

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

The City of Hobart is located in Lake County, adjacent to the Porter County boundary, approximately forty (40) miles southeast of Chicago. The City shares a common border on the north with Lake Station and New Chicago, south with unincorporated Lake County, west with Gary and Merrillville, and east with Portage and unincorporated Porter County. Hobart is served by excellent transportation facilities including Interstate Highway Routes 65, 80, 90, and 94, U.S. Highways 30 and 6, and State Roads 51 and 130. Because of these transportation facilities, the convenient location with respect to the Chicago Metropolitan area, and a stable, relatively low tax rate, the population of the City has steadily increased from 1940 to 1980 (see Table 1).

During the decade from 1980-1990, the effect of an aging population, coupled with a continuing sewer moratorium on new construction, resulted in the first population decrease in Hobart's history, and a climb in tax rate. In the early 1990s, the sewer moratorium was lifted and an aggressive residential tax abatement program was initiated in 1992, resulting in new residential development and a corresponding population increase.

Additional growth beyond the study period will not be limited by the availability of land for development. Hobart has an abundance of vacant developable property in addition to the recently annexed parcel, which represents nine (9) square miles of low density development. Within the original City boundary, approximately \_\_\_\_\_ acres lie vacant, with about 85% zoned residentially and the remainder zoned for light industrial or commercial. Residential growth is expected to continue, although at a slower rate, well after 2010. Pre-annexation saturation population, based on available land, current zoning, future comprehensive plans, and maximum density requirements, is not meaningful because it will occur in the extreme distant future.

The City of Hobart is provided with sanitary sewer service from a number of utility providers. The City is a wholesale customer of the Gary Sanitary District (GSD), which serves an area bounded by 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the north and 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue on the south. In this area, the City is responsible for all gravity and forced sanitary and storm sewer mains and lift stations within its boundaries. The GSD is responsible for all pump stations, and gravity sewers after the sewage leaves Hobart to the treatment plant, and the plant itself. The current Hobart system capacity of the GSD is 4.18 mgd, which is the same as it was in 1995. In 1995 the annualized daily average Hobart flow going to the plant was 2 mgd. However, as a result of the unparalleled growth since 1995, annualized daily average flow has climbed to 2.6 mgd. This concern over future sewer capacity resulted in an amendment to the City's tax abatement policy to encourage a more measured approach towards growth in general and a preference to develop existing in-fill or subdivided lots first. The City would like to extend sewers along S.R. 51 in the future and has collected some funds from new development along the route to help defray this future cost.

The City is also the sewer and sewage treatment provider for an area in the northeast corner of the city known as Nob Hill. Treatment capacity in this system is 75,000 gpd. Two areas within Hobart west on 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and in the northwest corner of the City, west of I-65, are direct customers with the GSD. A large area in the southwest quadrant of the City is served by the Merrillville Conservancy District (MCD), as a result of a contract executed between the Hobart Sanitary District and the MCD. The MCD is also a wholesale customer of the Gary Sanitary District. This area is west of Colorado Street, from 61<sup>st</sup> to 73<sup>rd</sup> Avenues, and the entire south section from 73<sup>rd</sup> to 85<sup>th</sup> Avenues. The Hobart capacity in this system is 3 mgd.

Residents of Hobart must pay a sewer user fee which is collected by the City on the utility bill. A portion of these funds are then paid to the GSD for operating expenses. The GSD has its own authority to float General Obligation (GO) Bonds, up to two percent (2%) of the GSD's assessed valuation. The GSD includes the Cities of Hobart, Lake Station, and the Town of Merrillville and looks to these three for the GSD Capital Improvement funds because the GSD does not have the authority to float GO Bonds based on the assessed valuation of these other cities. The City permits the purchase of water by residents directly from the Indiana American Water Company, a private utility. Indiana American Water currently has a maximum daily pumping capacity of 5.9 mgd, as they did in 1995. The peak daily demand was 3.2 mgd in 1995. This has increased to 3.5 in 2000. The Indiana American Water Company has been actively investing in major water main extensions along U. S. Highway 30 corridor in order to provide necessary supply to an actively growing area.

The City has a Mayor-Council form of government and elected its first Mayor in 1921. The City has had fourteen (14) mayors in the past eighty (80) years.

