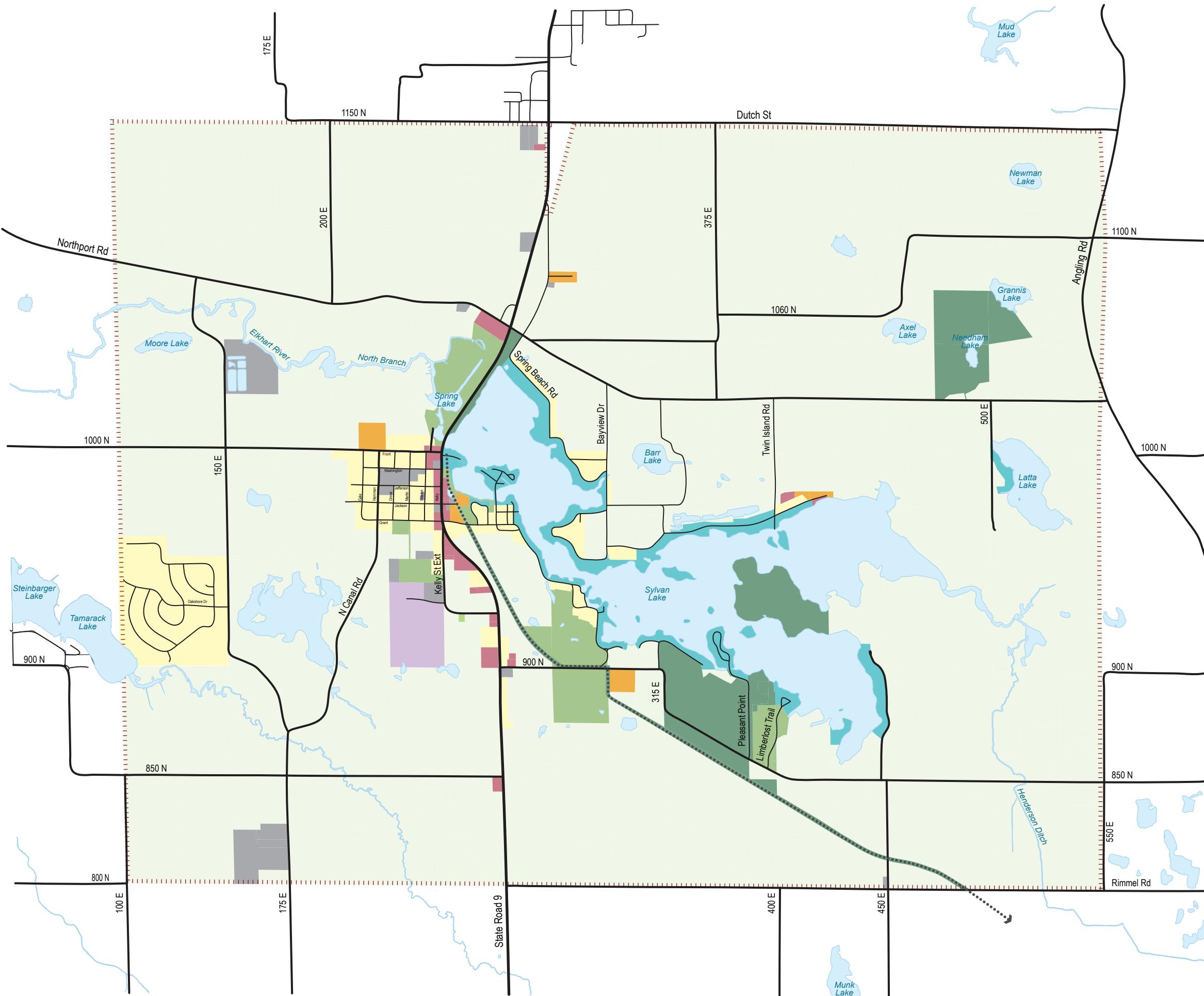


# Land Classification Plan

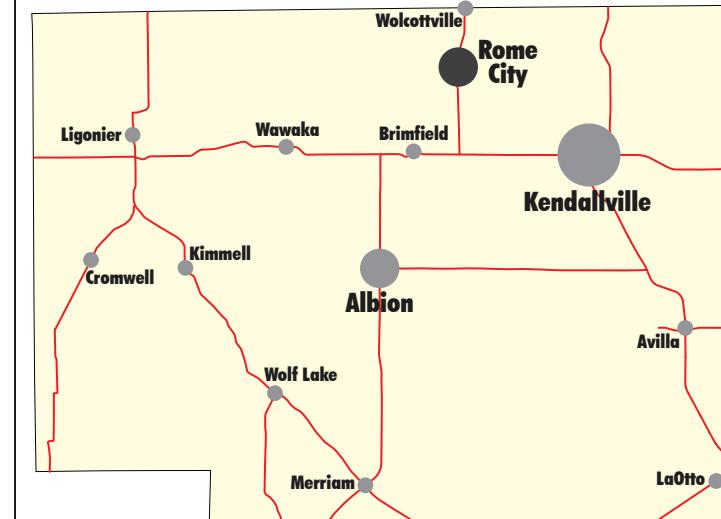
## Rome City, Indiana

### MAP LEGEND

- Agricultural
- Open Space and Recreation
- Conservation
- Lake Residential
- Low Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Government / Institutional
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction
- Lake
- Stream / Ditch
- Multipurpose Trail

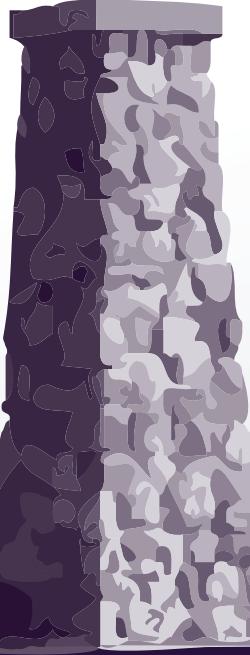


### COMMUNITY LOCATION



[Back Side of Land Classification Plan]





# **Part 4: Transportation Plan**

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**Part 1: Community Profile**  
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**Part 2: Planning Principles**  
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## *Introduction*

This section communicates the future street hierarchy for Rome City.

## PART 4: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Transportation Plan

The Transportation Plan utilizes the Indiana Department of Transportation's functional road classification system and applies them to the road network within Rome City. The town's right-of-way requirement mirrors Noble County's Transportation Plan for the applicable road classifications. The *Transportation Plan Map* (page 45) includes the following road classifications:

- ◆ Arterial;
- ◆ Collector; and
- ◆ Local Road.

#### **Road Classification and Description**

Each of the road classifications listed above has a page dedicated to its description. The intent is to use the descriptions as a guide to improve existing roads. Therefore, they are not necessarily reflective of existing configurations.

**General Description:** This section gives a brief description of the road classification and how it fits into the hierarchy.

**Road Features:** This section conveys the primary design features that make each road classification unique. The features include minimum right-of-way, maximum number of lanes, and minimum lane width.

**Design Priorities:** This section communicates the design priorities for each road classification.

**Traffic Management Options:** This section describes vehicular traffic management options to consider when improving a road. The options are intended to: identify the most appropriate means to configure intersections, slow traffic when appropriate, increase traffic efficiency when appropriate, and improve safety.

**Examples:** This section identifies one (1) or more developments in Rome City that is representative of the functional road classification. Some examples may not be exact matches, but still represent key features.

**Image Examples:** Images of each road classification are included. The images are intended to portray examples available in Rome City or in another Indiana community. The images may not represent the purest intent of the road classification. When applied in the real world, variations in design may be necessary.



## PART 4: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Arterial

#### **General Description**

An arterial is designed to carry heavy volumes of traffic to major destinations in, out, or through the jurisdiction of the town.

#### **Road Features**

- ◆ **Minimum Right-of-way:** 80 feet
- ◆ **Maximum Number of Lanes:** 2 lanes
- ◆ **Minimum Lane Width:** 12 feet

#### **Design Priorities**

- ◆ Limited access points
- ◆ Intersections designed for vehicular and pedestrian safety
- ◆ Sidewalks on both sides of road in urban areas

#### **Traffic Management Options**

- ◆ Defined turn lanes at intersections
- ◆ Passing blisters at roads that “T” into an arterial

#### **Example**

- ◆ State Road 9



*Indiana State Road 9, pictured in both images above, is Rome City's only Arterial.*

## PART 4: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Collector

#### **General Description**

A collector is designed primarily to provide connections between local roads and arterials.

#### **Road Features**

- ◆ **Minimum Right-of-way:** 60 - 80 feet
- ◆ **Maximum Number of Lanes:** 2 lanes
- ◆ **Minimum Lane Width:** 12 feet

#### **Design Priorities**

- ◆ Adequate drainage facilities
- ◆ Sensitivity to context
- ◆ Pedestrian facilities within urban areas

#### **Traffic Management Options**

- ◆ Signage

#### **Examples**

- ◆ Angling Road
- ◆ Northport Road
- ◆ 800 N
- ◆ 1000 N



*Northport Road (top), 850 North (middle), and Front Street (bottom), pictured above, are examples of Collectors in Rome City.*



## PART 4: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### Local Road

#### General Description

A local road is designed primarily to provide access to platted residential lots and other individual properties. These roads generally connect with collectors and other local roads. Local roads may include non-through roads.

