

**Indiana Avenue Cultural District Plan
Working Plan Version**

Positioning Statement – Conveys the Unique Cultural Identity of the District

Indiana Avenue is a powerful version of the American dream through an African-American lens. “The Avenue” is the historic African-American commercial, entertainment and worship center. Today’s multi-cultural landscape is filled with enduring community landmarks, a burgeoning university campus, contemporary residences and a lush waterway. The Avenue’s rich cultural heritage comes to life on stage, in public art, museums, nearby art galleries, nightlife and in the church.

District Overview

The Indiana Avenue Cultural District contains evidence of the original commercial district for Indianapolis' African-American community. African Americans, by the early 1800's, had established a vibrant social, commercial, residential, spiritual and economic community along Indiana Avenue. African-American entertainers, entrepreneurs, politicians and working people developed "The Avenue" into a thriving neighborhood of businesses, jazz clubs, shops, professional offices, churches, schools, restaurants, a beauty school, barber and beauty shops, a hospital, physicians' offices and residences. The Walker Building was widely-known with its 1200-seat theatre and its prestigious ballroom. This was a bustling Mecca in the Midwest for skilled craftsmen, entertainers, professionals and entrepreneurs in the 30's and 40's.

Today, the district offers a limited view of that thriving past and a connection to the city's present and future as the home to many historic sites and culturally significant institutions. Indiana Avenue is a gateway to the west side of downtown Indianapolis, the hub of activity for Indiana University Purdue University of Indianapolis (IUPUI), the city's life sciences initiative and a collection of major medical campuses. Adjacent to the city's Canal and White River State Park, the district has easy pedestrian access to some of the city's finest cultural establishments, entertainment, education, and leisure venues.

The district features more than thirty historic sites. These are being networked to support and connect walking tours, educational art programs, and entertainment and restaurant facilities. Some of the most influential African-American businesses and organizations in the city are located within the district or have a visible presence. The Walker Building, once home to the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company, is already an attraction for area visitors who wish to admire the achievements of the remarkable woman who became a millionaire from an investment of \$2.00. The Walker Building was added to the National Register of Historic Landmarks in 1988. It sits at the center "The Avenue," offering an array of entertainment and education programs. The Indianapolis Urban League building, located in the 700 block of Indiana Avenue, is known for significant architecture and community leadership resources. The IPS Crispus Attucks School and Museum, named for the first American killed in the Revolutionary War, stand as a living testament to the art and history contributions of the African-American community. The school opened in 1927 for African Americans, and has produced some outstanding individuals in distinguished fields such as education, music, theater, sports, law, medicine, art and science. Crispus Attucks today serves

as a Middle School and Center for African-American History & Multi-Cultural Education.

The many African-American institutions are complimented by the Historic Ransom Place, a six block residential neighborhood that once served as home to the most influential African-American families in the city. In 1992, Ransom Place became the first African-American neighborhood in Indiana to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Today Ransom Place features the Ransom Place Museum and Learning Center, a "house museum" displaying authentic artifacts and documentation of earlier times. The neighborhood is comprised of a diverse mix of long-time residents, young urban professionals, families, and IUPUI students, faculty and staff. Affordable urban housing options are a hallmark of the area offering restored historic cottages and new residential housing. Lockefield Gardens, the nation's eighth federal public housing project is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This apartment community was built exclusively for African-American families, to clear existing substandard housing and to provide construction jobs. Parts of the apartments were demolished and the remaining apartments were rehabilitated in 1986. Nearby on the IUPUI campus, new student housing bears the names of accomplished African-American neighborhood residents, among them Wes Montgomery and Madam C.J. Walker. Flanner House, organized in 1898, was a settlement house for African Americans offering health care services. The rapid influx of African Americans into Indianapolis after 1914 increased demands for services. Flanner House moved to West Street in 1918 and is now located in the 2400 block of Martin Luther King Jr. St. A third historic African-American neighborhood found in Indiana Avenue is Historic Fayette St.

