

Vermilion Advantage Feasibility Analysis Executive Summary

Submitted to:
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Purpose and Context of the Feasibility Analysis

Vermilion Advantage commissioned a feasibility study to evaluate redevelopment and reinvestment options for the East Voorhees Street Industrial Corridor in Danville, Illinois, a historic industrial area that is growing increasingly important in today's reshoring, advanced manufacturing, and logistics economy. The study aimed to determine whether the corridor's existing assets, infrastructure, workforce, and market position can realistically support private-sector investment, job creation, and sustainable economic growth.

The analysis was not meant to be a speculative visioning exercise. Instead, it concentrated on practical feasibility, market fit, and actionable outcomes. Findings were based on detailed data analysis, stakeholder input, site-level evaluations, and a review of industrial real estate and site-selection trends. The aim was to give Vermilion Advantage, the City of Danville, and regional partners a clear understanding of which types of development are viable, under what conditions, and what steps are needed to move from opportunity to implementation.



Overall Feasibility Conclusion

This study finds that the East Voorhees Street Corridor is viable and well-placed to attract industrial, manufacturing, and logistics investments if redevelopment is approached through a coordinated, market-aligned, and implementation-focused strategy. The corridor benefits from a rare combination of assets increasingly valued by site selectors and developers, especially in secondary Midwest markets looking for cost savings and faster time-to-market.

The corridor's viability is strongest when viewed as a collection of interconnected sites rather than a single catalytic project. Together, the Heatcraft facility, former Quaker Oats site, W&T Warehouse, and Norfolk Southern rail parcel offer flexibility across various user types, development scales, and timelines. Success will depend on disciplined site readiness, realistic workforce alignment, strategic incentive deployment, and consistent corridor-level coordination.

Corridor Context and Strategic Importance

The East Voorhees Street Corridor has long been a vital part of Danville's industrial past. It historically supported industries such as coal, heavy manufacturing, ceramics, and food processing, benefiting from rail access and nearby transportation routes. Over time, shifts in global manufacturing, automation, and company mergers led many old businesses to close or downsize, most recently exemplified by the 2024 closure of the Quaker Oats plant.

Despite these challenges, the corridor maintains infrastructure and location benefits that are hard and costly to duplicate elsewhere. As manufacturers and logistics companies increasingly look for alternatives to high-cost primary markets, corridors like East Voorhees, which offer scale, utilities, rail access, and public-sector support, are becoming more important again. This corridor remains one of the key opportunities in Vermilion County to stabilize and grow the jobs base, support higher-wage employment, and reposition Danville within the larger Midwest industrial economy.

Market Positioning and Competitive Advantage

From a site-selection perspective, the East Voorhees Corridor functions as a competitive secondary-market industrial area. Its value proposition relies on infrastructure readiness, transportation access, and affordability—factors that are now crucial decision criteria for many industrial users.

Key competitive advantages include:

- Strategic location less than two miles from Interstate 74, with direct frontage on IL-136, enabling efficient regional and interstate freight movement.
- Active Class I rail infrastructure through Norfolk Southern, supporting rail-served manufacturing, bulk materials, and transload operations.
- Industrial-grade utilities, including high-capacity electric and gas service, 10–12-inch water and sewer mains, fiber connectivity, and NPDES-compliant stormwater systems.
- Proximity to Vermilion Regional Airport, providing corporate and specialized air access for executives, technicians, and time-sensitive shipments.

Together, these assets position the corridor as an affordable alternative to larger industrial markets while providing the infrastructure and access needed for modern industrial operations.

Stakeholder and Market Validation

Stakeholder engagement was essential in verifying feasibility assumptions and identifying implementation factors. Vermilion Advantage, in partnership with TPMA, involved a wide range of stakeholders, including local government officials, property owners, workforce and education allies, utilities, developers, and business leaders.

Several consistent themes emerged from stakeholder input:

- Strong interest in repositioning the corridor as a unified industrial district, rather than marketing individual sites in isolation.
- Recognition that site readiness and control are essential to attracting private investment.
- Concern regarding workforce availability and the need to align training and recruitment efforts with realistic target industries.
- Desire for practical, phased development strategies that manage risk and capital costs.

These insights strengthened the study's emphasis on practical market positioning, portfolio-driven development, and disciplined implementation.

Vision for the East Voorhees Corridor

“The East Voorhees Corridor will become a future-ready industrial and logistics district that leverages its rail access, Opportunity Zone advantages, and modern infrastructure to attract advanced manufacturing and supply-chain employers. Through strategic redevelopment and strong workforce partnerships, the corridor will evolve into a clean, connected, and investment-ready gateway that drives economic growth, supports high-quality jobs, and showcases Danville’s commitment to innovation and long-term prosperity.”