#### Road Features

- ◆ **Minimum Right-of-way:** 50 - 60 feet
- ◆ **Maximum Number of Lanes:** 2 lanes
- ◆ **Minimum Lane Width:** 12 feet



#### Design Priorities

- ◆ Access to developed or developable lots
- ◆ Adequate drainage facilities
- ◆ Sensitivity to context
- ◆ Pedestrian facilities in urban areas
- ◆ Accommodation of golf carts



#### Traffic Management Options

- ◆ On-street parking
- ◆ Signage

#### Examples

- ◆ North Shore Drive
- ◆ Washington Street



*1150 N. (top), Washington Street (middle), and North Shore Drive (bottom), pictured above, are examples of Local Roads in Rome City.*



## PART 4: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

### *Transportation Plan Map Description*

The Transportation Plan Map on the following page applies a road classification to each road in Rome City's planning jurisdiction. The applied road classification reflects what the road classification will need to be in twenty (20) years. Therefore, it may not reflect how the road functions or is configured today.

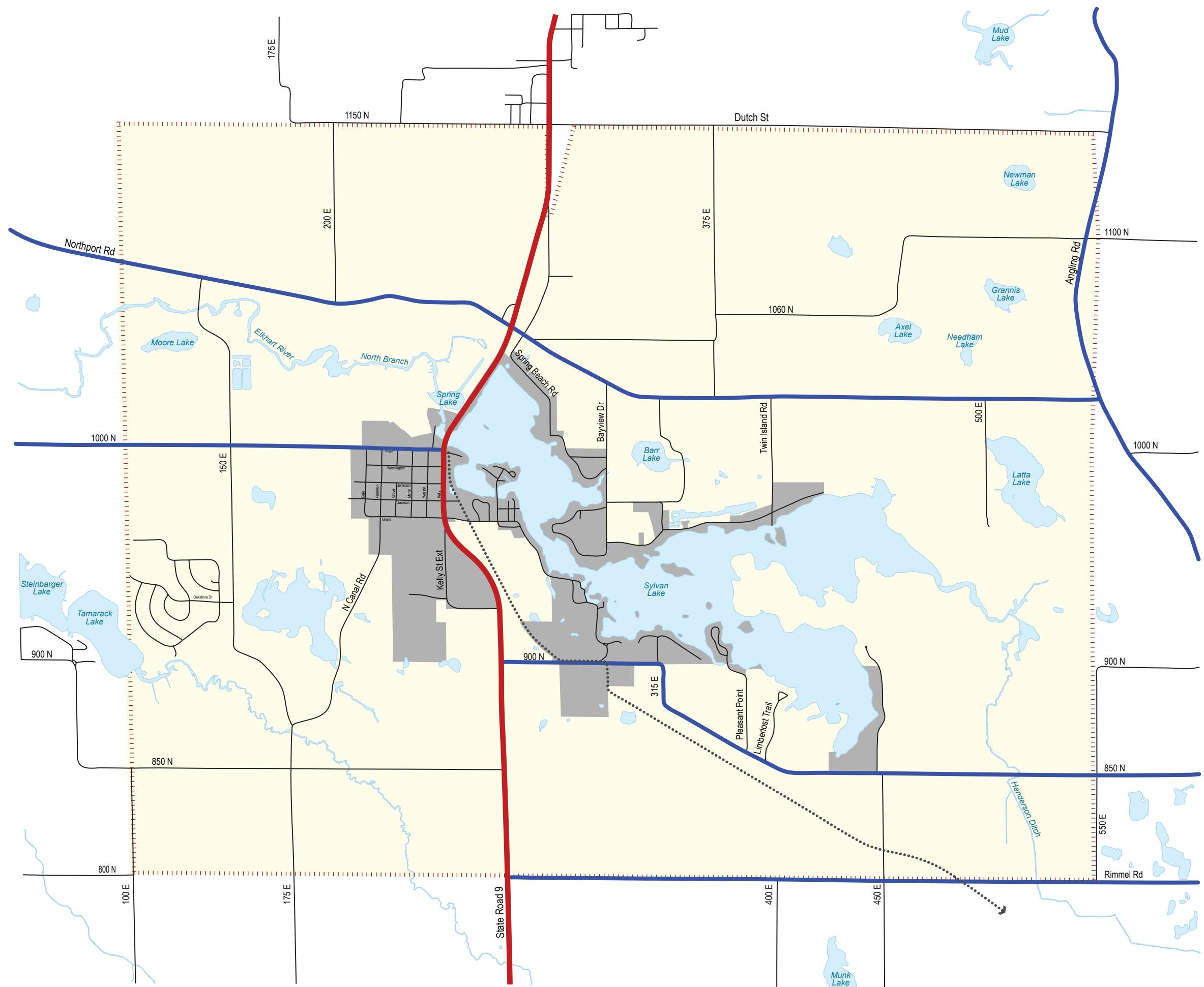


# Transportation Plan Map

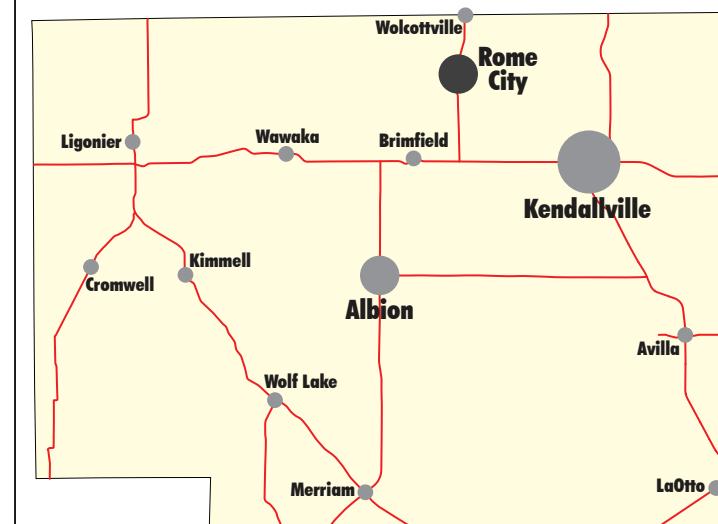
## Rome City, Indiana

### MAP LEGEND

- Arterial
- Collector
- Local Street
- Town Limits
- Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction
- Multipurpose Trail

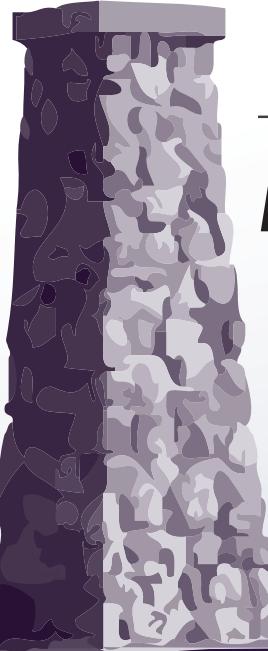


### COMMUNITY LOCATION



[Back Side of Transportation Plan Map]





# **Part 5: Historical Perspective**

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## *Introduction*

This section provides a historical perspective of the Town of Rome City.

## PART 5: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### *The Beginnings of the Town of Rome City and Sylvan Lake*

The territory embracing Orange Township, Noble County, Indiana was ceded at Carey Mission, September 20, 1828. Orange and Wayne townships were first surveyed for the United States by G. W. Harrison on November 26, 1830. The Base Lines of the territory had been run by Ebenezer Buckingham in 1804. The lands in our township are mentioned by early surveyors as "timbered lands and barrens of oak openings." In our township was found the headwaters of the south branch of the Elkhart River, which is the south branch of the St. Joseph River. Sylvan Lake is located on the most southern of the three streams which form this most southern branch. The Indian name for our branch was Mongoquinong. The word Sylvan in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is an adjective from Medieval Latin silvanus, from Latin silva, sylva meaning 1A: living or located in the woods or forest. 1B: of, relating to, or characteristic of the woods of forest.

Historian Millard Filmore Owens, who was the secondary source of Indian history in Orange Township, tells us the Potawatomie Indians had a village on the banks of one of the Forks of the Elkhart River and they called it Pahadketcha. In 1839 or 1840, "the redmen of the forest" were removed by the government and relocated elsewhere.

At the session of the 1836-1837 Indiana General Assembly a bill was passed called the "Mammoth Internal Improvement Bill" and signed by Governor Noah Noble. Among the works provided in the law was the construction of a ship canal from Lake Michigan at Michigan City to Fort Wayne-sometimes called the Northern Canal.

