



Sycamore Economic Development Playbook

Goals and Objectives for Continued Growth

Prepared by:

Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies

This report was prepared in conjunction with the City of Sycamore's 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

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Outreach, Engagement and Regional Development



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Introduction

This report was prepared in conjunction with the City of Sycamore 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update. Information gathered during the comprehensive planning process along with input from Sycamore’s Economic Development Commission (EDC) form the basis of the economic development playbook. Because this report was prepared in conjunction with the comprehensive plan update, the City has a guide to economic growth that is coordinated with its future land use plan. The goals and objectives developed by the EDC are a starting point for the City’s economic growth planning, including identifying specific implementation strategies.

The report is organized into several sections:

- Background information on the existing condition of the City’s economy;
- Public input based upon surveys of the residents, visitors, and business owners;
- Goals and objectives developed by the EDC, some of which are drawn from the 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update and some of which were added by the ED commissioners;
- Sycamore’s role in the growth of DeKalb County’s economy; and
- Next steps in the City’s economic development planning.

Background

This section presents key information gathered in the comprehensive planning process relevant to economic development. This information provides context for the EDC to develop goals and objectives. Additional detail can be found in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update.

Industry

Sycamore has enjoyed industrial growth in recent years. In terms of assessed valuation, the proportional size of the industrial sector declined from 1997 through 2009 but recovered between 2012 and 2018. Industrial building activity varied widely from year to year, but 2015, 2019 and 2020 were exceptionally strong years in terms of permit values (the value of industrial building improvements). Building permit records tend to understate the value of industrial building improvements, since smaller projects are typically completed by in-house workers. Figures 1 and 2 record the known data.

Figure 1. Industrial Valuation, Sycamore, IL

Year	1997	2002	2007	2009	2012	2018
Industrial EAV	\$9,099,118	\$11,092,209	\$16,462,567	\$17,517,636	\$14,204,393	\$22,370,358
% of Total EAV	5.8%	5.1%	4.0%	3.8%	3.8%	5.0%

Source: Illinois Department of Revenue, Property Tax Statistics, Table 28.

Figure 2. Industrial Permits and Valuation, Sycamore, IL

Year	No.	Valuation
2010	13	\$8,803,100
2011	15	\$369,620
2012	16	\$1,280,100
2013	11	\$1,523,275
2014	7	\$48,000
2015	12	\$18,200,919
2016	15	\$3,791,145
2017	25	\$3,106,409
2018	21	\$6,397,250
2019	19	\$14,388,391
2020	19	\$14,345,850

Source: Illinois Department of Revenue, Property Tax Statistics, Table 28.

Commercial Activity

Sycamore's commercial history began with a mill built on the north side of the Kishwaukee River by Sharer & Company in 1836. Through the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, the downtown business district accounted for most of the city's commercial activity. During the past twenty-five years, an increasing share of the city's sales tax has been generated in outlying commercial corridors, particularly Illinois Route 23 (DeKalb Avenue) and, more recently, Peace Road. Figure 3 tracks the valuation of new commercial additions and commercial buildings since 1996.

Figure 3. Commercial Valuation, Sycamore, IL

Year	1997	2002	2007	2009	2012	2018
Commercial EAV	\$32,539,839	\$46,370,926	\$77,950,756	\$96,344,271	\$83,210,491	\$98,760,630
% of Total EAV	20.9%	21.4%	19.0%	21.0%	22.4%	22.2%

Source: Illinois Department of Revenue, Property Tax Statistics, Table 28.

Commercial properties have represented slightly more than 20% of the property tax base in Sycamore since 2009. Commercial property values declined during the Great Recession, but in 2018 they exceeded their 2009 levels. Commercial permitting activity has remained strong, with more than 100 permits issued each year since 2015, although the value of those permits varies widely from year to year (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Commercial Permits and Valuation, Sycamore, IL

Year	No.	Valuation
2010	69	\$8,717,432
2011	91	\$17,235,645
2012	112	\$11,779,011
2013	91	\$7,974,570
2014	86	\$9,335,675
2015	101	\$6,052,688
2016	123	\$34,882,295
2017	107	\$50,879,621
2018	103	\$5,404,187
2019	120	\$43,255,267
2020	19	\$13,327,933