During the past ten (10) years, the City has encouraged residential, commercial and industrial development through the use of tax incentives, public investment and active recruitment of prospective developers. St. Mary's Hospital has not only experienced growth itself, but has also acted as a magnet to attract numerous health as well as non-health related facilities. In addition to adequate utilities, business development requires a functional intra-City road system. The renovation and extension of 10th Street and Wisconsin Street have provided for the efficient flow of traffic through the City.

The Ridge Road Reconstruction Project is extremely important not only for the City, but for the entire region as a reliever to the Borman Expressway (I-80/94). This project will have a profoundly positive affect on a corridor from I-65 to Wisconsin Street since this corridor has experienced decline during the past decade. Construction of the three phases of road widening improvements has begun and completion is anticipated in 2004. Cooperation from Lake County, Lake Station and New Chicago has been necessary and financial assistance was secured from INDOT. A landscaped median is also planned as an entryway into Hobart off I-65.

The Mississippi Street Project is currently under construction by the Town of Merrillville. The Town is constructing this thoroughfare using tax increment financing. The City, through an interlocal governmental agreement, is cooperating with Merrillville in acquiring necessary right of way on the east side of the road. When completed, the roadway will provide a standard four (4) lane primary arterial running from U. S. Highway 30 to 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue near I-65. The installation of this roadway in southwest Hobart opens the entire undeveloped portion from the U.S. 30 frontage north, and provides primary frontage for commercial and industrial development. The reconstruction of 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue from I-65 to Marcella Blvd., along with the addition of a third travel lane on I-65 from U.S. 30 to I-94 has been recently completed. This much needed improvement will provide better access to undeveloped property along the 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue, and future Mississippi Street corridors. The City plans to widen 61<sup>st</sup> Avenue to Colorado Street in 2003 and install intersection improvements and full function stop lights at Colorado Street as well.

Commercial and industrial development is further encouraged through the use of Tax Increment Finance (TIF) zones and tax abatement. The Mayor and Director of Development, along with HIEDC, the Northwest Indiana Forum, NIPSCO, the Chamber of Commerce, and Redevelopment Commission aggressively sell the City of Hobart to prospective business clients through publicity prospectus information about taxes, labor force, etc. The Rt. 30 Corridor and TIF zone continues to advance commercially, however, industrial growth is limited due to land available for such use. The Rt. 130 area & TIF zones also has potential for more industrial growth once area drainage concerns can be addressed.

The Hobart Industrial Economic Development Corporation (HIEDC) is a private not-for-profit group which is dedicated to bettering the economic, educational, cultural, and aesthetic quality of life in Hobart. This group has been an integral part of the recently constructed extensive Lake George lakefront improvements. They have also contributed to private improvements, such as a downtown building facade program when funding through City sources was not feasible.

Educational opportunities are high level and abundant in Hobart. The primary and secondary schools remain some of the best in Northwest Indiana. For many families, it is the reason for moving to Hobart. In 1993, ground was broken for the construction of a new state-of-the-art, eight (8) million dollar elementary school. Joan Martin Elementary has raised the bar for the level of expectations for all the other schools in Hobart. The Hobart School Board recently purchased 82 acres of property on east 10<sup>th</sup> Street for future school expansion needs.

Speaking regionally, Purdue University Calumet and Indiana University Northwest are within a few miles of the city. Valparaiso University is within fifteen (15) miles of the city. Numerous vocational schools are also within a thirty (30) mile radius. Chicago, with its' high level and diverse educational opportunities, is within forty (40) miles.

The Park and Recreation facilities are improving after years of limited financial support. A total of twenty-four (24) parks, summing to over 215 acres, serves the basic

recreational needs of the population. In addition, Indiana Dunes State Park and Dunes National Lakeshore provide access to Lake Michigan recreational opportunities.

In summary, because the city is strategically located with respect to excellent transportation facilities, has had a stable form of government, excellent public services, and an improving tax rate, has excellent utilities with sufficient additional capacity, has an abundance of vacant prime residential property, encourages business development, and has excellent educational and improving recreational opportunities, its populations will continue to steadily grow.

TABLE I  
TOTAL POPULATION

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>+/-%</u>
1940	7,166	
1950	10,224	43
1960	18,680	83
1970	21,485	15
1980	22,987	7
1990	21,822	-5
2000	25,363	16

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Editor's Note:

Includes approximately 2,600 population from Ross Township 1993 annexation.