

Courthouse in Valparaiso.  
Photo by Steve Johnson via Flickr.

# Chapter V : **Stewardship & Governance**

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# Overview

The 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan is a wide-ranging vision for growth and revitalization that contains recommendations in economic development, environment, land use and transportation. Land use planning and development decisions clearly remain the responsibility of local government. Local plans, codes and regulations are essential tools for accomplishing the regional vision of the CRP. The CRP is intended to serve as advice and support for local plans and a means to accomplish regionally beneficial planning decisions. The CRP encourages the integration of local and regional priorities. Just as local plans guided the development of the CRP, local circumstances, perspectives and decisions will influence how these regional recommendations are implemented.

As stated in the Growth and Conservation chapter, NIRPC will offer technical assistance to local governments to update their local comprehensive plans and ordinances to include the priorities of the CRP. This technical assistance may take different forms depending on community needs and means. NIRPC can serve as a partner and a resource by conducting research on best practices, identifying barriers to livable communities, providing data and analysis or developing model codes and ordinances. In turn, NIRPC will be in a better position to support local plan implementation.

NIRPC, as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the three-county region, is uniquely positioned to provide meaningful coordination, leadership and support on a broad range of initiatives that will foster the collaboration needed to realize the vision of the CRP. NIRPC is an advocate for sound planning principles and to educate those in the region about the methods, tools and other factors associated with these good planning measures and methods. NIRPC is also positioned to carry out a variety of roles in the stewardship of the region, depending on the nature and scope of the initiatives being undertaken. NIRPC is available to assist, not get in the way of

local planning and development. As appropriate, NIRPC will continue to take on the following roles of regional governance and stewardship:

- **Planning, Review and Coordination:** In addition to preparing and updating long-range plans for land use and transportation, NIRPC can serve an important role in reviewing and/or supporting local land use and transportation planning alternatives to help them serve regional goals. NIRPC will be available to assist in coordinating planning initiatives that span municipal and county boundaries and stakeholder interests. Based on the needs and interests of local governments, this can include:
  - Reviewing local comprehensive plan updates for consistency with the goals and objectives of the 2040 CRP and with those of county and adjacent municipality plans, providing policy direction to better coordinate planning efforts.
  - Reviewing proposed amendments to zoning and/or subdivision regulations, providing recommendations to better align local land use controls with 2040 CRP objectives over time.
  - Fostering inter-local cooperation and inter-governmental agreements where appropriate to address common issues.
- **Funding and Finance Support:** Through its role in the planning and allocation of federal and state funding for various programs, NIRPC is directly engaged in implementing individual initiatives at the local level. In addition to this financial stewardship role, NIRPC can also coordinate efforts to provide shared services and cooperative programs to assist municipalities in achieving fiscal sustainability. Where federal or other external financial resources are available, NIRPC will be actively engaged in ensuring the resources are secured for the benefit of the region.
- **Advocacy and Environmental Justice:** Through effective policy advocacy at both the state and federal levels, NIRPC can play a significant role in communicating the shared priorities of the region,

shaping public policy for the region's benefit, and ensuring that available resources (financial and otherwise) can be brought to bear to address the region's current and future needs. This will include partnerships with such important regional partners as the Urban League, the NAACP, area universities, the Regional Development Authority, the Race Relations Council, the United Way, local churches, the Heartland Center, the IACT, the IAC, and others to develop and promote effective policies and delivery mechanisms.

- **Education and Communication:** Through the promotion of “best practices” and organization of educational opportunities, NIRPC can facilitate and promote increased understanding among citizens and municipal officials in the areas of cultural and racial diversity, local planning laws, achieving economies of scale in a multi-community region, and shared infrastructure financing. In addition, NIRPC can promote best practices in land use, transportation and environmental planning and implementation. NIRPC can also serve a vital role in increasing the public's and officials' understanding of the importance of proactive planning efforts, consistent with the 2040 CRP, at all levels of government.