Portfolio of Development Opportunities

Rather than relying on a single redevelopment opportunity, the East Voorhees Corridor offers a variety of sites that collectively reduce market risk and expand the range of potential users.

Heatcraft Refrigeration

The Heatcraft facility is one of the corridor's most valuable short-term assets. It features a 200,000-square-foot, ISO-certified, fully climate-controlled manufacturing building on land owned by the City of Danville. This unique ownership arrangement allows for flexible redevelopment options, including ground leases, building purchases, or coordinated public-private partnerships.

The facility is perfect for advanced manufacturing, precision assembly, technology-focused production, and specialized industrial uses that require high-quality space and quick setup. Its condition and infrastructure significantly reduce initial development risk.



Image © 2013 The News-Gazette. Used for informational purposes.

Former Quaker Oats Site

The former Quaker Oats site represents the most significant large-scale redevelopment opportunity in the corridor. Covering approximately 44 acres of contiguous industrial land with a direct Norfolk Southern rail spur, the site offers rare rail-served, ready-to-develop potential in east-central Illinois. Completed demolition and grading help expedite redevelopment timelines and reduce costs.

A potential public acquisition of the site could enhance feasibility by simplifying transactions, allowing for incentive stacking, and enabling flexible development structures. The site is suitable for either a single large industrial user or a multi-tenant industrial park.



Demolition continues at the former Quaker Oats plant along East Voorhees Street in Danville. Photograph by Jennifer Bailey, © 2025 The News-Gazette.

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W & T Warehouse

The W&T Warehouse presents a classic value-add redevelopment opportunity. While the 344,900-square-foot building is in poor condition and needs significant reinvestment, its size, zoning, utilities, and location make it suitable for logistics, warehousing, and light industrial uses after rehabilitation or partial reconfiguration.

This platform is perfect for developers seeking to reposition themselves for reduced acquisition costs and sustained long-term growth.



Source: Loopnet listing for 1813 E. Voorhees Street, Danville, IL. Retrieved January 2026.

Norfolk Southern Property

The Norfolk Southern-owned parcel offers rail-dependent development opportunities for users needing direct Class I rail access. While longer development timelines are expected due to rail engineering and approval processes, the parcel is well-suited for bulk materials, agricultural processing, metals fabrication, and transload operations.

Target Industry Alignment

The feasibility analysis identified multiple industry clusters that match corridor assets, workforce skills, and market demand. These include:

- Food product and specialty manufacturing
- Metal and machinery manufacturing
- Nonmetallic and materials manufacturing
- Wholesaling, logistics, and distribution
- Select clean-tech, industrial services, and rail-served uses

These industries emphasize transportation access, reliable utilities, affordable industrial real estate, and connections to regional supply chains, criteria that the East Voorhees Corridor can dependably meet. Notably, these sectors also align with existing regional workforce skills and training resources, strengthening long-term sustainability.

Workforce and Talent Considerations

Workforce availability presents both a challenge and an opportunity for corridor redevelopment. Vermilion County faces a shrinking and aging labor force, with much of the near-term hiring demand driven mainly by replacements rather than expansion. At the same time, the region benefits from strong education and training institutions, including Danville Area Community College, Parkland College, and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The feasibility analysis indicates that corridor success will depend on:

- Aligning target industries with realistic labor availability
- Strengthening employer-led training partnerships
- Enhancing recruitment and retention strategies, particularly for skilled manufacturing and technical roles

Workforce alignment enhances feasibility by emphasizing the importance of proactive coordination alongside development efforts.

Risks, Constraints, and Mitigation

The analysis identified several risks that must be actively managed, including:

- Aging or obsolete building conditions on select sites
- Fragmented ownership across the corridor
- Workforce availability constraints
- Competition from larger Midwest industrial markets
- Construction cost inflation and rail development timelines

These risks do not prevent development but highlight the need for phased investment, realistic market positioning, and disciplined execution.

Strategic Recommendations and Path Forward

To translate feasibility into action, the study recommends:

- Establishing clear corridor governance and coordination
- Prioritizing site readiness and control
- Aligning workforce strategies with target industries
- Marketing the corridor as a unified, investment-ready district
- Pursuing phased development anchored by near-term wins

With intentional leadership and coordination, the East Voorhees Corridor can evolve from a legacy industrial area into a future-ready employment hub that enhances Danville's economic resilience and long-term growth.