The 40's and 50's were the golden age of jazz in Indianapolis. Indianapolis produced such international jazz figures as the Montgomery Brothers, J.J. Johnson, Leroy Vinnegar, Dave Baker, Jimmy Coe, and many others. Featured entertainment greats who performed along The Avenue were Lionel Hampton, B.B. King and Count Basie. Indiana Avenue Clubs, Theaters and bistros served as a training ground for aspiring local jazz musicians. Today jazz remains a unifying theme and a significant draw for the community with the annual Indy Jazz Fest, the Indiana Avenue Renaissance Festival, Jazz on the Avenue and local jazz nightspots like the Bourbon Street Distillery. Entertainment and great food mix at Payton's Place, a signature Indiana Avenue restaurant and gathering place. Public Art features the jazz theme prominently with the sculpture "Jammin on the Avenue" and a fountain constructed of musical instruments located at Lockefield Gardens. Both are by the late sculptor John Spaulding, a native of Indianapolis.

Historically, over 12 churches served this district. One of the spiritual hearts of the district is found at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was established in 1836 and still thrives today as a religious, historical and educational resource to the community. Bethel A.M.E. Church sits on the canal at Vermont Street and is the oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in Indianapolis. The Church has a storied past of fighting discrimination with active community leadership. The original church was burnt down on July 9, 1862 by an arsonist because of its believed participation in the Underground Railroad. One of the previous Pastors of Bethel, Rev. Wills Revels who recruited African-American soldiers to fight in the Civil War, was a brother to Reconstruction Senator Hiram Revels. Bethel is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. St. Philip's Episcopal Church was founded in 1906 and continues to meet religious and social needs of the community.

The heritage of the area is well known in Indianapolis and throughout the country. Visitors and residents alike enjoy the Heritage Tourism Corridor, a walking tour identifying 31 historic sites in the district. History is brought to life for audiences by Freetown Village, a troupe of actors who depict the lifestyles of African-American Hoosiers beginning in the 1800's. These dramatic interpreters dress in period clothing, speak the dialect of the time and interact with the audience re-creating actual situations. Stories of the past can be found throughout the district on historical markers, and in museum and gallery displays.

Boundaries - Indiana Avenue is a diagonal street falling within the following general boundaries.

North - 16th Street
South - Vermont Street
West - Riverside Drive
East - Capitol Avenue

Cultural District Initiative Goals- Set by the Cultural Development Commission

Overarching Goals

1. Strengthen Indianapolis as a unique cultural destination
2. Maximize the cultural experience for visitors
3. Attract new visitors
4. Build sustainable cultural institutions, events and programs

District Level

1. Increase local cultural participation
2. Increase sales
3. Increase overnight visitation
4. Increase artist support
5. Leverage increased resources

Cultural District Initiative Benchmarks – General

1. Attendance at cultural destinations and attractions
2. Representative art galleries, restaurants and retail store sales
3. Hotel Rooms booked and hotel occupancy
4. Artist commissions and contracts
5. Track investments made in the districts – development, operations and marketing

Benchmarks for the Indiana Avenue District – How you will measure success?

These need to be determined by the district.

- Increased employment in the district.
- Increased home ownership in the district.
- Increased retail/commercial square footage in the district.
- Increased number of visitors.
- Increased awareness of Indianapolis African-American history, culture and accomplishments.

District Assets/Strengths

- **Cultural Identity**

- Strong jazz, blues and gospel music heritage
- Original African-American commercial, residential, spiritual and social district
- Enduring historical perspective - appreciation of the past
- National reputation built on African-American entrepreneurship and achievements