For each initiative area described within this Plan, NIRPC will determine the most appropriate role to serve and work with its partners to move forward effectively. By fostering productive partnerships both within and outside the region, NIRPC can serve an ever more effective and meaningful role as north-west Indiana addresses challenges and pursues opportunities in the coming decades. NIRPC's guide will be the vision, goals and objectives of the CRP. Stewardship and Governance Goals and Objectives

The 2040 CRP Vision Statement addresses stewardship and governance in its “United Region” vision theme: Celebrating our diversity, we work together as a community across racial, ethnic, political and cultural lines for the good of the region. Two goals and their related objectives provide the framework for further action and initiatives to bring about achieving this vision theme.



Wetland to manage stormwater at the Dunes Visitors Center in Chesterton. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

## Goal: Environmental justice: shared benefits and burdens

### Objectives:

- Increase outreach in environmental justice communities and improve the public involvement process to eliminate barriers and engage minority, disabled, elderly and low-income populations in regional decision-making
- Improve capacity to identify residential, employment and transportation patterns of low-income and minority populations so that their needs may be identified and addressed, and the impacts of transportation can be fairly distributed
- Avoid disproportionately high and/or adverse impacts on minority, disabled, elderly and/or low-income populations.
- Minimize and/or mitigate unavoidable impacts on low-income and/or minority populations by providing offsetting initiatives and enhancement measures to benefit affected communities and neighborhoods
- Increase awareness and understanding of environmental justice issues among decision makers
- Mitigate displacement of local residents and the loss of property investments when redeveloping the urban core

By fostering productive partnerships both within and outside the region, NIRPC can serve an ever more effective and meaningful role.

## Goal: Efficient and coordinated local government

### Objectives:

- Facilitate the consolidation of redundant local government services
- Promote coordination of land use and corridor planning across jurisdictional boundaries
- Foster better communication, cooperation, and coordination to better leverage resources
- Promote the sharing of benefits, burdens and costs among governments

Achieving these goals will require the active buy-in and support of not only NIRPC and other organizations and elected officials, but also involved citizens. As with other initiatives, ongoing challenges related to the level of funding available to expand the capacities of NIRPC and partner organizations are very real. NIRPC and its partners will need to be creative and resourceful in identifying opportunities to coordinate efforts and seek alternative funding sources to support expanded initiatives, increased educational opportunities for the general public, and more in-depth technical assistance to the region's cities, towns and counties.

Awareness and education take time and resources, but are both key to fostering acceptance of new stewardship and governance strategies among stakeholders. The sections below outline current efforts, and introduce recommended strategies to make more effective use of existing resources and pursue new opportunities. For these initiatives to succeed, the commitment of both NIRPC and its many partner organizations and member governments will be critical.

# Current Stewardship Challenges

While there are many examples of meaningful intergovernmental relationships across the region, there remains a fractured intergovernmental framework for stewardship of the region's resources and the difficulties posed by multiple units of local government providing services. Through the process of developing the 2040 CRP, public comment and input specifically identified the following challenges facing local governments:

- Multiple local governments with individual land use plans, zoning ordinances, and subdivision ordinances are not conducive to creating regional stewardship programs for land use management, resource conservation, and preservation of environmentally significant areas for the region as a whole.
- Local governments need to be more efficient and effective in providing public services.
- More coordination, communication and collaboration among the region's governments, agencies and organizations are needed to bring about systemic changes in development trends and move towards a more sustainable region.
- Social justice considerations are not well integrated into the regional decision-making process.

Public input over the past two years also consistently identified several needs related to regional governance:

- Pursuing shared provision of public services to achieve economies of scale.
- Developing an ongoing regional dialogue and education effort to address race relations and social justice.
- Pursuing shared approaches (such as cooperative agreements) to ensure more effective land and natural resource stewardship.

## Organizing for Leadership & Collaboration

### NIRPC's Current Structure and Partnerships

The diagram on the following page highlights the current structure of NIRPC's internal organization and external partnerships as they relate to the major 2040 CRP initiative areas. The policy advisory committees are standing NIRPC committees populated by NIRPC Commissioners and other stakeholders. These committees formulate policy recommendations that are acted on by the Executive Board or the full Commission. Subgroups of the policy advisory committees are created as needed to focus on specific subjects. Participants in the subgroups generally include local "experts" such as municipal and county land use and economic development planners, engineers and public works staff.