Source: City of Sycamore Permit Records

The distribution of Sycamore’s retail sales taxes has been generally stable except for the significant economic downturn that plagued the United States for several years beginning in late 2008. In Sycamore, automobile dealerships remain the largest generators of retail sales tax. In terms of assessed valuation, the proportional size of Sycamore’s commercial sector has remained relatively stable since 1997. The commercial EAV in 1997 was 20.9% of the total EAV; this proportion increased to 21.4% (\$46,370,926) in 2002; 22.4% (\$83,210,491) in 2012 and stood at 22.2% (\$98,760,630) in 2018.

The distribution of retail sales tax revenue in Sycamore shifted considerably between 2014 and 2019, before the pandemic. Total sales tax revenue declined 29.3%. Sales tax revenue from manufacturers more than doubled, although it represents a relatively minor share of total sales. Sales from discretionary items like apparel and drinking and eating places increased (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Sycamore Sales Tax Revenue by Type of Retailer*

Retailer Type	2014	2019	% Change, 2014-2019	% of Total in 2014	% of Total in 2019
General Merchandise	\$31,686	\$31,635	-0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Food	\$1,129,862	\$1,263,731	11.8%	3.9%	6.2%
Drinking and Eating Places	\$968,229	\$1,228,137	26.8%	3.4%	6.0%
Apparel	\$10,152	\$35,005	244.8%	0.0%	0.2%
Furniture & HH & Radio	\$84,590	\$95,431	12.8%	0.3%	0.5%
Lumber, building, Hardware	\$936,140	\$1,078,135	15.2%	3.2%	5.3%
Car dealerships, gas stations, convenience stores, drug stores, and misc. retail**	\$16,417,359	\$14,785,659	-9.9%	56.9%	72.6%
Agriculture & All Others	\$9,110,437	\$1,560,486	-82.9%	31.6%	7.7%
Manufacturers	\$143,656	\$294,922	105.3%	0.5%	1.4%
Total	\$28,832,111	\$20,373,142	-29.3%		

*Municipal share of statewide sales tax plus Home Rule sales tax.

**The original Department of Revenue Data included two separate categories: Automotive & Filling Stations, and Drugs & Miscellaneous Retail. However, gas station revenue was inconsistently classified in this data for 2014 and 2019. These categories were combined to circumvent classification errors.

Source: Illinois Department of Revenue, Sales Tax Statistics, 2014 & 2019.

Labor Force

Sycamore’s labor force, the population employed or actively seeking work, totaled 5,036 in 1960, or 72% of the total population 16 years of age or older. In that year, the proportion of the total population in the labor force across the State of Illinois was 60%. In 1990, Sycamore’s labor force had fallen to 4,939 or 51% of the total population of 9,708. In 2000, residents who were 16 years of age or older in the workforce totaled 6,566 of a population of 12,020 (55%). The U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that 73.7% of residents 16 years of age or older were in the labor force from 2008-2012, but the labor force participation rate, the share of residents ages 16 and over in the labor force, decreased to 70.5% in the 2014-2018 period. Statewide, the 2014-2018 labor force participation rate was 65.3%. The labor force excludes retirees, full-time students who are not seeking employment, and those who are unemployed but have abandoned their job searches.

The distribution of employment changed dramatically in the period from 1960 to 2010. The Figure 6 depicts these changes.

Figure 6. Employment of Residents by Major Industry (Employed Persons 16 Years and Over)*

Category	1960	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018
Agriculture	53	97	138	163	82	143
Construction	144	213	354	426	740	515
Wholesale & Retail Trade	489	1,024	875	861	1,214	1,446
Professional (Health, education, public administration)	457	1,164	1,597	2,275	3,364	3,030
Service (finance, insurance, real estate, business, information, personal, entertainment)	352	393	485	772	1,771	2,153
Other (Manufacturing, transportation, utilities)	1,663	1,721	1,606	1,886	2,127	2,072
Total	3,158	4,612	5,055	6,383	9,298	9,359

**Data reflects jobs held by Sycamore residents, not necessarily the jobs physically located in Sycamore. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018 & 1960-2010 Decennial Census.*