Final Conclusion

The East Voorhees Street Corridor is viable, competitive, and well-positioned for industrial reinvestment. Its combination of infrastructure, site options, incentives, and workforce resources offers a solid base for redevelopment. With targeted efforts and ongoing collaboration, the corridor can play a key role in shaping Danville's future economic growth.



Appendix A: Summary of Economic Conditions | Key Findings



In recent decades, Vermilion County has experienced a consistent population decline. This population decline is projected to continue through 2030.



Household income in Vermilion County is considerably lower than the median household income at both the state and national levels.



Educational attainment rates in Vermilion County, particularly of bachelor's, graduate, and professional degrees, are considerably lower than both state and national averages.



17.4% of Vermilion County's residents fall below the poverty level, which is greater than the national poverty rate of 12.4%.



Between 2015 and 2024, the civilian labor force in Vermilion County has steadily declined, falling from 35,417 to 31,357 over the 10 years.



The overall net commuter level in the county is negative. 7,315 fewer workers travel into the county for employment than travel out of it.



Vermilion County is heavily reliant on public industries, including "Education and Hospitals (Local Government)," "Federal Government, Civilian," and other local government industries.



The largest private industries include "Restaurants and Other Eating Places," and various manufacturing and warehousing industries.



Vermilion County's most highly concentrated industry is "Grain and Oilseed Milling." The "Gambling Industries" (12.26) and "Apparel Accessories and Other Apparel Manufacturing" industries are the next most heavily concentrated industries.



The "Federal Government, Civilian" industry produces the highest GRP for Vermilion County. Other high-value industries include the "Grain and Oilseed Milling," "Education and Hospitals (Local Government)," and "Grocery and Related Product Merchant Wholesalers" industries.



The "Manufacturing," "Government," and "Wholesale Trade" industries export the largest share of their sales, indicating that these sectors are strongly connected to external markets.



Products or services from "Information," "Manufacturing," and "Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction" industries are imported heavily to meet local demand.



The most common occupation in the county is "Laborers and Material Movers." The next-largest occupations by total workers are "Drivers/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers" and "Cashiers."



The "Home Health and Personal Care Aides" occupation is expected to realize the most growth from 2024 to 2034. Over the same period, "Drivers/Sales Workers and Truck Drivers" and "Customer Service Representatives" are expected to see nominal growth.

Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement | Key Findings

Workforce and Talent

- Workforce readiness is mixed: many workers are capable, but a portion of residents are disengaged or underemployed.
- Participation in education and training is limited by socioeconomic barriers and low high school graduation rates.
- Wages remain lower due to past industrial closures, contributing to retention challenges.

Education and Training Infrastructure

- Danville Area Community College (DACC) is a major asset — responsive, flexible, and effective at customized training.
- Strong educational connections to the University of Illinois support ag-tech, research, and advanced industry growth.
- Adult education, GED, and middle college programs are active but highlight deeper educational gaps in the community.

Industrial, Agriculture, and Logistics Assets

- Robust agribusiness sector, including grain elevators, Growmark, biofuel capacity, and extensive farmland.
- Significant logistics strengths: interstate access, Class I railroads, and a growing airport authority.
- Advantageous industrial and warehouse lease costs support logistics and distribution growth.
- Need and opportunity exist for new transload facilities to handle grain and freight congestion.

Business Climate and Economic Development

- Strong collaboration among city leadership, county partners, Vermilion Advantage, and education institutions.
- Opportunity Zone incentives on East Voorhees offer strong investment advantages.
- Recent rebranding efforts aim to improve community identity and external perception.

Infrastructure and Utilities

- Adequate water, sewer, and power capacity for industrial development, though power reliability is a recurring concern.
- Natural gas supply is limited in certain industrial areas.
- Rail congestion and problematic grade crossings cause major mobility challenges.
- Longstanding flooding and stormwater issues require major infrastructure fixes.

Perception, Branding and Image Challenges

- Negative internal and external perceptions hinder business attraction and growth.
- Crime reputation, blight, and “worst-enemy” local attitudes reinforce a negative cycle.
- Strong need to shift the narrative toward opportunities and strengths.

Population and Demographic Trends

- Continued population loss affects funding levels for transit and community development.
- School system challenges drive families to live in surrounding communities.
- A significant portion of residents lack access to personal vehicles, increasing reliance on public transit.

Emerging Opportunities

- National onshoring and reshoring trends present major opportunities for manufacturing and logistics expansion.
- Competitive industrial lease rates can attract cost-focused firms.
- Proximity to the University of Illinois creates potential for ag-tech, high-tech, and research-driven growth.
- Redevelopment sites offer opportunities for new housing, commercial uses, or modern industrial development.