The efforts of NIRPC staff and officials are augmented and leveraged by the many affiliations depicted in the diagram. The primary activities of these existing partners are described in the following pages.

### Legend for diagram at right:

- NIRPC Committee
- Partner-Tech Support
- Partner-Policy, Advocacy
- Partner-Funding

\*-This Committee or Agency Addresses more than One Vision Theme  
Note: Other NIRPC Committees include: local government services, finance and personnel, Homeland Security

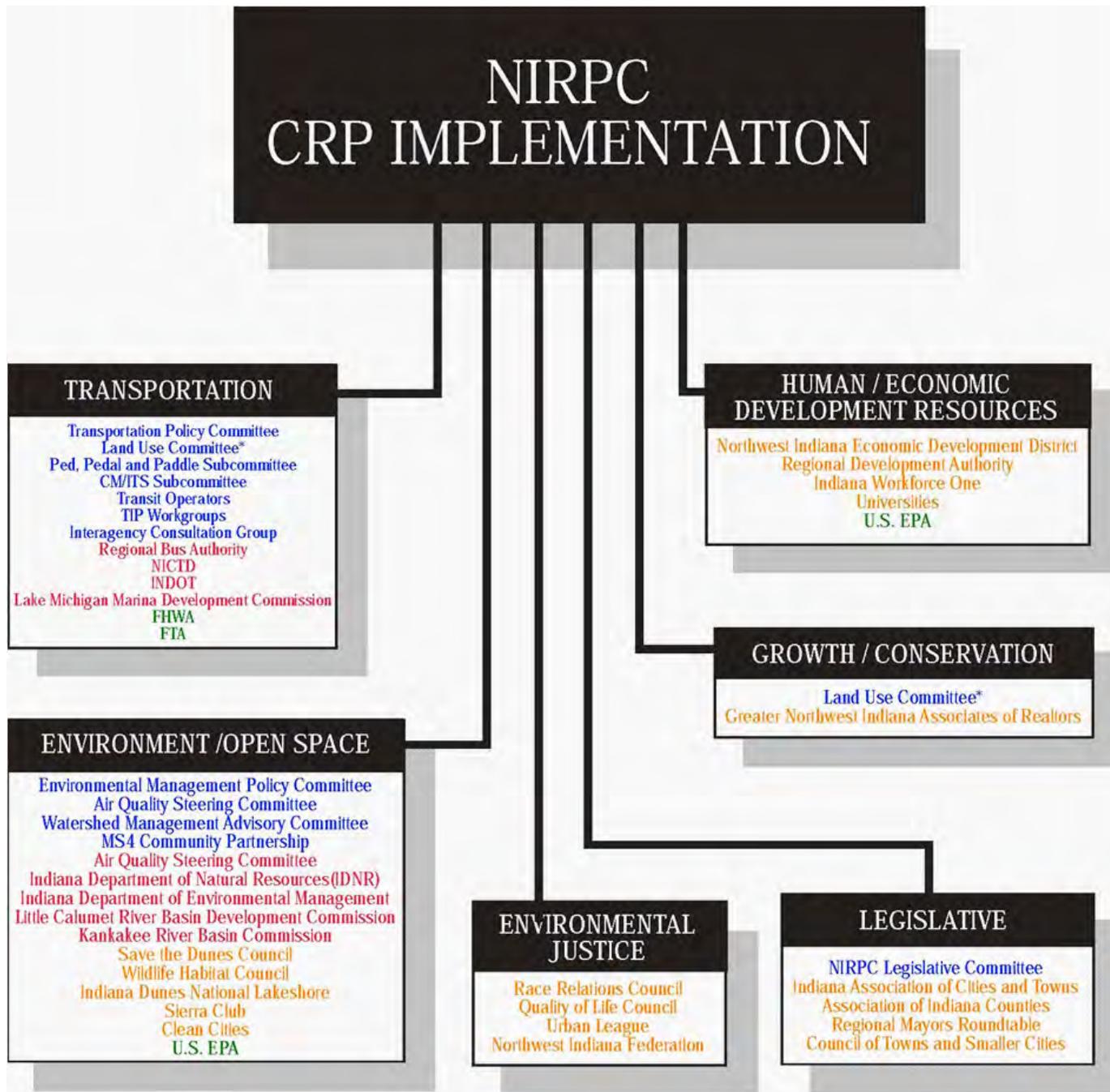


Figure V.I Diagram of NIRPC CRP Implementation.