To provide water to feed this proposed canal, a navigable feeder reservoir, which intersected the main canal and the Elkhart River was built. The dam was constructed across a tributary of the Elkhart River which created Sylvan Lake at the place where Rome City is now. The work on the dam, or earthen embankment was done during the years of 1837-1838. The result was an artificial reservoir that impounds 630 acres of water. The embankment is approximately 2,000 feet long and runs along what is now St. Rd. 9. One is in awe by the practical difficulties in building an earthen fill

of this magnitude at that time. Excavations, where necessary, were done with pick and shovel, and the wheel barrow was the means of dirt transportation. Most of the labor was done by Frenchmen or Irish, and as one might surmise when men of two nationalities are working on the same project performing strenuous labor and living in the crudest conditions resulted in frequent clashes. The foreman, Mr. Aveline retained the French on the Northport side and the Irish on the south side of the reservoir during construction, due to many bar brawls. The Irish were never content with their accommodations and an order came from Mr. Aveline: Do as the Romans do. By 1839, the State realized that the canal project was not feasible and by 1840 all canal affairs were closed.

The Middle Fork reservoir, now known as Sylvan Lake is the only canal reservoir in Indiana which is still holding water to this present day.

The Potawatomie Indian village of Pahadketcha was adjacent to the first saw mill operated in the early 1830's. On or near this old village was the early store and lodging house of the white men at the head of Sylvan Lake where the first highway bridge was built. From this point our early pioneers spoke of an Indian trail which led to the later village of Northport. There was another trail, which led southwesterly from the Northport trail, which crossed the stream between the two Narrows of Sylvan Lake. This trail was also used by the early settlers. An old wagon road could yet be traced in the early fifties on the banks of the reservoir leading up the northern bank near what is known as Sawyers Cove.

Many of those who worked on the construction of the dam were French and Irish Roman Catholics. These Roman Catholics worked on the south end of the dam, which became known as "Rome." This name was adopted by the county commissioners when the village was plotted. In December of 1839, the Town of Rome was platted by Orange Township Trustees Ebenezer Pierce and John C. Mather. This name was later changed by the postal authorities to Rome City to avoid confusion with another community in southern Indiana also with the name of Rome.

The original vision for the town and Sylvan Lake was by Millard Fillmore Owen who envisioned Rome City and Sylvan Lake could be a resort, vacation, and tourist area. Hotels and water-based businesses such as grist mills and woolen mills were developed and



## PART 5: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

reestablished through the years. The dam provided the power source for these mills while they were in existence. However, the dam or embankment broke three times in its early days and thirteen persons met their death in the construction of the reservoir. The first failure occurred in 1839 before being completed; again in 1844 resulting in three deaths; Millard F. Owens stated, "Three men lost their lives and their names are Aaron Abbott, Esquire Campbell, justice of the peace, and young Damon Campbell. The bodies of the men are now lying in the Northport grave-yard.", and finally a third failure in 1855. The State reconstructed the dam and then ceded ownership of the dam to the Noble County Commissioners.

Mr. Owen discusses a number of industries that were established at the overflow of the 630 acre reservoir. He mentions two woolen mills, three grist mills, and a saw mill. He stated the ownership of the mills passed through several hands with the Pennsylvania Railroad Co. finally acquiring the water power rights. Andreas & Baskin reported there had also been an extensive clothes-rack factory and a flour mill. The Rome City Natural Ice Business was started in 1872 and reached a large volume of business. Seven connected ice storage houses, 100 feet in length were on a bluff adjoining the railroad tracks. During the operation of these businesses the Rome City freight station was quite a busy point.

The Northern Canal, the proposed branch of the Wabash and Erie Canal, was never completed. None of the water impounded by the embankment was ever used for canal purposes, but the side results were to give vitality to a community that was in need of employment for both men and women and they found it in the mills that were powered by the overflow of water.

The great effect that grew from the artificially created fresh water lake was an ornate resort area. The Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad Company (GR & I) sent its first train through Rome City in 1870 and almost immediately the beauty of Sylvan Lake and its surroundings were observed and appreciated. For example, "The Standard", a weekly Kendallville newspaper, reported in 1873 that one hundred and nineteen couples participated in a dance at Lake Side House in Rome City on July 4th. Millard F. Owens became the first agent in Rome City for the GR&I Railroad on December 12, 1874. Owens and the

community solicited the resources of Mr. Owens' employer the GR & I Railroad Company, to make such improvements. Hotels were built. The railroad offered stops and reduced fares to the community. Other entrepreneurs established restaurants, boat rentals, and opened a myriad of other establishments serving visitors and residents alike. Excursion boats graced the waters, a dance hall provided live entertainment, and by 1874, a new railroad station was built. Rome City had rapidly developed into the popular vacation and tourist area envisioned by Owen, as thousands came to Rome City to take advantage of the community's offerings.

In the 1870's the buildings on Front Street were constructed. The two story brick building, located at 145 Front Street, which houses the Laundromat was once Dale Combs' barbershop from 1949-1961. The one story brick building, located at 165 Front Street, which housed the auto parts store. In 1903 it was W. P. Bloom's barbershop and in 1916 John A. Jennings made it the Post Office until 1961 when Cleo Donat Sr. tore down three houses where the library now sits. He built a nice limestone faced cement block building housing the post office (99 year lease), Dale Combs' barbershop and Edna's Restaurant, which was torn down for the new Library. The two-story brick merchants building, located at 145 Front Street, which houses Pepperoni's Pizza was Bob Frick's Grocery in the late 1940's and the upstairs housed the Masonic Lodge. All three of the above-mentioned structures had attached wooden structures, like barns, to store their horses and buggy's. The location of the Shooky's Liquor Store was a big barn that was the Niswander-Baum Chevrolet dealership. In 1950, Cleo Donat Sr. demolished the barn, built the block building and moved his growing Pepsi distributorship from his garage on the corner of Washington and Harriman Streets. Cleo Donat was an inventor of sorts. On one wall of his garage were metal chicken nests which had gutters the laid eggs ran down to one location. No egg collecting for him. The Orange Township Trustee building, located at 151 Front Street, was Holsinger's City Meat Market as early as 1903 (see picture below) in the 1940's it housed the Rome City Conservation Club.

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In the spring of 1876, on behalf of the railroad, several cars of lumber were set off for the erection of a dance hall on what was Jane Kerr Island. It was completed by June 1, 1876, and a bridge was built across the narrow channel from the mainland to the nearest point of the island. In the summer of 1881, a bridge was built from the island to the mainland on the south side; thus the beginning of Island Park Assembly Grounds in 1879, which drew thousands of visitors for concerts, speeches, religious training and demonstrations of the new telephone or phonograph. Rome City had become a major tourist and recreation destination. It became the home of the "Chautauqua" in 1881 which lasted till 1906.

In 1877, a heavy spring runoff caused extensive damage to the rotted wooden "tumbles" located on the north end of the dam near Northport, and there was almost a fourth breaching of the dam. The GR & I railroad company prevented the breach with two train loads of stone and sand.

In 1892, the Railroad company constructed "the tumbles" or spillway at the grist mill site on the south end of the dam. The State reconstructed the spillway control structure in 1973.

By 1906, the Island Park Assembly management could no longer meet its expenses which forced it to close. The Indiana General assembly had changed tariff laws making it unprofitable for the railroad to make stops in Rome City. Without the railroad providing transportation, Rome City lost its tourism, the economy declined, and soon the dance hall, the hotels and other small enterprises closed.

By the 1960's, the existing railway was abandoned and eventually sold off in parcels, in 1983 Penn Central Railroad finally provided a Quit Claim Deed for the remaining portions of the dam where the railway was once located thus relinquishing

ownership. There are no visible remains of the railroad today. The local school was consolidated into the East Noble School Corporation and the local high school was closed, the middle school was consolidated in 2010 and only the elementary school remains today.



*Rome City High School (Orange Township)*



*School at Rome City Shady Park.*

Even though Rome City was platted in 1839, it did not become an incorporated municipality until 1966, the town began planning the wastewater collection system and treatment facility in 1974 and the project was completed by 1976. In 1981, the town received a Community Development Block Grant through Housing and Urban Development to redevelop the mainland area. The mainland was located on the east side of town; many of the houses had dirt floors, were poorly constructed and lacked basic amenities. Most of the houses were purchased and demolished. The Rome City Housing Authority was formed to provide safe and affordable housing for the low income families in town. They built thirty-eight apartments on Front Street now called Warrener Court and constructed twelve apartments for the low income elderly on the south shore of Sylvan Lake next to the public boat ramp called Sylvan Manor.



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State Road 9, formerly known as Wolcottville Road, ran north through the village by first turning west onto Kelly Street Extended, then north to Front Street, then west to North Street, then north to the spillway, then east via bridge across the millpond entrance to the dam spillway and on to the levy, then turned north again to the Kneipp Springs Sanitarium where it turned east crossing the G.R.& I. railroad tracks to Spring Beach and then turned north again running through Northport and on to Wolcottville.

