

THE

BETTER  
PLAN

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The Better Strategic Plan for Munster

Councilman Jonathan Petersen, Ward 5

# Why is *The Better Plan* better for Munster?

The Town of Munster faces two distinct strategic plans for its future: the draft Strategic Plan 2025 prepared by external consultants HWC Engineering, and *The Better Plan*, a concise proposal developed by local leadership. The HWC plan offers broad ideas, but fails to offer feasible plans for implementation and, in particular, fails to offer a practical solution to the budget challenges that Munster faces. In contrast, *The Better Strategic Plan for Munster* is a focused document that prioritizes immediate action and addresses fiscal challenges without external consultancy.

*The Better Plan emerges as the superior option due to its practicality, fiscal conservatism, and alignment with immediate community needs. By avoiding bureaucratic expansion and emphasizing actionable steps—The Better Plan ensures Munster can navigate revenue constraints responsibly while preserving its high quality of life. Unlike the HWC plan’s potential for added costs and deferred implementation, this approach fosters transparency, accountability, and quick wins, making it a more effective roadmap for sustaining Munster’s desirability as a safe, well-maintained community for generations to come.*

*The Better Plan prioritizes immediate actions and directly addresses fiscal challenges.*

Key differences lie in their scope, approach, and fiscal philosophy. The HWC plan adopts a consultant-heavy approach calling for additional sub-plans and significant expenditures such as new hires like an Economic Development Director despite severe projected revenue losses from Senate Enrolled Act 1.

The HWC plan risks delays through further planning layers and will likely force the imposition of a municipal income tax further depressing growth. *The Better Strategic Plan for Munster*, however, champions efficiency with specific, low-cost measures like partnerships with Local Economic Development Organizations and annual waste audits, drawing from private-sector practices to cut inefficiencies and generate new revenues without tax increases.



*The Better Plan emerges as the superior choice. It is practical, fiscally conservative, and aligns with immediate community needs.*

## Let's break this down . . .

*The Better Plan*

**avoids  
tax  
hikes**

*The Better Plan* recognizes and addresses the significant municipal revenue losses projected from Indiana's Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1) which provides property tax relief to homeowners up to \$300. Nevertheless, Munster residents agree that imposing a municipal income tax to offset revenue losses will almost certainly cost taxpayers more. *The Better Plan* navigates these emerging fiscal constraints responsibly and transparently by prioritizing government efficiency, waste reduction, and unrealized revenue opportunities, rather than relying on tax hikes or increased spending.

*The Better Plan*

**slashes  
gov't  
waste**

*The Better Plan* applies private-sector principles to public administration including a dedicated section on "Reduce Government Waste," advocating for annual plans to eliminate inefficiencies, ranking department activities to cut the bottom 3-5%, and rewarding fiscal efficiency.

*The Better Plan* also calls for clear language and consistent application that address current inconsistencies in hiring, reviews, and vendor screening/retention.

*The Better Plan*

**knows  
the  
town**

*The Better Plan* responds to community input, focusing on practical improvements in amenities, communication, public safety, and infrastructure. With an emphasis on preserving Munster as a "highly desirable community" with strong schools, safe neighborhoods, and well-maintained parks, *The Better Plan* will ensure that "Munster will still be Munster for the next generation."



## We need to get real about the budget .....

The HWC plan will worsen budget pressures by failing to cap spending, continuing ill-conceived hiring practices, and disregarding sensible growth. In essence, the HWC plan is a consultant-driven “Tax and Spend” plan that will not produce the promised results. *The Better Plan* focuses on low-cost, immediate actions and preserving Munster’s high quality of life without burdening taxpayers.

# The Better Strategic Plan

## INTRODUCTION

*Munster is a highly desirable community, known for its excellent municipal services, friendly and well-kept neighborhoods, strong public safety, top-tier schools, and a well-maintained park system. However, the recent passage of Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1) introduces significant fiscal challenges for the town.*

*Although providing nominal property tax relief to homeowners up to \$300, SEA 1 is projected to reduce municipal revenues substantially. For Munster specifically, navigating this revenue reduction while maintaining essential services and infrastructure is the key challenge before us.*

*In contrast to the tax and spend plan proposed by outside consultant, HWC Engineering, **The Better Plan** successfully addresses revenue shortfalls by simultaneously encouraging growth and cutting costs.*



## CREATE A CULTURE OF FISCAL EXCELLENCE

*Prudent use of taxpayer dollars is vital to maintain public trust and fiscal excellence. Simple exercises, just as those used in private business, can identify and reduce waste to make more efficient work processes for staff and ensure good stewardship of public funds.*

Implement a ranking system from most to least essential tasks and target the bottom 3-5% for reduction or consolidation.

