

# America's Best Communities Semifinalist

By Jennifer Decker, Herald Republican, Winter 2016

ANGOLA — Angola-Fremont has been named a top 15 semifinalist in the \$10 million America's Best Communities Award competition.

The official announcement came Wednesday at the Northern Indiana Lakes Country Enterprise Center, 907 S. Wayne St.

The grand prize of the competition is \$3 million to spur community revitalization. Second place will receive \$2 million and third place, \$1 million.

"I dare anyone to knock this smile off my face," said Angola Mayor Dick Hickman. "It allows our communities to go out and show what Angola and Steuben County and Fremont have. I know 14 others have made it. This says a lot about our community and we're going after the \$3 million."

Locally, Angola and Fremont have teamed up in the competition because neither city was large enough to compete on their own. When Angola-Fremont advanced to the quarterfinal round, it received \$50,000 to use in developing its revitalization plan. The team was one of 50 quarter finalists nationwide.

The competition is sponsored by Frontier Communications, DISH Network, CoBank and The Weather Channel. Mike Neville, Frontier general manager, Northeast Indiana, said the competition is about teamwork to better where people work, live and play.

"The way the communities have come together for a common good" is remarkable, he said.

Local officials were thrilled with the announcement.

Steuben County Economic Development Corp. Executive Director Dave Koenig said the plan focused on different areas, not just downtown Angola or Fremont.

"It's an exciting opportunity for Angola-Fremont and the county. I think the plan illustrates a focus on the urbanized area," Koenig said. "The plan is to be transformational. We can't focus on municipal boundaries."

For the competition, that Angola-Fremont community revitalization plan includes building and equipping the Enterprise Center; a proposed Angola Certified Technology Park at the Interstate 69 and U.S. 20 intersection; a preliminary development plan for the Fremont Logistics Park; and conceptual drawings on two corridor enhancement projects on U.S. 20, from I-69 east into the city, and C.R. 200W from I-69 to C.R. 275N.

Fremont Town Judge Chris Snyder said it's an honor for his town to be included in such a contest. "That is great. It's very rare when a town of this size can participate," said Snyder, who was formerly town manager and has been working on the ABC project for Fremont. "I don't think there's any doubt we put together a good program. It's exciting to know we're in the top 15 in the country. I'm sure we'll do our best. It can only happen because we've come together as a community."

There are three Indiana semifinalists, Angola-Fremont, Madison and Valparaiso. The other semifinalists are: Lake Havasu City, Arizona; Charleston, West Virginia; Statesboro, Georgia; Valley County/Meadows Valley, Idaho; Chisago Lakes Area, Minnesota; Huntington, West Virginia; Portsmouth, Ohio; DeKalb, Illinois; Fort Dodge, Iowa; Darrington/Arlington, Washington; Tualatin, Oregon; and Wenatchee/East Wenatchee, Washington.

The communities will attend a summit April 26-27 in Durham, North Carolina, where they will present their proposals to a panel of judges from the sponsoring companies and compete to advance to the finalist round.

At the end of the summit, eight finalists will be named and will receive \$100,000 to continue developing their plans. In April 2017 the three winners will be announced.