This was all changed during the great depression. The two lane concrete highway as we know it today by-passed Northport and added the overhead bridge at Kneipp Springs Sanitarium along with the concrete bridge over Sylvan Lake the paving of Kelly Street and the by-pass of Kelly Street Extended to the south. This was all dedicated with a two day celebration and boat races along with speeches by Gov. M. Clifford Townsend and highway commissioner, Earl Crawford, on Saturday and Sunday August 7 and 8, 1937.

In 1985, the Chautauqua Festival was revived as a three day event coinciding with Gene Stratton-Porter's birthday celebration. By 1989, nearly a century since the community had experienced the pinnacle of its tourism success, the Rome City community once again revived its tourism heritage. Rome City celebrated Gene Stratton-Porter Chautauqua era by bringing back the paddle wheel excursion boat, the "Princess Laura" which featured cruises and entertainment on Sylvan Lake. By 1990, the festival known as the Gene Stratton-Porter Chautauqua Days Festival had grown 300% from 1989, it had evolved into a two week three weekends long celebration. By 1992, the festival featured a much larger vessel named the "Chautauqua Princess" with a 400 passenger capacity, in addition to the many combined events throughout the community; the Gene Stratton-Porter Chautauqua Days Festival drew over 40,000 visitors during the event. The festival committee received an award for the development of this successful event in 1992 from the Northeast Indiana Tourism council. The festival was canceled in 1993 due to problems with the Sylvan Lake Dam. The festival committee brought back the "Chautauqua Princess" in 1996 this would be the last year for the paddle wheel boat as the owner of the vessel decided to no longer transport the boat. Without the paddle boat as the centerpiece of the festival it reverted back to a three day festival

for two years and the festival committee stopped having the festival in 1998. However, the Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site continues to have a celebration for Gene's birthday.

In 1992, the new United States Post Office was constructed on Kerr Avenue. Where a pretty two story frame home with a large front porch once stood. Many photos of the lake and depot were taken from its tall roof. There was one photo taken of the "Gravel Pit" now known as Gaff Park, during the Chautauqua Days it was known as the amphitheater and the photo showed hundreds of people, seated around it enjoying a band concert.

In 1997 the Orange Township Library was razed and a new library was erected on the same site, it is now called the Limberlost Library.

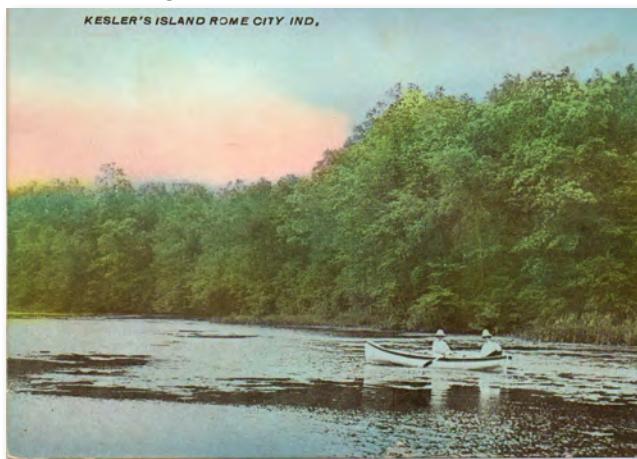
In 2002 the new Rome City Town Hall was constructed it houses the town's administration and the Marshal's Department.

The legal level of Sylvan Lake was established as 916.2' M.S. L. by the Noble County Circuit Court in 1951. Sylvan Lake is comprised of four basins: Lower Basin, Upper Basin, Cain Lake, and Gravel Pit Lake. Cain Lake Basin-was named after C. C. Cain a pioneer an Orange Township farmer, who acquired several small parcels of land contiguous with both Cain Lake and Gravel Pit Lake basins. The land acquisition occurred during the period 1865-1872. The Cain Family Farm (420 Acres) abridges the eastern extremity of Sylvan Lake with frontage on both basins and has been in the same family for four generations to date. Gravel Pit Lake Basin-is said to be named because the material, limestone and gravel, was excavated from this basin for the making of the earthen dam embankment and was transported by a small rail line. Sylvan Lake's shoreline stretches for 16 miles, covering approximately 630 acres with a maximum depth of 16 feet; making Sylvan Lake the largest of 147 lakes in Noble County.

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Sylvan Lake was originally home to 16 islands and now has 15 islands due to the filling of a channel on Kerr Island:

**1. Kessler's Island, Big Island:** (aka Boy Scout Island) is located in between Upper Basin, Gravel Pit Lake and Cain Lake now known as Camp Big Island- This Island was originally owned by T. P. Kessler and later purchased by the Boy Scouts of the Anthony Wayne Area of Fort Wayne and stayed in their ownership until the tornadoes of 1974 which subsequently destroyed nearly all the buildings on the island. Many of the lake residents recall waking up to "Reveille" and hearing "Taps" played in the evening from the scouts camping on the Island. In the evenings, the scouts would chant as they canoed across Sylvan Lake in a single file to purchase candy from Williams' drugstore (aka Mr. B's) now known as Town, Lake and Country Realty. They pulled their canoes on shore where Don and Alice Richards live today on Sylvan Point. The island was then sold into private ownership and in 2007 the Sylvan Lake Association purchased the land and partnered with the State of Indiana, Heritage Trust, to preserve the island in its natural state for all future generations.



*Kessler's Island, Big Island (aka Boy Scout Island)*

**2. Bishop's Island:** (aka Grape Island) is located in the Upper Basin. The original name of this Island was Grape Island although we have no documentation regarding the origin of the name. The island was originally owned by the O'Rourke Family from Fort Wayne. In the 1800's the O'Rourke's sold to the catholic diocese in Fort Wayne. Over the years, it was occupied by Bishop's Ahlberding, Noll and Pursley. Bishop Noll used the island as a working retreat and wrote several books while visiting. Bishop Noll entertained many guests; other bishops, archbishops and cardinals. The sisters (nuns) from the Fort Wayne diocese also spent many hours of leisure on the island. In the 1950's, the diocese sold the island back to the O'Rourke Family, they in turn sold the Island several years later due to access issues, to the Sordelet Family and then to the Phillip Davis Family.

**3. Gem Island:** More commonly known as O'Rourke Island is located in the Lower Basin near the earthen embankment. The Island was purchased in 1863 by P. S. O'Rourke, who was Superintendent of the G.R. & I Railroad. The original house was an ice house which was dragged over (on the ice) to the island during the winter. It was a wood frame building and destroyed by fire. In 1903, the current house was built; telephone and electrical lines to the island run along the bottom of the lake through the earthen dam. Gem Island has remained in the O'Rourke Family and it is currently owned by one great-granddaughter (McPike) and two great grandsons (O'Rourke). Due to the size of their families they draw for weeks in early spring to determine when each family can use the island. The holidays are open for all family members.



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4. **Kerr Island:** Located in the Lower Basin across from the Public Access Ramp. This Island was originally two islands and fill was added between the islands thus making it one Island; although part of the channel remains open between Stanley Watkins' and Dr. Greg Johnson's homes. The Island was originally named Jane Kerr Island and was the location of the Island Park Assembly where the Western Chautauqua was held from 1876-1906 was developed by a group of Methodist Ministers from the area. They first organized a Sunday School Institute bringing speakers from all over. Upon the dissolution of the Assembly, in 1906, the island was converted to a park. The northwest side of the island had a beach called "Malibu Beach" with a beach house. One of the main attractions at the beach was a large water slide. The park also rented canoes, fishing boats, had walking paths and a pavilion for dances. On the mainland, where Lakeside Park sits today, was the site of the old dance hall which was also used as a skating rink.
5. **Round Island:** Located in the Upper Basin and owned by the Hutsell Family of Fort Wayne. They owned the Ovelma Cream Company which produced medicated cream. The home was destroyed during the 1974 tornadoes and was never replaced. Ownership to this Island has changed hand several times over the years until the Schafer Family purchased the island in 2003 and built a log cabin on the island.
6. **Sponhauer Island:** (aka Hathaway Island) is located in the Upper Basin near Round Island. During the early 1900's, Wilder and Lydia Sponhauer purchased the Island which was only as big as the house presently located on the island. During the winter months they had tons of fill brought in by dump truck and placed on the ice. Eventually this filled in around the island to where the willow tree stands today. The island also had a boat house but it was lost to the 1974 tornadoes. The Paul Kuczora Family purchased the Island in 1978 from Edson Webb and it remains in their ownership.
7. **Sullivan Island:** (aka Cook Island) is located in the Upper Basin. In 1890, Kincade Faux sold Sullivan Island to John and Mary Peters for \$50. They built the house on the island between 1890 and 1907. John and Mary Peters were the grandparents of actress Carol Lombard and, as a child, Carol spent time on the island visiting her grandparents. In 1918, the Peters Family sold to Clarence Cook who, in 1942, transferred the island to Loretta Ann Fink, the grandmother of the Sullivan Family and sister to Bishop Noll (there were 19 children in the Noll family). Today, six of the Sullivan grandchildren own the island and they also draw for weeks to spend on the island due to their large families similar to the O'Rourke family.
8. **Twin Island:** Two (2) islands located between the Upper Basin and Gravel Pit Lake Basin. Big Twin Island is the only island accessible by a wooden bridge. The original house was destroyed in the 1974 tornadoes. The existing log home was completely remodeled and an addition added in 1989 constructed and owned by "The Way College" to house their resident doctor, Carolyn Rawlins. The Island was then sold to Pachalis Evangelidis and is currently owned by Joan Varketta since 2001. Little Twin Island is accessible only by boat and was purchased by the Johnson Family and it remains in their granddaughter's ownership, Janel K. Johnson.
9. **Chicken Coop Island:** Located in Cain Lake Basin was owned originally by the Cain Family and at one time included the Antler's Point lodge; previously call the Berghoff Brewery Employee Park. The Fort Wayne employees were transported via the G.R. & I. Railroad to Rome City and thence via boat to the vacation site during the early 1900's. Subsequent owners of the lodge were a small group of Kendallville B.P.O.E #1194 (Elks) members, during the period of 1920-1948, the last survivor being (Earl) "Heinie" Ackerman. The Elks used the Island to house their fighting cocks during the 1920's, 30's and 40's. It has been said the Elks Lodge was a resting place for John Dillinger's gang between his rendezvous'. The property is currently owned by the Joseph Patton Family.