Reward department heads demonstrating fiscal efficiency and create incentives for improvement.

Follow through on expanded revenue-generating opportunities.



## AMENITIES

*The community urges that the town explore unrealized revenue opportunities to enhance town amenities, provide better programs and services, and create more jobs. Continued improvement will create a more pleasant experience for residents and attract more visitors.*

**Centennial Park:** Review parking meter system; explore more efficient paid parking alternatives; implement reasonable non-resident fees for events; assess user experience at the golf course.

**Parks Department:** Seek new revenue sources; annually review programs to cut waste.

**Train Stations:** Include passenger conveniences at or next to stations (e.g., coffee shop and/or convenience store); avail spaces for rental by commercial vendors within the station.

**West Lake Park:** Continue enhancements around Cricket Pitch.

## COMMUNICATION/TRANSPARENCY

*Residents require consistent, timely and accurate information to follow rules, participate in events, or stay safe in an emergency. Creating predictable standards, procedures, and vehicles for communication ensures benefits to both town staff and residents alike.*

**Town Website:** Overhaul and modernize website with consistent content and logical structure; commit to weekly updates to provide a well-organized, user-friendly experience.

**Resident Communications:** Establish a single, consistent online platform; implement a reliable video feed of Council Meetings, Town Boards and Commissions; ensure timely uploads of meeting recordings

**Homeowner Associations:** Develop an HOA clearinghouse; publish HOA management contact information.

**Senior Residents:** Implement a reliable method for delivering town information; open dialogue for improving the senior experience.

## ECONOMIC & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

*To restore Munster's high standards, the town is urged to partner with local economic development organizations. It is critical to ensure Munster will still be Munster for the next generation, while the community continues to progress.*

**Economic Growth:** Create robust partnerships with Local Economic Development Organizations ("LEDO") including NW Indiana Forum, One Region, Lake County Economic Alliance, etc. and repurpose and dedicate specific staff to identify and obtain grants; develop a transparent plan for TIF fund usage.

**Identify and Obtain New Grants:** Repurpose and dedicate staff to seek out grants across the entire organization to fund existing and future town functions.

**Infrastructure:** Resume planning for Calumet at 45th underpass to accommodate West Lake expansion traffic.

**Zoning:** Restore the 2018 traditional Zoning Code and previous municipal ordinance standards to maintain aesthetics, safety, and economic stability.

**Reduce Outside Consultants:** Reduce reliance on expensive outside consultants; hire a staff attorney and task with completing zoning restoration at a reasonable cost.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

*Current ethical standards are vague and are not consistently applied. It is critical to have clear directives with which all who do business with the town can comply.*

**Clear Standards:** Vendors conducting business with the town must be free of conflicts-of-interest.

**Consistency:** Use the Ethics Code consistently as an HR tool for hiring, employee reviews, and vendor screening.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

*Residents have overwhelmingly cited public safety as the most important role of local government. Providing basic safety devices where needed and taking care of Munster's first responders will reduce safety incidents. A proactive approach saves the town money.*

**Police & Fire:** Maintain quality services; create a plan to annually review staffing and compensation to stay competitive; incorporate patrols on bike paths.

**Monon Corridor South Shore Line:** Review installation of safety/privacy fencing or landscaping adjacent to residential areas where not currently installed.

## ROAD & INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE

*The condition of roads and infrastructure is the most basic metric that measures the quality of a town. Munster residents have an expectation that taxpayer dollars are prioritized for this purpose.*

**Streets:** Continue seeking grants for street repairs; maintain proactive repair/replacement schedule; survey lighting needs and work with NIPSCO to replace missing street lamps.

**Water & Sewer:** Implement a long-term preventative maintenance plan, with annual reviews and updates to maintain services and control costs.

**Sidewalk Program:** Reduce liability by ending cost-sharing model; establish repair prioritization metrics; and schedule accordingly for repairs.



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