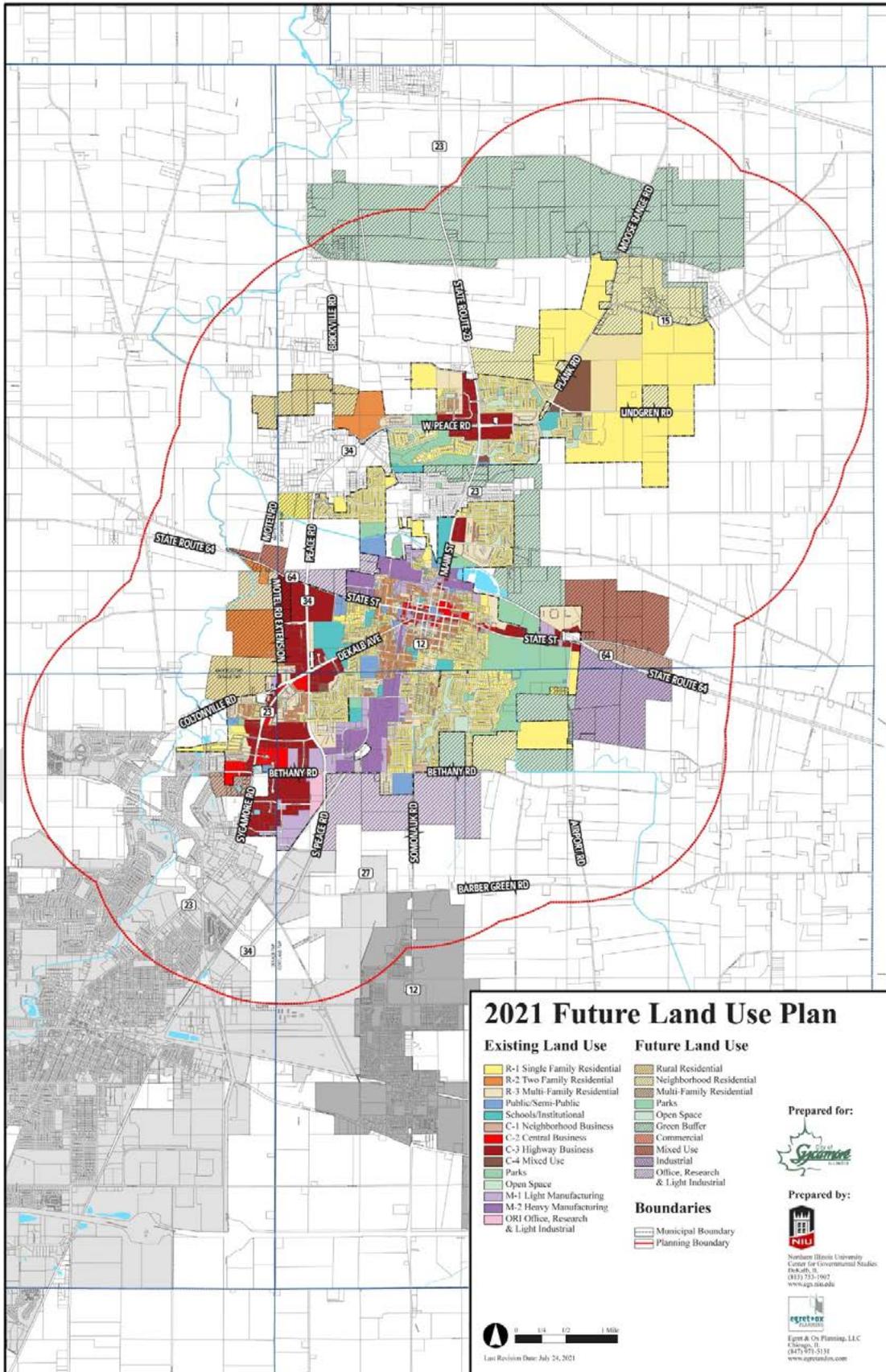
Future Land Use

The 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update presents the City's allocation and location of land for different uses. These decisions are basic building blocks for economic growth planning. Highlights from the City of Sycamore's 2021 Plan Update follow. The Future Land Use Plan can be found on the following page (Figure 7).

