



Ridge Road: RENEW... RECONNECT... REIMAGINE

ReNew... ReConnect...ReImagine... Ridge Road is the implementation of the Calumet-Ridge Streetscape Plan, the product of a collaborative effort between a resident/business advisory committee, the Munster Town Council, and Town staff. The plan is based on over twenty stakeholder interviews and multiple surveys and workshops held between the summers of 2020 and 2021.

The goals and objectives of this project are to

- Improve safety for drivers, walkers, and cyclists along the Ridge Road Corridor
- Improve business and economic vitality along Ridge Road
- Reinforce a sense of a downtown place in our community
- Develop a more welcoming environment for biking and walking
- Enhance the ability to absorb stormwater and reduce flooding

You can find the full Calumet-Ridge Streetscape Plan on the Town's website at <https://www.munster.org/egov/apps/document/center.egov?view=item&id=5722>

What was the reason behind this plan in the first place?

For many years, the look, alignment, and safety of Ridge Road has been a familiar discussion among residents and councils alike. As far back as 2010, the Town of Munster Comprehensive Plan had a number of recommendations to address these challenges, such as consolidation of curb cuts, improving bicycle crossings, and redesigning intersections.

In 2020, two significant events took place:

1. The Town reviewed data that the traffic count on Ridge Road declined up to 21% from 2012 - 2018 (2018 traffic count on Ridge Road, west of Calumet Ave 16,600).
2. The Town also reviewed data that between 2016 and 2020, there were over 600 vehicle collisions on Ridge Road. Of these, 81 crashes resulted in one fatality and serious bodily injury to 124 people.

The initial review did not seem correct. Less traffic on a road should mean that there are fewer, less serious crashes. However, the town has found that this assumption is incorrect. National studies have shown that when there is less traffic on roads like Ridge Road, vehicles tend to drive faster and therefore when a collision happens it is much more dangerous because of the speeds that they are driving.

On April 6, 2020 the Town Council approved a contract with Teska Associates to develop a streetscaping and corridor improvement plan that included Ridge Road.

Was the Calumet-Ridge Streetscape Plan Publicly Discussed?

The Streetscape Plan is based on ideas generated by multiple public input opportunities. These are documented in the plan and can be reviewed in more detail on the project page on the Town's website.

In summary, the planning process included the following:

- Four Advisory Committee Meetings
- Two Public Works Meetings
- Over 20 Stakeholder Interviews
- Three Public Workshops
- Online Engagement:
 - 374 Website Subscribers
 - 4,400 Website Visits



245 Website Rendering Comments
1,066 Poll responses
1,509 Poll Comments

This process culminated at a public meeting on June 21, 2021, when all five members of the Munster Town Council voted unanimously to pass Resolution 2084 adopting the Calumet-Ridge Streetscape Plan.

Opportunities for public discussion will continue into the next steps. Like all plans, the streetscape plan contains concepts and preliminary designs. Additional detailed design and engineering are required to move the plan towards implementation. During the design phase, the Town will hold public meetings at which the community can share issues and opportunities.

Why are we talking about moving the Conceptual Plan into Design and Engineering?

The Town of Munster was recently awarded a highly competitive \$17 million Rebuilding America Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant to implement the Ridge Road portion of the plan from State Line to Columbia Avenue. By leveraging these grant dollars, the Town can construct a \$21 million project using only \$4 million of local tax dollars.

The local match (\$4 million) will be coming from a capital projects fund. ***The funds that will be used for this match cannot be used for operating expenses like salaries or equipment.***

What happens during the Design and Engineering Stages?

The Town is in the process of hiring an engineering firm to complete the design of the project. The key objectives are:

- Transform Ridge Road into a safer, more attractive downtown business district via reduced travel lanes, fewer curb cuts, traffic calming measures, expanded sidewalks and crosswalks, a continuous multi-use path, and sustainable landscaping.
- Reduce the ugly, cluttered look of overhead utilities by burying them or relocating them to the rear of businesses. Eliminating utility poles and wires will free up space within the parkways and in the sky for new shade trees.
- Develop public gathering spaces at key locations for community gatherings and events in partnership with local businesses.

The design phase includes topographic survey, environmental document preparation, geotechnical investigation, utility coordination, traffic studies, and roadway design. Impacts on traffic, safety, police, fire, public works, businesses, and residents will be reviewed and considered before final plans are completed. We anticipate the design phase to take eighteen months or more.

When will construction start?

Construction is tentatively slated to begin in the summer of 2025.

Interesting Facts about Ridge Road

- Vehicle traffic along Ridge Road has decreased from 2012 -2018 over 21%.
- Between 2016 and 2020, there were over 600 vehicle collisions on Ridge Road. Of these, 81 crashes resulted in one fatality and serious bodily injury to 124 people.
- Currently, 100% of the Ridge Road right-of-way is impervious surface. This means that when it rains all of that stormwater runs into the storm sewer system which then flows into the Little



Calumet River. The ReNew, ReConnect, ReImagine Ridge Road project will reduce stormwater runoff by 25%.

Will this change increase traffic congestion?

Lane reduction on Ridge Road will slow down cars and trucks but will not cause backups. Traffic engineers hired by the Town during the planning phase estimated that the proposed changes would result in just a **one to three-minute increase in travel time from State Line to Calumet Avenue at peak travel times**. Plus, traffic engineers also estimate that there will be about 20% less traffic on Ridge Road after the improvements are complete.

When asked, the majority of participants in the Streetscape Plan survey shared that the improvements and amenities the Town would gain would be worth an extra three minutes of travel time in our cars.

I live on a street within a couple of blocks of Ridge Road, will traffic just use the side streets as a cut through?

This is a concern that will be reviewed in much detail. The Town also has an interdepartmental staff team that reviews speed on residential streets and is researching and testing traffic calming measures that can slow traffic down on commonly used cut-through streets. Once people realize that they have to drive slowly, the street is no longer an attractive cut-through.

What about all the local businesses in the corridor?

When the Town began planning this improvement, we established a steering committee composed of multiple stakeholders including business owners of small, medium, and large retail establishments located on Ridge Road. Their feedback was incorporated into the plan. When presented with the choice of which direction to recommend to Council, the Steering Committee unanimously chose the alignment that reduced Ridge Road to three lanes.

Local businesses will benefit from a more beautiful and welcoming streetscape setting, new on-street parking for their customers, additional sidewalk space for benches and outdoor dining, and more visibility to passing traffic, which will no longer be able to speed past at 45 mph.

How will Emergency Services Access Ridge Road?

Emergency service vehicles will be able to access Ridge Road the same way that they currently do. One element that we will keep top of mind as the project is designed is continued access to the corridor. One way to accomplish this is via center turn lanes. We are not the only community that has faced this question and the design consultant that the Town selects will have had experience successfully addressing this circumstance.