

# CREATIVE ADAPTIVE REUSE CASE STUDY

ELECTRIC WORKS  
Fort Wayne, Indiana



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

Electric Works is a transformative adaptive reuse and mixed-use innovation district developed on the historic General Electric (GE) campus in Fort Wayne. Once a manufacturing powerhouse that employed thousands and symbolized the city's industrial strength, the 39-acre site was closed in 2015 and later redeveloped into a vibrant hub for innovation, education, business, and community life. The nearly \$300 million redevelopment blends historic preservation with modern mixed-use programming, creating jobs, supporting workforce development, and igniting downtown Fort Wayne's resurgence.

## CHALLENGE

### Industrial Decline and Vacant Landmark

The former GE Electric Works complex was once central to Fort Wayne's economy, at one point employing over a third of the city's workforce. Over decades of industrial restructuring and consolidation, production diminished, and the campus was ultimately shuttered in 2015. This left over 1.2 million square feet of underutilized buildings and raised concerns about economic stagnation and lost opportunity in the heart of the city.

### Lost Jobs and Community Identity

GE's closure disrupted local employment ecosystems and left a symbolic gap in community identity. The challenge became how to repurpose the historic asset into something that would support modern economic needs while honoring its legacy.

# SOLUTION: ELECTRIC WORKS INNOVATION DISTRICT

Electric Works reimaged the former GE campus into a mixed-use innovation district, combining workspace, education, healthcare, retail, community amenities, and cultural activity facilities.

### Key Elements

- Historic adaptive reuse of 18 buildings across 39 acres, preserving industrial character while accommodating new uses
- Innovation-oriented office and coworking environments supporting startups, regional firms, and remote work.
- Educational hubs, including the new science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) public high school preparing students for workforce and college pathways
- Public market and food hall supporting local vendors and food access
- Healthcare services, including a clinic and pharmacy serving thousands annually
- Anchor tenants such as the global hardware cooperative Do It Best Corp. headquarters

Financing included historic tax credits, New Market Tax Credits, private investment, and public funds—enabling the revitalization of this strategic, central asset.

# THE STORY

Electric Works' evolution reflects Fort Wayne's broader economic renaissance. The property's origins date to the late 19th century when the Fort Wayne Jenney Electric Light Company pioneered electrical technologies; acquired by GE in 1892, it became a manufacturing engine for generations.

When GE closed the complex in 2015, the site's future was uncertain. In 2017, a partnership led by Ancora Partners and RTM Ventures acquired the property with a vision to preserve its historical significance and reinvent its role in the modern economy.

The redevelopment honors the campus's industrial roots while introducing spaces that attract entrepreneurs, students, professionals, and community members. As one project leader observed, Electric Works taps into the site's historic "innovation DNA" to fuel a new chapter for Fort Wayne.

# OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

## Economic and Workforce Impacts

### ECONOMIC OUTPUT:

The west campus alone is projected to generate an estimated \$375 million in annual economic impact at full occupancy.

### EMPLOYMENT:

Nearly 900 daily workers and students currently occupy the campus, with more than 200 new jobs in the first two years and projections to support over 2,200 daily workers when fully leased.

### CONSTRUCTION & LONG-TERM JOBS:

Redevelopment supported thousands of construction jobs; long-term employment includes corporate, education, healthcare, retail, innovation, and service.

## Workforce Development & Education

The inclusion of a STEAM high school and flexible innovation spaces connect students directly with workforce pathways and experiential learning aligned to regional employer needs.

## Cultural and Community Outcomes

Electric Works activates downtown Fort Wayne with markets, food amenities, community programs, and spaces that foster social interaction, contributing to downtown vibrancy, improved quality of life, and neighborhood revitalization.

# KEY TAKEAWAY

Electric Works demonstrates how historic industrial assets can be reinvented into modern engine rooms for economic growth, workforce development, and community identity. By integrating innovation, education, workforce readiness, healthcare, and cultural amenities, Fort Wayne has created a dynamic mixed-use district that honors the past while powering tomorrow's economy.

**This investment in the creative economy yielded an estimated \$511 million in total economic output and generated an estimated \$71 million in total tax revenue spread across federal, state, and local governments.**

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