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**10. Pig Island:** (aka Tin Can Island) is located in the Upper Basin near Sullivan's Island. It was formerly owned by Andy Thieme he also owned the adjacent land which he used to moor and rent row boats for \$1.00 a day. The Island was covered in junk; old appliances, paint cans, oil cans and all kinds of tin cans hence the renaming to Tin Can Island. The Island was cleaned of all debris and a flagpole erected on the Island by the current owner's the Nick Heffner Family.

**11. Oak Grove Island:** (aka Kessen's Island, aka Anchor Cove) is located in the Upper Basin accessible by a concrete bridge. It was originally owned by Al Rigel-owner of the Rigel Cigar Shop in Fort Wayne. Purchased by John H. Kessen in 1940 the property stayed in the Kessen family until 2006. It was purchased by Feuser Contracting. They subsequently sub-divided the island into three parcels and the parcels are now owned by the Tom Smith Family, Nick Busche Family, and the Steve Hankins Family.

**12. Little Island:** Located on the north side of the Lower Basin in Little Island Bay in Zuber's Circle, in front of the Henry Sandkuhler properties. Ownership of the island is unknown.

**13. Two small unnamed islands:** One (1) island located on the north side of the Lower Basin is currently owned by the Steven Fisher Family. This island was used in the past for the annual fireworks event. The second island is located on the south side of the Upper Basin is currently owned by the Lee Harges Family.

### ***Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site:***

In 1884, while vacationing in Rome City, the twenty-one (21) year old Geneva (Gene) Stratton met Charles Darwin Porter. On April 21, 1886, Geneva Stratton married Charles Darwin Porter and became "Geneva (Gene) Stratton-Porter." Gene Stratton-Porter was a famous author and naturalist which she incorporated into her many drawings, photographs and writings. In 1893, the prize winning story "The Strike at Shane's" was published anonymously. Authorship was later attributed to Gene Stratton-Porter. In 1904, Gene Stratton-Porter's first romantic novel, "Freckles," was written and published. In 1909, the Porters purchased land in Cain Lake Basin from D. L. Sowers. She wanted to live in the woods where she would be close to the nature she wrote about in her books. She chose to name her

summer home "Limberlost" to reflect the area of her permanent residence in Geneva, Indiana. Mrs. Porter's Rome City cabin was built for the cost of \$17,000. A two story cabin built from Wisconsin cedar logs on a boulder foundation. In 1912, the Porters moved into the "Limberlost" cabin. Much of her writing was done in the cabin. She was one of the few American authors to sell more than 100,000 copies of her books within six months after their release date. "Freckles" and "Girl of the Limberlost" were her two best sellers. She was one of the few authors in her time period to continue to write best sellers. In 1919, she moved to California where she continued to write and started a movie production company in order to produce her movie (adaptations of her books) in their true form into motion pictures. Mrs. Porter had two other best sellers, "Michael O'Halloran" and "Laddie", made into motion pictures. She was a woman ahead of her time. On December 7, 1924, at the age of 56, Mrs. Porter was killed in a street car accident. In 1945, the Gene Stratton-Porter Society purchased the land and home from Jeanette Porter-Meehan, (Gene Stratton-Porter's only child), the society transferred the site to the State of Indiana in 1946 where it remains a local and state treasure, open for all to enjoy. Mrs. Porter was originally buried in California, as was her daughter, Jeanette Stratton-Porter Meehan. They were both moved to their final resting place on April 22, 1999 near her cabin in the "Wildflower Woods" in Rome City. It was in Rome City that most of her novels were written while she also pursued her hobby as a naturalist. Even today, there are rare species of plant-life developed by Mrs. Porter in existence on her estate and surrounding area. Every year tens of thousands visit the site of one of Indiana's foremost authors and naturalist. These visitors come to the site to experience the era and the natural environment that has been maintained since Mrs. Porter's untimely death.

### ***Kneipp Springs: The Spring Beach Sanitarium (aka Kneipp Springs, aka The Way College, aka Sylvan Springs)***

About 1882, Mr. Frank M. Baker, bought 200 acres of the Geisendorff estates, and started celery gardens in the low lands. With the discovery of numerous mineral springs he built a commodious three story brick building with basement and started a sanitarium accommodating 10 guests. By 1886, he and his brother had built an extensive trout hatchery along the highway south and east of the large building.



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This business carried on for a while, but finding there was no money in it they gave it up.

During the summer of 1894, Dr. W. G. Geirmann visited Rome City and Sylvan Lake, and as, it developed later, interested the Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, whose headquarters at the time were in Celina, Ohio. He contracted with Mr. Bunker for 180 acres of Hill Side Springs and low lands, the site being favorably looked upon by the sister's as suitable for a sanitarium and Sisters' home. Dr. Geirmann, the first American to study under the direction of Monsignor Kneipp, earned a certificate of proficiency in hydrotherapy at the University of Vienna. He made arrangements with Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood for the sisters' home to be at the same location. Persons from throughout the Midwest visited the sanitarium in these years to partake of the "cure" offered by the mineral spring water. As physician in charge, Dr. Geirmann began improvements at once, in 1887, erecting what is known as the Hollow Block Building with a gymnasium for physical therapy (this building was razed after WWII to enlarge the parking lot) and utilized the Bunker brick building known as the Spring Beach sanitarium. Here the wonderful Kneipp treatment was administered by him, by means of the magnetic mineral water, the curative properties of which were already so widely known that in the first season more than 2500 visitors were attracted to the place and 200 patients received treatment. In January 1902, the Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood purchased the facility for \$30,000 and continued to offer the Kneipp treatments. A large three story commodious and modern brick sanitarium with a chapel was dedicated as the Chapel of Mary, Mother of Mercy. In 1906, the brick Bunker building was torn down and a matching three story addition was added to the new sanitarium's east side, doubling the capacity of the institution and it is what we see still standing today. Again about 1910 another large \$17,000 addition, matching the earlier addition, and a new chapel were added to the west side of the sanitarium building in addition to an extensive power and heating plant being installed. In 1915, the Catholic burial ground was opened, located to the west of the buildings, and it still operated by the Catholic church for area catholic burials. In 1976, Kneipp Springs was purchased by "The Way College of Biblical Research." They owned the site

until the year 2000 when they decided to consolidate into their Ohio and Colorado campuses. The site was purchased on November 8, 1999, by the Noble County Community Foundation and they named the site Sylvan Springs. They sold the site to Blue Chip USA on November 2000 and remained in their ownership until 2010 when they filed bankruptcy. The current owner is Westrick LLC.

### ***Sylvan Lake Improvement Association (SLIA):***

In 1908, the Sylvan Lake Improvement Association (SLIA) was formed and was officially incorporated by Fred A. Sims, Secretary of State. The officers were: William J. Hosey, President; John A. Jennings, Vice President; Robert S. Moses, Secretary; J.B. Niezer, Treasurer; and Peter Hekenuis, Director. The original by-laws called for five members of the board of directors. Today, there are three officers: Joseph Costello, President; Daniel Diggins, Vice-President; and Marianna Reick, Secretary-Treasurer; and sixteen board members. According to the State Charter, the object of the incorporation was "to improve and conserve generally the natural beauty and facilities for recreation and advance the welfare of Sylvan Lake, to cooperate in and contribute to any program designed for further sanitation, wildlife conservation, highway improvements, utility service and any other move toward our mutual benefits..." Although we do not have record of all the past presidents to serve on the SLIA, they are still deserving of recognition. Between the years of 1962 and 1972, four Presidents served. They were Matthew Junk, Keith Marks, Samuel Adams, and Loy Reitz. Joseph Costello served as President from August 1972 through March 1985. From 1985-1992, Dennis Parr and John Kessen served as President. Upon Mr. Kessen's resignation in 1992, Joseph Costello agreed to serve for one term and is still President of the SLIA today.

