

# STATE ROAD 56 CORRIDOR STUDY

*with consideration of larger initiatives*

TOWNS OF FRENCH LICK AND WEST BADEN SPRINGS

INTERIM REPORT  
DECEMBER 13, 2004



*Enhanced SR 56 roundabout concept*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The development of a new casino combined with the reconstruction of SR 56, renovation of the French Lick Springs Hotel and Resort and reopening of the West Baden Springs Hotel provides the greatest redevelopment opportunity the Springs Valley communities have seen in decades.

To capitalize on this significant opportunity for the benefit of residents of French Lick, West Baden Springs, Orange County, and the surrounding regions, a corridor development plan was initiated to guide appropriate development. The plan itself is a joint venture between the Towns of West Baden Springs and French Lick, with significant input from residents and other community stakeholders.

This document is an interim report documenting ideas discussed, policy decisions made and summarizing next steps in the process.

### **Development Goals**

Through a stakeholder and community input process, an overall goal was set to:

***Develop the Towns of French Lick and West Baden Springs into a world class resort community destination***

The theme for development is intended to emphasize the historic small town character, being sensitive to the 1920's-1930's era in which the two historic hotels were first in their prime.

### **SR 56 Improvement Project**

Design plans are underway through INDOT that will result in the reconstruction of SR 56 between Prospect and French Lick as part of a greater project improving SR 56, SR 37, and US 150 in the region. As proposed, the SR 56 project will replace pavement and curbs, replace the Lost River Bridge and improve intersections at SR 56 and SR 145.

While the project is needed and desired by the community, when the project was originally scoped several years ago, it was intended to be a straight forward pavement replacement project. In the time period between when the scope of the original road project was determined and the preliminary engineering work initiated, the casino

initiative was approved. As a result, the Towns' desire that the INDOT SR 56 road project be re-evaluated to verify that it is keeping with the emerging vision and overall redevelopment efforts to develop the "community into a world class resort destination".

The Consultant Team recommends that specific elements of the current INDOT SR 56 plan need to be reconsidered as follows:

- **Prospect (SR 56/US 150 Intersection):** Encourage an alternative intersection alignment at SR 56/US 150 (such as a roundabout) that will maintain and nurture the small town/"hamlet" character of this community.
- **Lost River Bridge:** Consider the construction of the new bridge west of the existing spring to allow reduced construction costs, improvement of the Abydel Road Intersection and preservation of the last remaining spring in the valley, while allowing the bridge to serve as a signature gateway feature to the community.
- **Scarlet Terrace/West Baden Springs Downtown:** Consider realignment of the roadway in this area in a manner that is sensitive to Scarlet Terrace, the West Baden Springs downtown business district and the West Baden Springs Hotel Entrance.
- **Streetscape Identity:** Implement a streetscape plan that is pedestrian friendly while providing for traffic calming measures.
- **SR 56/SR 145 Intersection:** Encourage the development of the proposed roundabout in a pedestrian friendly manner.
- **French Lick Downtown:** Develop a plan for revitalization of the downtown business district that is connected to the French Lick Springs Hotel and Resort and the proposed casino.

#### **Drainage**

It is recommended that the Towns begin the process of developing a long term drainage solution while also

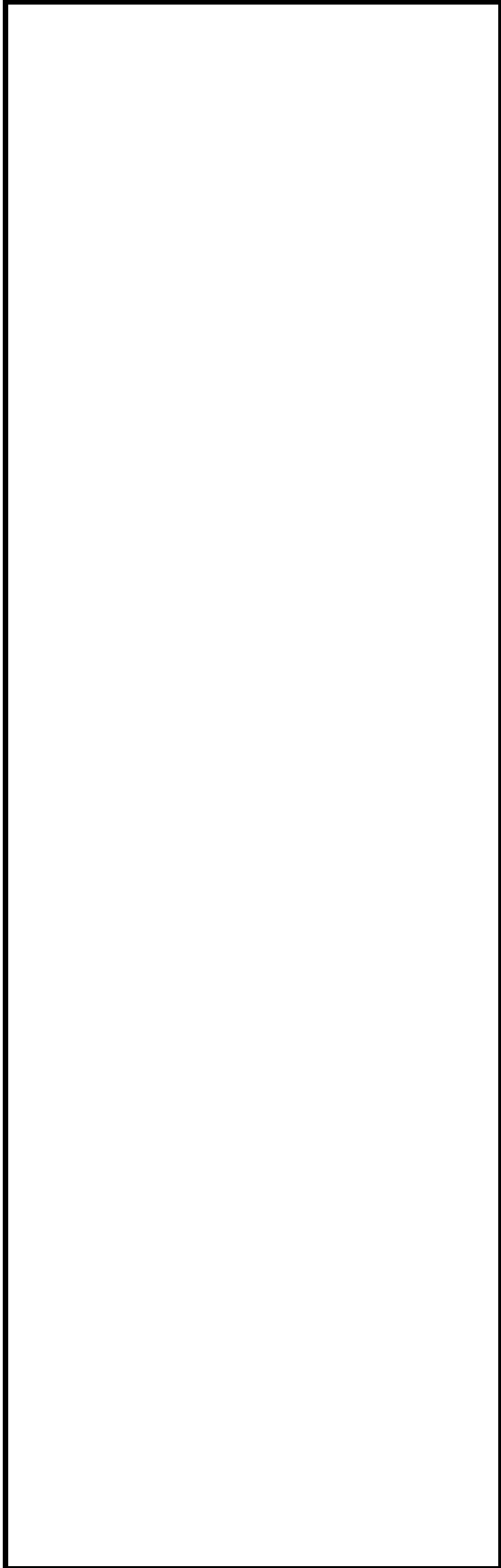
implementing short term measures to mitigate the impact of flooding. The long term solution identified includes the construction of a dam/levee on French Lick Creek that will prevent water from the Lost River from backing up into West Baden Springs and French Lick. This solution needs to be coupled with the installation of one or more reservoirs on French Lick Creek south of the community in order to provide an effective long term solution. It is recommended that the communities begin the detailed process of planning and design of this solution in the first quarter of 2005.