Commercial

Commercial designations in the primary development area (land within the city limits) will accommodate retail, service, and office uses that serve the Sycamore planning area (within 1.5 miles of the city limits) and beyond. They are generally intended to provide for highway business uses as opposed to neighborhood business uses. Neighborhood commercial uses may be integrated with mixed use-residential developments. The proposed commercial uses are automobile-oriented and are located to provide direct access to and from arterial and collector streets. Two large and un-annexed areas remain open to annexation for highway business purposes: (1) the northeast corner of Illinois Route 64 and Peace Road and the northeast and southeast corners of Airport Road and Illinois Route 64. These areas should be developed in a unified fashion rather than in parcel-by-parcel strip developments. Approximately 1,067 acres of commercially zoned land exists within the present City limits with 274 acres proposed for future land use.

Figure 7. Future Land Use Plan



Industrial

The City annexed two prime areas for industrial development: roughly 60 acres within the “Thanks America” subdivision that lies west of Peace Road and north of Wirsing Parkway, and a 64 acre parcel within the Sycamore Prairie Business Park. While heavier industrial uses may be introduced in the Crosby Avenue area and “Thanks America” subdivision, light manufacturing, warehouse, and distribution uses will be encouraged in the areas abutting Bethany Road. Office/research uses can be a component within designated industrial areas but would be subordinate to the principal industrial uses within the context of a creatively planned development.

Light industrial development may also be a minor component of a mixed-use land designation. However, the more extensive and costly infrastructure requirements for industrial uses would typically make the siting of other uses financially unfeasible.

The Land Use Plan includes a total of 573 acres of existing industrial (manufacturing), with 39 acres proposed for future industrial use.

Office, Research, and Light Industrial (ORI)

In keeping with regional planning trends and local aspirations for low impact “high tech” businesses to diversify the City’s employment and tax base, the Comprehensive Plan Update depicts several “Office/Research/Light Industrial” areas. Such developments invite such uses as:

- laboratories,
- the low-impact manufacturing of electronic and scientific instruments,
- experimental product development,
- printing and publishing,
- training and educational facilities,
- other businesses that are not offensive in terms of emissions, noise, dust, or frequent and repetitive truck movements
- flex spaces,
- coworking spaces,
- business incubators,
- tech start-up,
- breweries/microbreweries, and
- makerspaces

Three prime areas for ORI development are the northwest corner of Illinois Route 64 and Peace Road; the southwest corner of Bethany and Somonauk Roads; and along the south side of Bethany Road between Sycamore Road and Peace Road (adjoining the present Monsanto campus). The land area south of the regional detention pond at the southwest corner of Bethany and Somonauk Roads is on the periphery of the path for the DeKalb Taylor Airport’s northeast runway and would not be suitable for residential uses. The Land Use Plan Includes 27 acres of existing ORI land, with 583 acres proposed for future ORI use.

Downtown Sycamore

Downtown Sycamore is an asset that embodies the Sycamore community and helps shape its identity. As the heart of the City, the historic center serves as home to the DeKalb County seat offering a collection of locally owned shops and restaurants woven into a network of intimate tree-lined streets. High quality streetscapes enhance the traditional street grid by introducing on-street parking and wide, commercially oriented sidewalks with a variety of traditional street features. These elements combine to establish an active pedestrian environment possessing the quaint nature of a traditional small town and reinforcing the identity and charm of the community.

This section identifies opportunities to further enhance the downtown area. These recommendations are based on public input solicited for the 2021 update and include resident, visitor, and business owner surveys. The discussion focuses on five key areas: Marketing, Real Estate Market and Economic Development, Land Use and Zoning, Access and Circulation, and Signage and Wayfinding.

Marketing

There is a general interest in determining how Sycamore can promote the downtown area to people outside of the City, who may not be aware of the types of shops, services, and the unique environment offered.

In addition to traditional print and online marketing, the use of information centers in the downtown area would provide opportunities to highlight businesses, history, unique architecture, and significant natural features such as mature trees, all of which contribute to the unique atmosphere of the downtown. This can be accomplished through informational kiosks in public parking areas or through a formal welcome center.