- **Attraction Assets**

- Thirty-one African-American historic sites, including
 - The Walker Theatre Center/The historic Walker Building and Heritage Museum (Designated National Historic Landmark; listed on National Registry)
 - Payton's Place
 - IPS Crispus Attucks Museum
 - Ransom Place Historic Neighborhood (National Registry)
 - Fayette Street Conservation District
 - Bethel AME Church
 - Freetown Village live interpretive programming
- Jazz Festivals
 - Indy Jazz Fest
 - Indiana Avenue Renaissance Festival
 - Jazz on the Avenue
- Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art (IMOCA)
- Bourbon Street Distillery
- IUPUI Campus
- The Canal (Greenway and Waterway)
- National Institute of Fitness and Sports (NIFS)
- Flanner House Homes
- Center Township Healthplex (formerly Fall Creek YMCA)
- Stutz Building – art galleries
- The Indianapolis Urban League Building (“The Sam Jones Building”)
- Bloch Cancer Survivors Park
- Buggs Temple
- Ransom Place Park
- Victory Field
- 500 Block of Indiana Avenue (listed on National Registry)

- **Placemaking Characteristics**
 - Architecture of Historic Buildings
 - Diagonal Street
 - Interesting Public Art
 - Connection to Canal Walk
 - Proximity to IUPUI
 - Clarian People mover

- **Interesting & Involved People**
 - Long time residents offer great oral history of the district; there's a wealth of people with stories
 - Active community and neighborhood organizations
 - Ransom Place Neighborhood Association
 - Midtown Economic Development And Industrial Corporation (M.E.D.I.C.)
 - BOS CDC
 - Lockefield Civic Organization
 - New residents with a strong interest/commitment to the area
 - IUPUI students, administrators and campus visitors provide large visitor population
 - Wishard Hospital staff and supporters

- **History & Architecture**
 - Incredible collection of historic buildings and sites
 - Lockefield Gardens (listed on the National Registry)
 - 31 Sites on the Heritage Tourism Corridor
 - Indianapolis Urban League ("The Sam Jones Building")
 - African-American Memorabilia Collections
 - The Walker Theatre/Walker Manufacturing Co./Walker Building
 - Urban League
 - IPS Crispus Attucks Museum
 - Ransom Place House Museum and Walking Tour
 - Dunbar Apartments
 - Indiana Historical Society
 - Freetown Village
 - Bethel AME archives

- **Organizational Capacity**

- High level of support and involvement from the African-American Community
 - The Walker Theatre Center has an active board and staff
 - The Indianapolis Recorder, Indianapolis Star and Indiana Herald represent communication channel and capability
 - BOS CDC can provide residential and commercial development support
 - Support from M.E.D.I.C., the voice of the community
- High level of support from the Indianapolis Cultural & Business Community
 - Support from Historic Landmarks Foundation Of Indiana
 - IUPUI may have organizational resources that can be tapped
 - Support from Indianapolis Downtown, Inc.
 - The Mayor's office would serve as a resource to connect the district to the rest of the City, which will be important in generating support for the district

District Challenges

- **Improving Cultural Identity**

- Build district identity around African-American achievements, heritage and music
- District needs to strengthen its reputation for music and history with everyday activities and permanent programming
- Showcase the stories permanently for visitors
- Incorporate music throughout the district

- **Improving Attraction Assets**

- Create a nucleus of top quality attractions with a unified experience that can represent the district and attract additional offerings over time
- Attractions need to be hosted and open per regular advertised schedules to give access to visitors and to engage and guide visitors.
- More interactive activities
- More retail shops
 - Book store
 - Coffee shop
 - Clothing stores
- More live performances are needed; jazz 24/7
- A welcome center both real and electronic needs to be available to help visitors plan their itinerary
- Create an Indiana Avenue merchandising program and at least one retail location
- Additional themed food options are needed including a Soul Food Restaurant and jazz clubs
- More comprehensive history of jazz
- Add retail to serve residents and visitors

- **Improving Placemaking Characteristics**

- Unify the district and communicate the cultural position with a recognizable district identity
- Visitor amenities need to be increased including rest room accommodations and convenience food
- Way finding signage needs to be added to inform and pull the visitor through the district
- Traffic needs to be calmed and pedestrian traffic needs to be catered to with better traffic management solutions
- District identity is needed to unify the area and communicate the cultural position
- Public Art is needed to enliven the district and create visual markers that tell the story
- Streetscaping can be improved with additional landscaping and decorative markers
- Connect Indiana Avenue to the Canal Walk, IUPUI and the Cultural Trail with significant gateways
- Vehicle parking must be curtailed on the street where it blocks frontage