Since the long term solution could take 10-15 years or more to implement, a series of short term measures should be undertaken to mitigate the impacts of flooding. These measures include working with INDOT to raise key segments of highways and developing alternate routes in/out of the community for visitors in the event of flooding.

#### **Next Steps**

The next steps identified to be part of this planning effort include:

- Develop a land use plan to complement the Corridor Plan
- Finalize the entire corridor plan after input from stakeholders and INDOT.
- Develop a downtown revitalization plan for French Lick
- Develop design standards for the corridor.
- Implement recommended improvements



PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Orange County, Indiana towns of French Lick and West Baden Springs are facing great change caused by the intersection of two major initiative:

- Development of the 11th Casino in Indiana
- Reconstruction of SR 56 through Valley by the Indiana Department of Transportation

The team of Hannum Wagle & Cline/Storrow Kinsella Associates with support from Banning Engineering, have been retained by the Towns to assist them in managing the change spurred by these projects, and successfully integrate them with the Towns' vision of becoming a worldclass resort destination.

The two towns and are interested in the growth and future of Springs Valley initiated this process and began with a focused planning effort along the SR 56 corridor. The project began in July of 2004 and the group has been meeting to evaluate the current pavement and bridge replacement project proposals while considering integral, parallel and related ideas for improvements along the SR 56 corridor.

The project identified general goals and objectives for the SR 56 Corridor Development. These goals and objectives were determined and then documented following meetings with Town representatives and various project stakeholders.

During planning sessions, issues were identified and organized related to the various settlements of:

- A– Prospect,
- B– The Town of West Baden Springs,
- C– The Town of French Lick, and
- D– Flooding.

Figure 2.04. Project Area and Context  
The graphic illustrates the project area that has been the focus of the report indicated by the dashed line.

Specific issues related to the corridor were evaluated and studied including gateways, pedestrian connectivity, economic development and accessibility to the valley during significant flood events.

These issues were discussed with the community and determined worthy of further exploration. Design study resulted in a series of conceptual ideas to address the issues. These concepts were presented in preliminary form at a planning workshop held with town representatives in Indianapolis. Input from town representatives was incorporated into the ideas for refinement, and a first draft of the proposed Corridor Plan for SR 56 was presented at an October 11th, 2004 Public Meeting.

Following the public hearing, subsequent presentations and meetings have been conducted with various project stakeholders to review and receive comments on the draft Corridor Plan. Comments received thus far support the INDOT plans to rehabilitate the roadway in partnership with the town's desire to be sensitive to the historic, natural, social and economic environments of the valley.

Specifically, the two towns and broader community position regarding the planned SR 56 project is that infrastructure improvements, both vehicular and pedestrian, are needed in the valley. With respect to construction schedules and project timelines, the communities favor establishing and facilitating a timeline for all of the projects in the valley that meet the needs of the valley, including the Casino Developer and residents of Orange County. However, the two towns recognize that the project, as scoped in 1999/2000 and as currently designed, does not, nor could have addressed the significant changes that have occurred in recent years within the valley. Specifically, a new casino, 30-60 million dollars in investment in the West Baden Springs Hotel, traffic counts projected to more than double, new development interest and investment, increasing property values leading to new investment, and a completely new influx of tourists and pedestrian traffic.

The towns are pleased that the project is planned and want to work with the INDOT to find ways to embrace the positive change in a context sensitive way for the residents of the valley, Orange County and the State of Indiana.

Finally, the towns would like to compliment INDOT and the State of Indiana on its efforts to work with the community and request that the dialogue continue about what is best for the SR 56 project and its potentially valuable contribution to the success of the community's and the State's economic vitality.