Events and promotions are successful revenue generators for downtown businesses and participation by businesses is high. The City will continue to work closely with DeKalb County, the Sycamore Chamber of Commerce, the Sycamore Library, and downtown businesses regarding these efforts. A welcome center or additional informational kiosks can be utilized to promote both programs and initiatives that are mutually beneficial to all parties. Creating new spaces and preserving existing ones so the size and number of events can grow should be a priority.

Real Estate Market and Economic Development

Residents, business owners, and visitors all value downtown's mix of locally owned businesses, small town ambience and historic character. The City has invested in the downtown and there is support for sustaining that investment in the form of continued streetscape improvements, façade grants and financial incentives to small businesses. Residents and business owners benefit from a mix of businesses. New kinds of businesses should be encouraged. There is also a desire for more entertainment venues. While new kinds of businesses are desired, there is also interest among existing businesses in clustering of similar businesses. Signage, curbside pickup modifications, contactless service, and other changes that have proved beneficial to businesses and shoppers should be retained.

Filling storefronts is key to business success. A critical mass of retailers is necessary to continue to attract enough shoppers. Presently the storefronts are occupied by a mix of retail, restaurant, office, and service uses. Sycamore might consider what a desirable balance is and consider policies to encourage that balance. Successful downtown businesses generate demand for more business space and create foot traffic that supports sales growth at existing businesses.

The City should pursue policies that encourage existing downtown businesses to expand into additional downtown space rather than relocating. Such policies benefit the businesses, downtown in general, and demand for downtown space. Population growth creates additional demand for the goods and services offered by downtown businesses. Therefore, business owners support residential growth, particularly new residential development targeted to young adults.

Land Use and Zoning

Interest in the downtown area increased as the economy rebounded from the lows of the Great Recession. While several potential businesses approached the City looking to turn adjacent residential uses into commercial offices and/or storefronts, the emphasis has generally been to fill out the existing downtown district before considering expanding the footprint. Retaining residential areas adjacent to downtown can provide a strong base of customer support for nearby businesses.

Active Downtown

Implementation of programs to attract and retain unique businesses will help sustain an active downtown and fill vacant storefronts to draw shoppers, diners, and visitors to the downtown area. Encouraging the use of upper floor spaces for residential purposes provides a local base of residents who can visit downtown shops, services, and restaurants. A policy limiting the amount of first floor; State Street facing space occupied by non-retail/restaurant uses should be considered. Downtown should also provide spaces that appeal to employment-generating uses, such as professional offices, coworking spaces, business incubators, and flexible spaces for emerging entrepreneurs.

Downtown Sycamore would benefit from continued steps that enable it to evolve into a place where people live and work rather than just a place to visit for a short time and then leave. This would create a more active downtown that has an around-the-clock population of residents and workers who can support downtown businesses throughout the day. As vacancies begin to fill with new business and possible residential uses the City will need to identify opportunities to expand parking.

The COVID-19 pandemic destabilized the downtown business community beginning in early 2020. City officials and local partners have worked together to help businesses through current challenges. Continued collaboration can help stabilize the local economy, support local business owners, and take appropriate steps to continue making Sycamore a desirable place to shop, dine, and set up new businesses.

Public Input

Public input into the 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update included surveys of residents (343 responses), visitors (142 responses), and business owners (81 responses). The points listed below were particularly relevant for economic development.

Findings from all Surveys

- Downtown is important to residents, visitors, and businesses.
- Nearly all respondents visit downtown and want it preserved and strengthened.
- More variety of businesses are desired throughout the community but especially downtown.
- There is particular interest in more food options downtown.
- Respondents say they would spend more in Sycamore if there were a greater variety of businesses.
- Business owners would like more thought given to clustering complimentary businesses.
- There is support for incentives to encourage small businesses downtown.
- There were many comments that the east side, particularly East State Street, needs significant improvement.