- **Attracting Interested & Involved People**

- The district needs more pedestrian traffic
- Need to build a stronger residential base with more home owners to create a more stable and supportive constituency
- Develop a District Association of residents and businesses that can support and undertake functions that advocate the District and its purpose and make the District self-supporting and self-developing
- Need to strengthen attractions for IUPUI students, faculty, staff and supporters to better leverage daily traffic to the campus
- African-American artists, performers, musicians, architects and creative talent needs to be drawn to the district and engaged in creating the visitor experience
- Current influential group of supporters can attract a wider array of additional supporters
- Present oral history from real storytellers

- **Enhancing History & Architecture**

- The story of Indiana Avenue needs to be captured and told in more complete, predictable, cohesive and entertaining ways; the history needs to be captured on tape
- Document, preserve and present district history
- The Walker Theatre Center needs to be re-developed into a complete destination with a regular performance and programming schedule and supportive property management services
- Madam Walker's life story and legacy need to be showcased
- Jazz and the music heritage of the area need to be brought to life for the visitor through attractions like a Jazz Walk of Fame
- The oral histories of long time residents need to be part of the vehicle to present the Indiana Avenue story
- Expand a level of history or heritage to the residents of Indianapolis
- Architecture and history needs to be described and celebrated with identifiable street and pedestrian identification
- Strong alignment with Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana is needed to develop quality programming with strong entertainment value
- Contemporary art showcasing modern African-American art

- **Increasing Organizational Capacity**

- A formal and disciplined organization is needed to act on the cultural district plan
 - Specific funding requirements must be identified and professionally packaged in order to be funded; development of consistent revenue streams to support the district
 - The district lacks dedicated "real estate development and design" talent to invent the experience from existing assets
 - The district must define funding sources and create an organization to pursue needed dollars
- The district has no formal and active role in the development of the Cultural Trail
- Attract dedicated creative, design and real estate development talent to the district

Vision Summary – Imagine a Day in the Future of the District

Indiana Avenue celebrates the African-American experience past, present and future. Visitors and residents alike enjoy the energy of a music-infused urban neighborhood jamming with the sounds of jazz, blues and gospel in restaurants, coffee houses, institutions, parks, churches and gathering places. The streets are active day and night with pedestrians traveling easily around the district, for work, recreation and worship, along Canal Walk and the Cultural Trail. The district features inspiring live performances, museum collections, festivals and events that immerse the visitor in an appreciation of the significant contributions of African Americans to Indiana and to the world. Expressions of art, history and culture abound in public art and formal exhibits. Well orchestrated heritage walking tours conduct groups to myriad points of interest to admire significant architecture, restored, historic neighborhood homes, and commercial buildings. Storytelling is at its best on The Avenue where you can visit with an "old timer", learn about Indiana Jazz Greats, and participate in a re-enactment back in the day. When you are here, you are part of the history, the present and are inspired to be part of the future of Indiana Avenue.

Top Funding Priorities - tentative

1. Development of a Destination Redevelopment Plan for the district.
2. Development of a unique and compelling identity that can be used to unify the district and communicate with the consumer/visitor
3. Development dollars to renovate and renew The Walker Theatre Center as a major attraction.
 - a. Increase activity in the theatre with a regular programming schedule including live and recorded entertainment
 - b. Re-open a themed period café
 - c. Improve the Madam Walker/Indiana Avenue memorabilia collection
 - d. Add an Indiana Avenue welcome center
 - e. Improve the retail shops with quality Walker and Indiana Avenue merchandise
 - f. Increase activity in the ballroom and lounge with more frequent scheduled events
4. Investment fund to seed improvements to attractions throughout the district that will make them more visitor friendly and accessible and more marketable
5. Funding to establish and maintain a website that can house visitor information for Indiana Avenue Cultural District
6. Operating funds to engage Freetown Village and other live performance organizations who can deliver high quality programming.
7. Operation funds for Ransom Place Museum
8. Marketing and advertising dollars to actively market Indiana Avenue