In 1941, H.B. 273 was passed by the Indiana legislature which prohibited the lowering of the water level of any lake containing more than 20 acres and more than 12 inches below the high water mark established by a dam creating the lake. Prior to this law, Sylvan Lake was routinely lowered each fall and raised each spring.

Early 1960 brought a growth of algae so abundant it was killing Sylvan Lake. The Board of Directors and its membership sought help from the Sanitary Engineering Division of the State Board of Health

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who presented them with the use of copper sulfate to control the algae. Between 1962 and 1968 the Sylvan Lake Association applied to the lake over 300 tons of copper sulfate, plus six (6) barrels of an arsenic based chemical in 1964.

Studies of Sylvan Lake were conducted in 1963-64 by Dr. Wetzel, of Indiana University. He determined the lake was "Hypereutrophic" meaning the lake was very high in nutrients and the water was very clouded with algae. In 1965, the SLIA received permission to lower the lake for 30 days to perform clean-up, beach maintenance and to check for septic systems flowing into the lake. They also hoped it would help control the algae problem. In 1967, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) conducted the first fisheries study and they continue to do studies on the lake's fish to this day.

On April 11, 1974, Sylvan Lake was hit by several tornadoes which produced severe damage to property around the lake. The SLIA requested the water level be lowered from July 1974 to March 1975 to allow for clean up of the debris strewn by the tornado. Also in 1974, the Town of Rome City began a three million dollar wastewater collection system and treatment facility, it was completed in 1975. Sylvan Lake was one of the first lakes to be connected to centralized sewer system in the State of Indiana. The City of Kendallville also upgraded their wastewater system to reduce nutrient input into Sylvan Lake.

In December 1975, the first meeting was held to improve water quality of the lake based on research to lower the lake for a few years. The project was headed by Dr. David Eberly of Manchester College. Funds were secured in 1978 and the project was officially started. The IDNR continued with their fish population studies. They completed seven studies and they conducted two fish harvest studies in 1977 and 1981.

On September 1984, the IDNR conducted total fish eradication and restocking of Sylvan Lake. This was one of the largest projects of its kind ever conducted in Indiana. A chemical fish toxicant called rotenone was applied to the lake and to many of its incoming tributaries. The residents on the lake helped with the clean up. Fifty-five gallon drums were placed around the lake and the fish were hauled from the shore to the drums. Many residents said there were fish as far as the eye could see. You would clean up one day and then start completely over the next.

Within one month after the treatment, the restocking of fish began, during the fall of 1984 and the spring of 1985, the lake was restocked with bass, bluegill, catfish and walleye; thus resulting in one of the best fishing lakes in northern Indiana, today. On May 17, 1988, SLIA was awarded \$15,300 for a feasibility study on the Lake Enhancement T-2000 Program. Due to the efforts of then State Representative Brad Fox and State Senator Robert Meeks, the SLIA was awarded a \$100,000 grant toward the design and implementation of the water filtering system (aka Weir Dam project). The SLIA matched \$25,000 for the project.

In December 1992, the town was notified by a property owner on the dam that their house was shifting and material was sloughing away on the back of their property due to the dam. The town advised the owner to contact state officials. By February 1993, the dam was considered unsafe and in May 1993, the IDNR enacted an emergency due to an increase in seepage through the dam's North Street embankment. Emergency repair construction was started on May 25, 1993, for the installation of toe drains, filter material and riprap on the downstream face of the North Street embankment. The situation became too critical to maintain the normal water level. They ordered the mandatory lowering of Sylvan Lake by 7.2 feet to relieve stress from the embankments. State officials determined seepage from the dam posed a threat to area property owners. On October 7, 1993, the State of Indiana provided \$200,000 to identify and evaluate alternatives for the reconstruction of the Sylvan Lake Dam and Spillway to meet minimum dam engineering standards. They assigned the engineering firm Lawson and Fisher Associates, in South Bend, Indiana, to the project. In February 1994, Lawson and Fisher issued their report for a total reconstruction of the dam. The Noble Circuit Court agreed to temporarily allow the level of Sylvan Lake to remain at the 909 level, 7.2 feet below normal pool. The court ruled the water level would remain lowered and could be returned to normal level, 916.2, by May 15, 1995. In September 1994, the Governor declared the reconstruction of the Sylvan Lake Dam an emergency and announced \$5.3 million was allocated for the project. On September 6, 1994 the Town formed the Rome City Conservancy District (RCCD) to purchase all the land for the spillway project, earthen embankment and the new public access site. The RCCD was



initiated and established in response to the Sylvan Lake dilemma and the State's demand for the local citizens to contribute to the project. The RCCD contributed a match of \$500,000 toward the project. The RCCD had to procure a loan to obtain monies to purchase all the properties on the earthen embankment, the spillway site, and the land. They also contributed monies for the relocation of the sewer utility from the east side of State Road 9 to the west side. The RCCD's final total of funds contributed escalated to \$650,000. The RCCD levied two taxes on the citizens of Rome City and all the citizens on the lake, to pay for the loan and the future cost associated with the operation of the dam. One tax called a Special Benefits Tax was levied to pay for the operation and maintenance of the dam; this will be an ongoing tax. The second tax called the Exceptional Benefits Tax was a onetime tax to repay the loan. The Exceptional Tax was only levied on those individuals whom received an exceptional benefit from the lake, thus those that are directly on the lake, those with access to the lake and all the businesses in Rome City. The RCCD remains active today and is charged with the continued maintenance and operation of the Sylvan Lake Dam. The construction of the dam was awarded to Reith/Riley Construction. Lawson and Fisher Associates designed the rehabilitation of the earthen embankment, along State Road 9, and the construction of a two level spillway system with a tainter gate able to pass the probable maximum precipitation (PMP) which far exceeds the levels of a 500 year flood. The State requested and received an extension from the May 15, 1995 date to September 1996. The dam was completed by the September 1996 date and the lake returned to normal pool after two and half years of construction.

In 1993, the T-2000 project had completed the design phase and was scheduled for construction; however, it was put on hold due to the lowering of the lake. In September 1995, the process to begin the T-2000 project, construction of the weir dam, began again. Approval was received in the fall of 1997, and the contract was awarded to L. L. Genes, Inc. They began construction in March 1998 and completed the project in July 1998. The Weir Dam project was designed to trap sediment filtering into the lake from the Henderson Ditch in Gravel Pit Lake Basin.

In 1993, the SLIA needed to raise money for the T-2000 project, Daniel Morris started the "Bingo"

at the Rose Garden Restaurant in Kendallville. Daniel Morris and Joseph Costello agreed to share operational duties for the bingo. In June 1994, the SLIA ceased the bingo operations in Kendallville and began looking for an alternative site. The Masonic Lodge building on State Road 9, south of Rome City was for sale. The SLIA purchased the building for \$110,000 and added a 1,500 sq. ft. addition to the original 3,900 sq. ft. A new kitchen, bathroom, storage rooms, game room and offices were added. They also added three smoke eaters, exhaust fans, a furnace, air-conditioning, a well, a soft water system and a sound system.

The SLIA is responsible for many other projects and charitable contributions to the community and for the water quality of Sylvan Lake: spraying the weeds, purchasing the boat for the Lake Patrol and paying the officers wages, purchasing and installing the buoys, the annual member meeting and dinner, Christmas decorations in town and on the building, the July 4th fireworks, and donations to various other community groups. In 1999, the SLIA and the Town of Rome City entered into an agreement to pave roads around the lake and in town. The SLIA gifted \$65,000 and agreed to an interest free \$171,000, 10 year loan to fund the project.

In 2007, Joseph Costello fulfilled a dream of the SLIA to procure and preserve Boy Scout Island (Camp Big Island) approximately 110 acres, from future development. The SLIA purchased the Island for \$1,250,000 to preserve it in its natural state. The island is in the process of being cleaned of debris and will eventually have walking trails and docking facilities for everyone to enjoy. In September 2008, Governor Mitch Daniels dedicated the Island to the State of Indiana. Fundraising for this project is on going and the development of the island continues.

**Materials used for this Historical Perspective:** History of Orange Township. M. F. Owen; The Western Chautauqua, Rome City Chautauqua Committee; Sylvan Lake Directory, Sylvan Lake Association; Research by: Russell Frehse for the Rome City Historic Sign, Noble County Historian, and Rob Glass.

## Listing of Historic Sites

The tables below identify historic areas and significant properties in Rome City and Orange Township that contribute to the areas historic fabric. In March 1986, the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana published the Noble County Interim Report that inventories properties that are already listed or should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Properties are rated as (O) for outstanding, (N) for notable, or (C) for contributing.