Comments and Concerns from Business Owners

- There is general satisfaction with Sycamore as a business location and appreciation of the City's efforts.
- Most businesses anticipate level or higher volume and profits over the next two years. Bars and restaurants are less optimistic.
- Some businesses would like to expand but do not think there is space available.
- Businesses are concerned about high rents.
- Businesses want more City transactions online and more streamlined processes.
- There is strong interest in more marketing.
- Respondents would like to see improvements to buildings.
- For those businesses located downtown:
 - Appearance and foot traffic are the most important downtown characteristics for their business (both points selected by 73% of respondents)
 - 40% say their building needs significant external repairs but 93% say downtown buildings mostly look good
 - 87% participate in events and 67% say they are important to business revenue
 - Parking and internet are not issues
 - About half want first floor uses restricted
 - 52% own the building where they are located

Visitor Spending

- The most frequent amount spent by visitors was \$51-100 but approximately 40% of visitors spent a greater amount.
- People would like more of the following businesses (number of mentions):
 - Restaurants of all types (39)
 - Clothing (39)
 - Specialty foods (34)
 - Gifts (30)
 - Shoes (26)
 - Books (18)
 - Furniture/décor (13)
 - Sporting goods (12)
 - Crafts/fabric (10)

Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives were developed based on the preceding background information, input from the surveys, and the thoughts of EDC members. The EDC met to discuss the goals and objectives in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update that are most relevant to the EDC's mission. The commissioners modified the selected goals and objectives, added additional objectives, and then prioritized them. These goals and objectives can form the basis for future economic development strategies. The goals and objectives presented below, grouped into the same four categories that are found in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update: Commercial, Industry, Downtown, and Economic Development.

Commercial

Goal: Focus primarily on community-oriented commercial development, including retail and service outlets, while also encouraging development that will attract spending from both inside and outside of the community.

Objectives:

1. Continue to support the revitalization of the downtown commercial district, which is vital to the community's image, identity, and economic base.
2. In cooperation with the Sycamore Chamber of Commerce, the DeKalb EDC and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, promote more intense retail development in three key areas: (1) The First Rockford Development (land on the west side of Peace Road between DeKalb Avenue and Illinois Route 64); (2) the Menard Subdivision; and (3) the corner of Peace/Plank and Route 23.
3. Balance the needs of downtown and outlying commercial sites to minimize competition and encourage growth in all areas.
4. Identify redevelopment areas and utilize economic development tools to ensure that appropriate properties are repurposed to fill retail needs and are consistent with community expectations regarding appearance.

5. Initiate a business retention program to preserve the existing retail and commercial base of the community.
6. Encourage the clustering of complementary businesses in commercial areas and downtown.
7. Consider making permanent the pandemic related adjustments to local codes regarding additional outdoor dining, easier access for curbside pickup, signage informing the public of options for interacting with the business, and other changes beneficial to businesses and the community.

Industry

Goal: Retain Sycamore’s quality industrial firms and diversify the community’s industrial base by attracting new industry to Sycamore.

Objectives:

1. Encourage research facilities and other “light” industrial uses.
2. Ensure roadways and utilities are adequate to support desired industrial uses.
3. Aggressively promote the remaining development-ready sites in the Sycamore Prairie Business Park and Thanks America Subdivision.
4. Plan for and facilitate the development of new industrial sites for future industrial expansion. The extension of Crosby Avenue to Peace Road through the Peterson Farm would open additional industrially zoned sites. Plan for access along Bethany and Peace Roads that could open additional industrial sites.
5. Identify and create a new industrial park.
6. Collaborate with the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, Sycamore Community School District 427, Kishwaukee College, and the Kishwaukee Education Consortium to enhance the availability of skilled labor through the Workforce Development Program.
7. Continue networking with the Sycamore Chamber of Commerce, the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Illinois Department of Transportation, and other agencies as needed to market Sycamore’s industrial sites.
8. Support improvement of the Sycamore Industrial Park to accommodate new industrial uses.
9. Consider and actively support new industrial uses in former industrial buildings located near downtown.

Downtown

Goal: Enhance the vitality and sustainability of the downtown in terms of aesthetics and commercial activity.

Objectives:

1. Continue to work towards a true downtown brand providing a cohesive and modern aesthetic to downtown signage and way finding and apply that brand identity to help market downtown as a unique experience within the City.
2. Focus downtown development efforts on infill and other enhancements before considering expansion of the downtown boundaries.
3. Work with the Sycamore Chamber of Commerce to target specialty shopping and restaurants.
4. Retain changes made to accommodate outdoor dining and curbside pickup that have been popular with customers and businesses.
5. Explore creating a downtown business attraction program that provides incentives for desirable businesses to locate in the downtown.