Key Strategies Summary

1. Establish an Indiana Avenue identity that showcases African-American history, culture, spiritual, social and musical legacy. Package and present the heritage in a permanent way for future generations.
2. Create a unique, compelling and accessible visitor experience with a nucleus of well developed attractions.
3. Feature two to four annual Indiana Avenue festival or event traditions that deliver a "showcase" experience.
4. Create a marketing and tourism program to increase traffic to the district, attract and engage potential visitors, residents and investors.
5. Develop the district's economic and residential base by organizing community support to effectively fund and manage development, marketing and operations within the district.
6. Improve pedestrian experience by implementing way-finding signage, welcoming gateways, public art, landscaping and other appropriate environmental enhancements that showcase the district identity, unify and link district attractions.

Key Strategy #1

Establish an Indiana Avenue identity that showcases African-American history, culture, spiritual, social and musical legacy. Package and present the heritage in a permanent way for future generations.

Priorities

- Create a unique district identity based on the district's heritage including a logo and key marketing messages.
- Preserve and protect the historical and cultural assets of the district.
 - Inventory stories/history to capture and preserve.
 - Build a list of all the stories/history that we want to capture and preserve.
 - Build an inventory of what information is already available about Indiana Avenue: books, videos, documentaries, etc.
 - Identify partners to deliver well produced programming.
 - Dedicate resources/accountability to preserve original stories, memorabilia and historical assets.
- Create or acquire educational and entertaining historical programming.
 - Create a "Neighborhood Storytellers Association" that provides people with an opportunity to share, entertain and educate.
 - Revitalize the Ransom House/Historic sites tour - update site signage and add recorded tour.
 - Design a visitor tour with Historic Landmarks Foundation.
 - Create publicly accessible story telling opportunities along the street by creating a Jazz Walk of Fame.
 - Assist Wishard with the Wishard Lost Collection of Murals painted by Hoosier Salon Artists; proposed gallery Bryce Building, first floor, 1001 W. 10th St.

Key Strategy #2

Create a unique, compelling and accessible visitor experience with a nucleus of well-developed attractions.

Priorities

- Identify a nucleus of existing businesses and organizations to collaboratively represent the Indiana Avenue experience.
 - The Walker Theatre Center
 - IPS Crispus Attucks Museum
 - Bethel AME Church
 - The Sam Jones Building
 - Center Township Healthplex
 - Payton's Place
 - 31 Site Heritage Tourism Corridor including Ransom Place
 - Freetown Village Live Interpretative Programming
- Develop a Destination Re-Development Blueprint to include:
 - Specific physical improvements needed to elevate attractions.
 - Visitor amenities improvements.
 - Viable food and retail destinations.
 - Live performance programming.
 - Design/placement of identity environmental signage/ graphics.
- Use music as a unifying theme and identity.
 - Regularly schedule live musical performances throughout the district especially at The Walker Theatre Center.
 - Add music through existing or new restaurants and clubs.
 - Add recorded music to commercial establishments.
- Improve the visitor experience.
 - Secure expected offerings as a part of the Indiana Avenue story, like soul food and live jazz clubs.
 - Develop a retail merchandising program that celebrates the Indiana Avenue story.
 - Enhance public gathering places and expand public art offerings to enrich the identity of the district.
 - Increase street retail to serve visitor and resident needs.
- Improve visitor access.
 - Provide transportation from downtown hotels and convention venues to Indiana Avenue.
 - Standardize business and attraction operating hours.
 - Add staff to engage and guide the visitor.
 - Determine "gate" or ticketing options that can be a permanent source of funding for the nucleus of key attractions. (\$25 ticket is

full day pass to multiple venues – can be purchased at any of the multiple venues)

Key Strategy #3

Feature two to four annual Indiana Avenue festival or event traditions that deliver a “showcase” experience.