### Rome City: Scattered Sites (12001-010)

Number	Rating	Description
001	N	HOUSE, 100 Weston Street, Queen Anne, c.1900
002	O	HOUSE, 255 Front Street, Italianate Second Empire, c.1900
003	C	HENRY COBB HOUSE, 297 Front Street, Bungalow, c.1911
004	C	HOUSE, 174 Weston Street, Queen Anne, c.1905
005	C	HOUSE, 195 Weston Street, Carpenter-Builder, c.1870
006	C	DEMOLISHED - ROME CITY COMMUNITY BUILDING, Martin Street, 20th Century Functional, c.1940
007	O	BROTHWELL HOUSE, 302 Martin Street, Italianate, c.1880,
008	C	HOUSE, 252 Kelly Street, Carpenter-Builder, c.1890 *DEMOLISHED*
009	N	HOUSE, 301 Kelly Street, Queen Anne, c.1880/1910
010	N	HOUSE, 402 Kelly Street, Carpenter-Builder, c.1870 *DEMOLISHED*
	C	ROME CITY METHODIST CHURCH, Washington Street Carpenter-Builder, c.1869
	C	ROME CITY BAPTIST CHURCH, Weston Street Carpenter-Builder, c.1888, built by Geo. Mains
	C	TWO STORY BRICK MERCHANTS BUILDING, 145 Front Street, c.1877 (Old Masonic Lodge)
	C	ONE STORY BRICK MERCHANTS BUILDING, Front Street, c.1870's (Post Office 1916-1961)
	C	TWO STORY BRICK MERCHANTS BUILDING, 185 Front Street, c.1870's (Dale Comb's Barber Shop 1949-1961)

### Rome City Area: Additional Sites

*(Listed in Orange Township and located within the Town's Planning Jurisdiction )*

Number	Rating	Description
005	C	NORTHPORT CEMETERY, 300 E, 1841-1880; Exploration Settlement, McGregor McDougal
006	O	KNEIPP SPRINGS SANITARIUM (The Way College of Biblical Research), State Road 9, Colonial Revival (Sanitarium 1905), Gothic Revival (Church 1910), Queen Anne (Convent 1894)
007	N	IRA MYERS HOUSE, Northport Road, Italianate, c.1868
008	C	HOUSE, 900 N, Carpenter-Builder, c.1910
009	O	GENE STRATTON-PORTER STATE HISTORIC SITE, 850 N, Carpenter-Builder, c.1914
010	N	BECK HOUSE, State Road 9, Carpenter-Builder, c.1840
011	N	HALL HOUSE, 1000 N, Italianate, c.1865
012	C	FLINT HOUSE, 1000 N, Bungalow, c.1915-1917
	C	DANIEL L. SOWER HOUSE, 850 N, Carpenter-Builder, c.1887



*Rome City Baptist Church, erected in 1888.*



*Rome City Methodist Church, erected in 1869.*





# **Part 6: Appendix**

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## *Introduction*

This section provides the detailed results from the public input and a physical perspective for the Town of Rome City.

### Community Values Survey Results

#### **Respondent Location**

Respondents represented the in-town properties, lake properties, as well as property located in the two (2) mile planning jurisdiction. A summary of the respondents location listed below.

- ◆ **Live in the town:** 55% of the respondents live in the town's corporate limits.
- ◆ **Live in the Planning Jurisdiction:** 35% live outside corporate limits, but within the planning jurisdiction.
- ◆ **Do not live in the town or the Planning Jurisdiction:** 10% did not live in either the town's corporate limits or the planning jurisdiction

#### **Respondent Age**

The majority of the respondents were in the age category between 61 and 70 years old and the age category between 41 to 50 years old, for a total of 53% and less than half of the respondents did not answer the question. A summary of the respondents age is listed below.

- ◆ **20 Years Old or Less:** 0%
- ◆ **21 to 30 Years Old:** 3%
- ◆ **31 to 40 Years Old:** 17%
- ◆ **41 to 50 Years Old:** 20%
- ◆ **51 to 60 Years Old:** 13%
- ◆ **61 to 70 Years Old:** 33%
- ◆ **71 to 80 Years Old:** 10%
- ◆ **81 Years Old or More:** 3%

#### **Distribution Analysis**

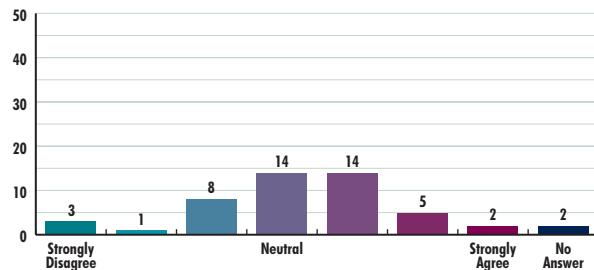
The Values Survey was offered to everyone that attended a meeting or workshop and was also available at the Rome City Town Hall. A total of fifty (50) surveys were completed.

The following bar charts display the distribution analysis for each of the individual questions on the Community Values Survey. The number above each bar indicates the total number of times that answer was selected.

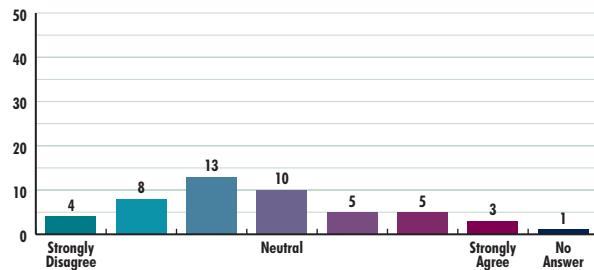


## PART 6: APPENDIX

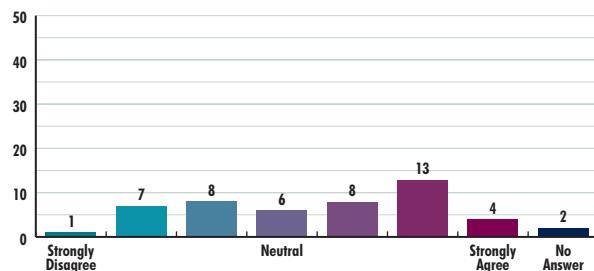
**Question #1:** Rome City currently offers a high quality-of-life to it's residents.



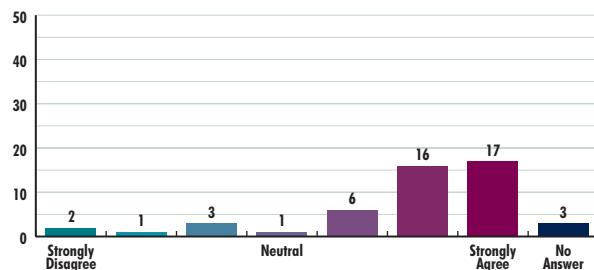
**Question #2:** Improving the overall quality-of-life of residents in Rome City is more important than protecting individual property rights.



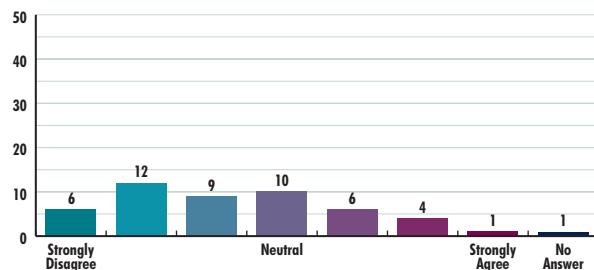
**Question #3:** New development should only be allowed where it does not conflict with existing development.



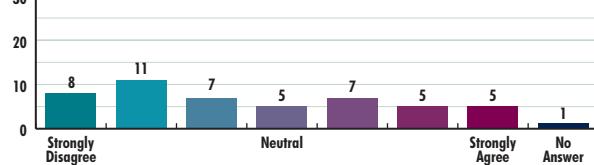
**Question #4:** New development should only be allowed when it does not cause notable harm to the environment.



**Question #5:** We should make changes that appeal to the people and businesses that are here today, even if those changes do not appeal to persons and businesses that might choose to relocate to Rome City.