Economic Development

Goal: Enhance the local economic climate to ensure that Sycamore is a desirable community in which to live, work, and conduct business.

Objectives:

1. Actively work to increase business retention through the EDC and all City offices.
2. Encourage locally employed nonresidents to become residents by promoting workforce housing and other development attractive to this group.
3. Develop and sustain a multi-year plan for infrastructure repairs to better serve existing businesses and residents.
4. Promote a mix of quality housing for households of all sizes and incomes.
5. Work cooperatively with neighboring municipalities and DeKalb County to promote regional planning initiatives, market city and county development opportunities, and support existing joint planning agreements that reduce adverse competition for new business.
6. Actively market available commercial and industrial sites to expand and diversify the community's tax base.

Prioritized Objectives

Prioritizing the objectives provides guidance to the City when allocating resources including funds and staff time. The EDC prioritized the objectives through an online ranking system, considering the impact each objective might have on the community and how achievable it was given resources likely to be available. Figure 8 lists the objectives in priority order with number one being the highest priority.

Figure 8. Prioritized Economic Development Objectives (1 is highest priority)

Priority Rank	Commercial	Industrial	Downtown	Economic Development
1	Support and revitalize downtown.	Encourage research facilities and other light industrial uses.	Continue work on a true downtown brand.	Actively work to increase business retention.
2	Promote more intense retail development in key areas.	Ensure roadways and utilities are adequate to support desired industrial uses.	Focus on infill before expanding beyond current downtown boundaries.	Encourage people working in Sycamore to become residents by promoting workforce housing and developments attractive to potential residents.
3	Balance the needs of downtown and outlying commercial sites to minimize competition and encourage growth in all areas.	Aggressively promote remaining sites in the Sycamore Prairie Business Park and Thanks America Subdivision.	Work with the Sycamore Chamber to target specialty shopping and restaurants.	Develop and sustain a multi-year plan for infrastructure repairs.
4	Identify redevelopment areas and use economic development tools to repurpose properties for retailers and meet appearance expectations.	Plan for and facilitate the development of new industrially zoned sites including access along Peace and Bethany Roads.	Retain popular changes to outdoor dining and curbside pickup.	Promote a mix of quality housing for all sizes and incomes.
5	Initiate a business retention program.	Identify and create a new industrial park.	Explore creating a downtown business attraction program.	Work cooperatively with other municipalities on regional planning initiatives.
6	Encourage clustering of complementary businesses.	Collaborate with area educational institutions to grow the local work force.		Actively market available commercial and industrial sites to expand and vary the City's tax base.
7	Consider permanent code changes to retain pandemic adjustments that have long term community value.	Collaborate with other organizations to market Sycamore's existing industrial sites.		
8		Support improvement and reuse of the Sycamore Industrial Park.		
9		Support industrial reuse of older underutilized industrial buildings near downtown.		

Sycamore and Countywide Growth

DeKalb County completed a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in 2018. The CEDS is designed to encourage economic growth in all DeKalb County communities and provides a structure for looking at Sycamore’s role within the county’s economy. The CEDS’ five goals and related strategies are presented below along with comments on how they relate to Sycamore.

Goal 1: Ensure DeKalb County has a talent pipeline that meets the needs of workers and employers.

Strategies:

1. Conduct and regularly update a labor market analysis for the County.
2. Strengthen the relationship between employers and NIU, Kishwaukee College, and high schools throughout the county.
3. Support the development of housing stock that meets the needs of a range of workers.
4. Use commuting data to identify new worker recruitment targets.

While Sycamore is home to approximately 18.5% of the County’s population, its residents comprise nearly a quarter of the County’s college educated population (Figure 9). Sycamore has affordable homes, a strong school district, and a small-town lifestyle attractive to potential residents. By continuing to develop and improve this desirable quality of life, Sycamore can help attract the workforce needed locally and throughout the County.

