

From the Mayor...

September 1, 2023

Recently I was asked to write about how our city has grown over the years and what kind of vision I can project into the future. In 1972, I moved to Warsaw. So, for this column, I'm going to focus on what I have experienced over those 50 years.

Population growth is always associated with the vibrancy of a community. Since 1970, we have more than doubled our population. In the last census, we recorded a 16% growth in the city, with just over 15,800 residents.

What has precipitated this growth over the last 50 years? I think there are two very significant factors. The first is the growth of our orthopedic industry. As it has evolved into a global industry, the workforce demand has had a steady impact, increasing our population with regularity.

The second was the completion of the US 30 highway through our community in 1972. In that ten-year span of the 1970's, we produced a 41% increase in the 1980 city census! Without question, the connectivity to our community from US 30 has created significant retail, residential, and industrial growth along the corridor over those fifty years.

If we look ahead to the next 50 years, the proposed freeway plans along US 30 will improve local and regional mobility, creating safer, more efficient transportation logistics. This will undoubtedly become a catalyst for local growth and development.

Back in the mid-nineties, Warsaw's first TIF district was created in our downtown to provide incentives for development and infrastructure improvements. At the same time, US 30 was opening access to regional markets that attracted national and regional retailers along the highway. But like many small cities, the retail sprawl was taking its toll on downtown small businesses.

The vibrancy of a community is reflected by the vitality of its downtown. The 2001 HyettPalma Downtown Action Agenda gave our community a blueprint to assist and incentivize downtown revitalization and mitigate urban sprawl. Over the past 22 years, we have made significant progress implementing that plan.

But many changes have occurred in the last 20 years. The way we shop and go out to eat has changed significantly. Amazon and Covid have seen to that! In addition, our workforce is much more mobile. Housing needs are different. These changes must be viewed as new opportunities for our community as we reset our community and downtown blueprint with a new 2023 Action Agenda. With the oversight of Mainstreet Warsaw and a downtown coordinator, more housing, specialty shops, public and performing arts, and improved ride/walk connectivity are among the changes contemplated.

Let me remind you that I consider the “Warsaw” community footprint to extend beyond our city limits. The quality-of-life amenities we collectively share with Winona Lake and our surrounding rural towns attract new opportunities and workforce talent that none of us can do on our own.

Moving ahead the next 20 years, we must continue to focus on the needs of our local industries and their workforce. Our community partners have been charged to prioritize resources to support and leverage more funding for critical initiatives that will benefit the success of our community.

The Warsaw community can be very proud of what we have accomplished in the last fifty years. For that, I am very thankful! We have been blessed with leaders that understand the challenges of the future. Guided by the fundamentals that have given way to community growth, emboldened by current and future leaders, Warsaw is poised to continue the trajectory of success that we have all worked so hard to build.