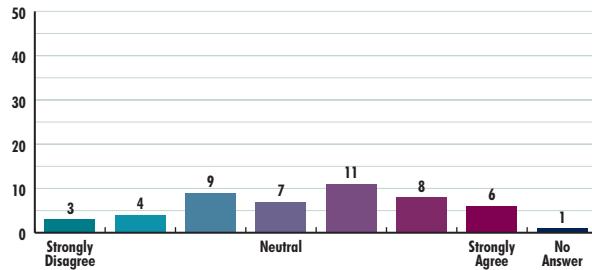


**Question #6:** I should be able to do anything I want on and with my property without government interference.

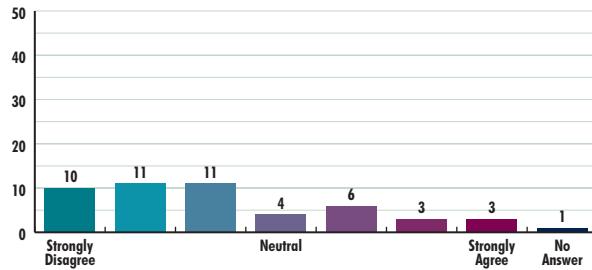


## PART 6: APPENDIX

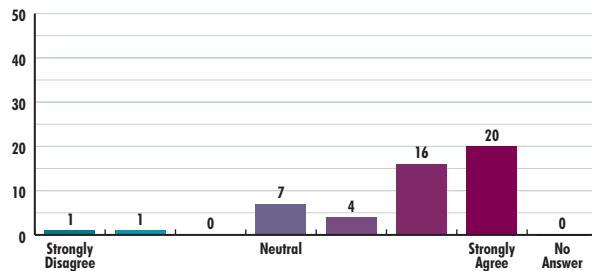
**Question #7:** New growth and development should be allowed only where infrastructure and services exist to support it.



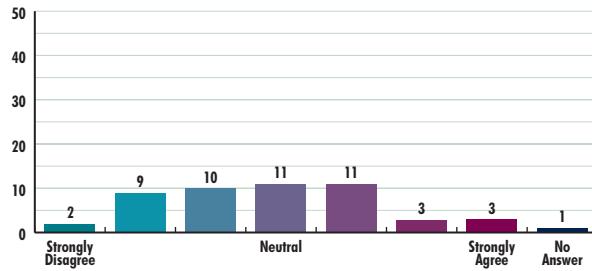
**Question #8:** A new industry should be allowed to establish itself anywhere in the Town that best suits its needs.



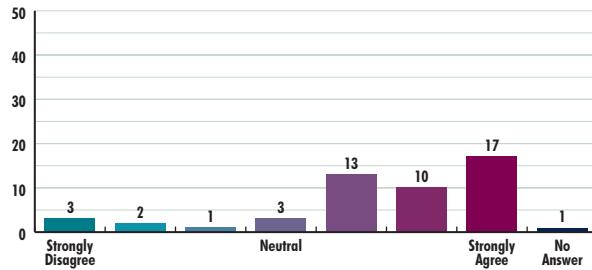
**Question #9:** Being a “walkable” community is important.



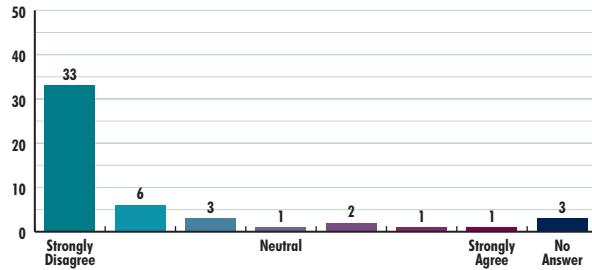
**Question #10:** The type, quality, and quantity of housing in Rome City fully meets the needs of persons who live or want to live here.



**Question #11:** The water quality of Sylvan Lake should be protected at all costs, even if lots with lake access have to endure greater development restrictions.

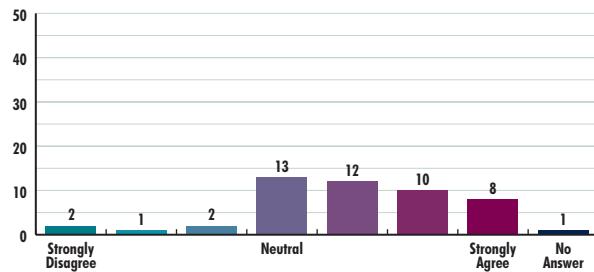


**Question #12:** My neighbors should be able to do anything they want on their land, even if it devalues my property and diminishes my quality-of-life.

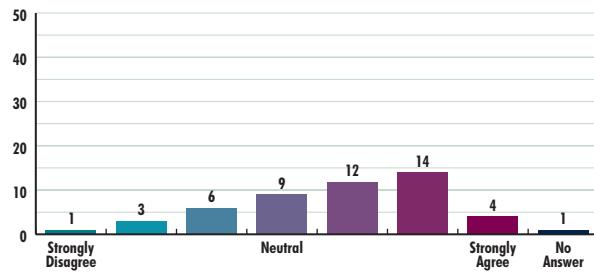


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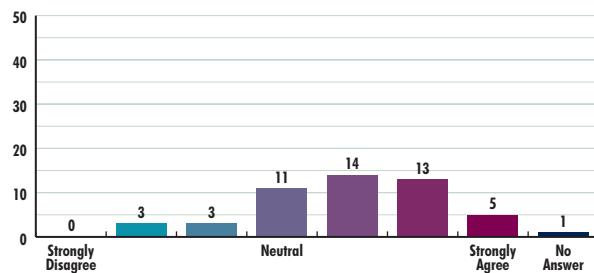
**Question #13:** Rome City should commit to becoming a “green” community.



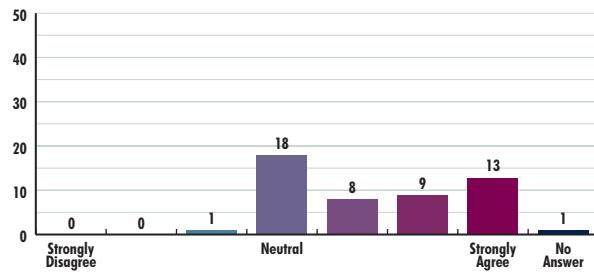
**Question #14:** The town should make changes that attract new residents, businesses, and industry, even if those changes do not directly benefit the existing residents.



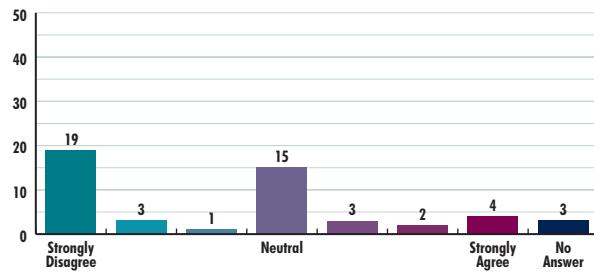
**Question #15:** The Rome City government effectively provides laws, services, facilities, and infrastructure for the community as a whole.



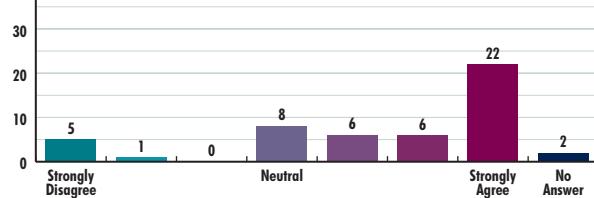
**Question #16:** I live in Rome City because I prefer living in a small town.



**Question #17:** I live in Rome City because I grew up here.



**Question #18:** I live in Rome City because of Sylvan Lake.



### *Physical Perspective*

#### **Source: 2005 Comprehensive Plan**

The Physical Perspective below is from the Town of Rome City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan.

The Town of Rome City is located in Orange Township, in the northeastern part of Noble County.

Much of the Rome City area is rolling, glaciated terrain. Sylvan Lake is situated within the Indiana physiographic region known as the Steuben Morainal Lake Area. The Steuben Morainal Lake Area is an area of rugged terrain whose landforms are of glacial (or post-glacial) origin, having been produced by the advance and related activity of the Huron-Saginaw and Ontario-Erie Lobes of the Wisconsin-age glaciation. Ground elevations within this area vary thirty (30) feet or more. The entire Rome City area drains into the Elkhart River. The Elkhart River is part of the St. Joseph River Watershed, which drains mostly into Lake Michigan.

Sylvan Lake is the largest lake in Noble County and among the largest lakes in the State of Indiana. It covers an area that is approximately 630 acres, a volume of 7,400 acre-feet, a drainage area of about 33.7 square miles with some fourteen (14) miles of shoreline. Sylvan Lake is a man-made lake with its origin as a result of the Indiana General Assembly's decision in 1836-37 to develop a navigable feeder canal from Michigan City to Fort Wayne. Construction was undertaken in 1837-38. In 1839, the state realized the canal project was not economically feasible, and all canal affairs were closed in 1840. The feeder canal was dammed up to create Sylvan Lake.

Potable water within the Town of Rome City is provided by individual wells. However, the town has a non-potable water system near the industrial park and Kelly Park (only used for fire protection).

Public sewer is provided by the Town of Rome City to all of the residents in the corporate boundaries.

The area that comprises Sylvan Lake is heavily wooded. In fact, tree stumps still exist in numerous areas of Sylvan Lake that may have been in existence during the formation of the lake. Webster's Dictionary defines "sylvan" as "Of, pertaining to, or inhabiting the woods; wooded". Areas of rare plant-life, wildlife, and wetlands exist within the district boundaries. Numerous islands and a former boy scout camp exist on Sylvan Lake, which are not accessible except by watercraft. These are higher elevated areas which remained above the water level upon creation of Sylvan Lake and have retained much of their natural integrity.