Figure 9. Educational Attainment, Sycamore and DeKalb County, 2021

Factor	Sycamore	DeKalb County	% From Sycamore
2021 Population Age 25+: Bachelor’s Degree	3,159	13,528	23.4%
2021 Population Age 25+: Graduate/Professional Degree	1,924	8,203	23.5%

Source: Esri, ArcGIS Business Analyst, 2021.

EDC objectives include encouraging people working in Sycamore but living elsewhere to become Sycamore residents. Planning for a variety of housing options is included in Sycamore’s 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update. An additional EDC objective is continued collaboration with area educational institutions to grow the workforce.

Goal 2: Identify and recruit target industries.

Strategies:

1. Identify strong and growing industry sectors.
2. Focus recruitment efforts on logistics, agriculture, and other known economic development targets.
3. Attract technology-based companies and start-ups to a research and development park in collaboration with NIU.

Figure 10 shows the share of jobs by category located in Sycamore in relation to the county. Categories where Sycamore has an exceptionally high percentage are in bold. Many of these categories are in growth industry sectors, showing the importance of Sycamore’s employers.

Figure 10. Comparison of Jobs in Sycamore and DeKalb County by Industry

Industry	Jobs in Sycamore	Jobs in DeKalb County	Share of Jobs in Sycamore
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2	473	0.4%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0	17	0.0%
Utilities	0	64	0.0%
Construction	189	1,913	9.9%
Manufacturing	1,674	4,214	39.7%
Wholesale Trade	195	1,586	12.3%
Retail Trade	813	4,082	19.9%
Transportation and Warehousing	424	1,087	39.0%
Information	71	468	15.2%
Finance and Insurance	281	692	40.6%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	23	235	9.8%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	282	690	40.9%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	98	131	74.8%
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation	200	1,054	19.0%
Educational Services	989	6,698	14.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,004	3,756	26.7%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	27	335	8.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	663	2,333	28.4%
Other Services (excluding Public Administration)	263	1,104	23.8%
Public Administration	661	1,137	58.1%
Total	7,859	32,069	24.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2018.

The EDC has identified the need for a new industrial park and improvements to the existing Sycamore Industrial Park as objectives. The 2021 Comprehensive Plan Update also identifies sites for industrial growth.

Goal 3: Create a countywide business climate in DeKalb County that contributes to business success.

Strategies:

1. Streamline regulations for business location and expansion.
2. Convene an economic development boot camp for local officials.
3. Encourage the adoption of consistent economic development marketing messages.
4. Publicize available economic development tools.

Responses to the survey of Sycamore business owners indicate that the City is creating a positive business climate. The Sycamore Chamber of Commerce also contributes to this positive climate.

Goal 4: Brand and promote the “DeKalb County Experience” that focuses on the county’s unique assets.

Strategies:

1. Support entrepreneurship and innovation throughout the county.
2. Incorporate the county’s innovative agricultural practices into marketing messages.
3. Increase awareness of area arts, culture, and entertainment.
4. Create and maintain a quality-of-life dashboard.

Positive findings from the survey of residents and visitors regarding arts, culture, entertainment, and shopping/dining show that Sycamore is doing much to enhance the DeKalb County Experience.

Goal 5: Collaborate countywide to maximize the economic health of all communities in DeKalb County.

Strategies:

1. Market all communities in the county.
2. Coordinate and communicate activities between countywide stakeholders.
3. Market strategically important development targets throughout DeKalb County.
4. Promote opportunities for communities to benefit economically from collaboration.
5. Fund infrastructure improvements.

Sycamore has shown support for countywide planning and economic development efforts, financially supporting both the DeKalb County Regional Planning Commission and the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation. The EDC’s objectives support continued work with other organizations and communities to further countywide growth. DeKalb County’s Opportunity Unbound provides a structure for the City to participate in a coordinated countywide marketing effort.

Next Steps

The Economic Development Playbook was developed in conjunction with the 2021 Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, this report can help ensure that the EDC’s future work is coordinated with the City’s future land use planning deliberations and initiatives. The report positions the EDC to effectively suggest and advise the City regarding business growth incentives either in place or to be considered, physical improvements that would be supportive of local businesses, and other actions designed to encourage economic growth. This report also provides the City with completed first steps towards developing a detailed economic development strategy focused on implementing goals and objectives.