Priorities

- Leverage existing events like Indy Jazz Fest and the Indiana Avenue Renaissance Festival.
 - Assess current offerings’ measure of success/value to Indiana Avenue.
 - Attract more people and pull business into Indiana Avenue destinations with enhancements.
- Identify additional existing programming that can be located or featured on Indiana Avenue each calendar year.
 - (Annual Lifetime Jazz Awards, Emancipation Day, Back to School Jam)
- Identify community or business partners who can provide the organizational and funding support to launch new offerings.
- Create stronger connections to The Canal and White River State Park programming.

Key Strategy #4

Create a marketing and tourism program to increase traffic to the district, attract and engage potential visitors, residents and investors.

Priorities

- Create a functioning and sustainable web presence for the district that can effectively represent the district experience and act as a planning tool for visitors.
- Create a single "ticketing" phone, fax and web fulfillment entity.
- Secure media partnerships that provide access to the consumer public and invite visitors to patronize area attractions and businesses.
- Create a hospitality/welcome station within The Walker Theatre Center with satellite materials distribution at locations throughout the district.
- Engage Tourism and Marketing Director or Contract Consultant who can pursue group visits, coordinate with ICVA, IDI, hotels and other tourism partners, and acquire positive public relations for the district.
- Pursue marketing mentions in area attraction materials including White River State Park, Indiana History Center, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, Artsgarden, IUPUI and others.
- Create a marketing advisory group with the Mayor's office, ICVA, IDI, State Tourism Office, IBE, Arts Council of Indianapolis, etc.

Key Strategy #5

Develop the district's commercial and residential base by organizing community support to effectively fund and manage real estate development, marketing and operations within the district.

Priorities

- Facilitate implementation of the Cultural District Plan Committees:
 - Executive - Fiscal & Administrative role plus Committee Leadership.
 - Identity/History Research
 - Marketing & Tourism
 - Community & Economic Development
 - Destination Development/Visitor Experience
 - Fundraising

- Utilize the Destination Re-Development Blueprint to set a vision and identity and to secure needed funding.
 - Confirm district boundaries.
 - Identify building and land uses and availability for re-development.
 - Determine improvements needed for existing attractions.
 - Determine feasibility of converting Stadium Drive to Indiana Avenue which will allow the street and the district to exist from 16th to Capital.

- Identify existing or new business and community partners committed to develop market, manage and fund key strategies in the area.

- Engage the residents and businesses in efforts to build the cultural identity and experience.
 - Engage IUPUI in a leadership role to leverage the institution's vast expertise.
 - Develop an Indiana Avenue Business Association to support and promote business enterprises.
 - Recruit businesses and institutions to define and create the "future" success of Indiana Avenue. (IMOCA, IUPUI related entities, new campus businesses)
 - Involve strong resident/neighborhood associations.
 - Offer an annual open house or annual "free pass" for residents to visit and enjoy the area attractions free of charge.
 - Communicate volunteer opportunities to residents, students and area workers.

- o Invite people who worship in the area to special Sunday/gospel programs that offer them the opportunity to get involved.
- Attract the entrepreneurial and creative community to live, work and play in the district.
 - o Invite artists to create product/programming for Indiana Avenue.
 - o Incubate African-American businesses and artists with special incentives or opportunities.

Key Strategy #6

Improve pedestrian experience by implementing way-finding signage, welcoming gateways, public art, landscaping and other appropriate environmental enhancements that showcase the district identity, unify and link district attractions.

Priorities

- Add engaging gateways and improve vehicular intersections for pedestrians.
 - Create a West Street/MLK elevated pedestrian walkway.
 - Create a gateway between IUPUI and Indiana Avenue that celebrates African-American Heritage and campus life.
 - Develop public art to link district destinations and create better continuity along Indiana Avenue.
 - Provide a visually compelling invitation to move traffic onto Indiana Avenue from the Canal Walk.
 - Connect to the Cultural Trail.
- Highlight and enhance public gathering spaces in the district.
 - Identify and improve the presentation of existing gathering places.
 - Add gathering and resting places along the Avenue that provide water and landscaping features, seating, public art and food.
- Improve parking availability and awareness.