## Partners in Growth & Conservation

- **Land Use Committee** – Composed of municipal and county planners, this NIRPC-staffed subcommittee is the technical advisory committee on land use issues for the region.
- **Local Governments** – Municipal and county planners are integral to achieving a coordinated regional approach to sustainable development and resource conservation. Local planners are members of NIRPC's many task forces and working groups that address issues impacting land use.

## Partners in Transportation

- **Transportation Policy Committee (TPC)** – NIRPC's policy advisory committee on transportation to the commission. Members are municipal and county officials, public and private transit providers, the Regional Bus Authority, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, business and industry representatives, and representatives of freight and aviation industries.
- **Ped, Pedal and Paddle Subcommittee** – This staff-supported committee provides the input and oversight for non-motorized transportation planning for bike, pedestrian and water trails. Its members include planners from the county and municipal park and recreation departments and representatives of area bike, hike and paddle clubs.
- **Regional Bus Authority (RBA)** – The RBA operates public transit buses in the north half of Lake County and supports demand response public transit in Lake and Porter counties. It also operates commuter bus service to Chicago from central west Lake County.
- **NICTD** – NICTD operates the South Shore commuter rail service that operates between Chicago, Illinois and South Bend, Indiana. NICTD is also the lead agency on expanding commuter rail to the West Lake and Valparaiso areas.
- **Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT)** – Staff from both the INDOT district and Indianapolis offices participate on the TPC and transportation-related work groups and subcommittees. Close collabo-

ration with INDOT facilitates planning and programming of state projects, which must appear in the appropriate MPO short range transportation improvement program.

- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** – FHWA staff participate as nonvoting members on a number of transportation-related working groups and subcommittees, including Congestion Management, Ped and Pedal, and TPC. FHWA distributes federal highway funds appropriated by Congress and apportioned to Northwest Indiana. These funds also support the MPO planning function assigned to NIRPC.
- **Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** – The FTA oversees the programming and spending of funds apportioned to northwest Indiana for public transit. A portion of these funds also support NIRPC's MPO function. FTA staff also participates on the TPC as non-voting members.
- **Others** – Local municipal and county elected officials and staff, and public and private transit operators also participate in the TPC.

## Partners in Environment/Open Space

- **Environmental Management Policy Committee (EMPC)** – The EMPC serves as the commission's policy advisory committee on all environmental issues. Its members include public and private sector representatives as well as representatives of regional environmental organizations. Active work groups under the EMPC include the MS4 Partnership, the Air Quality Steering Committee, the Watershed Management Advisory Committee and the Greenways Council.
- **Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore** – Staff from the National Lakeshore are active participants in the EMPC providing a vital link between NIRPC and the nation's largest urban national park.
- **South Shore Clean Cities** – In addition to being active on the EMPC, the Clean Cities organization is a frequent partner with

NIRPC on public education and outreach projects addressing clean and renewable energy.

- **Northwest Indiana Forum** - Northwest Indiana Forum (“the Forum”) is a nonprofit organization consisting of a diverse membership of small businesses, municipalities, health care, financial institutions, legal firms, local universities, and large industry. The Forum is dedicated to the economic development of the region, to attracting and retaining jobs, quality of life improvement, and to an increased standard of living for all. The Forum connects Northwest Indiana to the rest of the world through its advocacy in expanding the Gary/Chicago International Airport as well as its role in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River Basin Compact.
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA)** – Staff from the Region V office of the U.S. EPA participate on the EMPC as non-voting members. The U.S. EPA is also a funder of environmental planning and public education projects carried out by NIRPC.



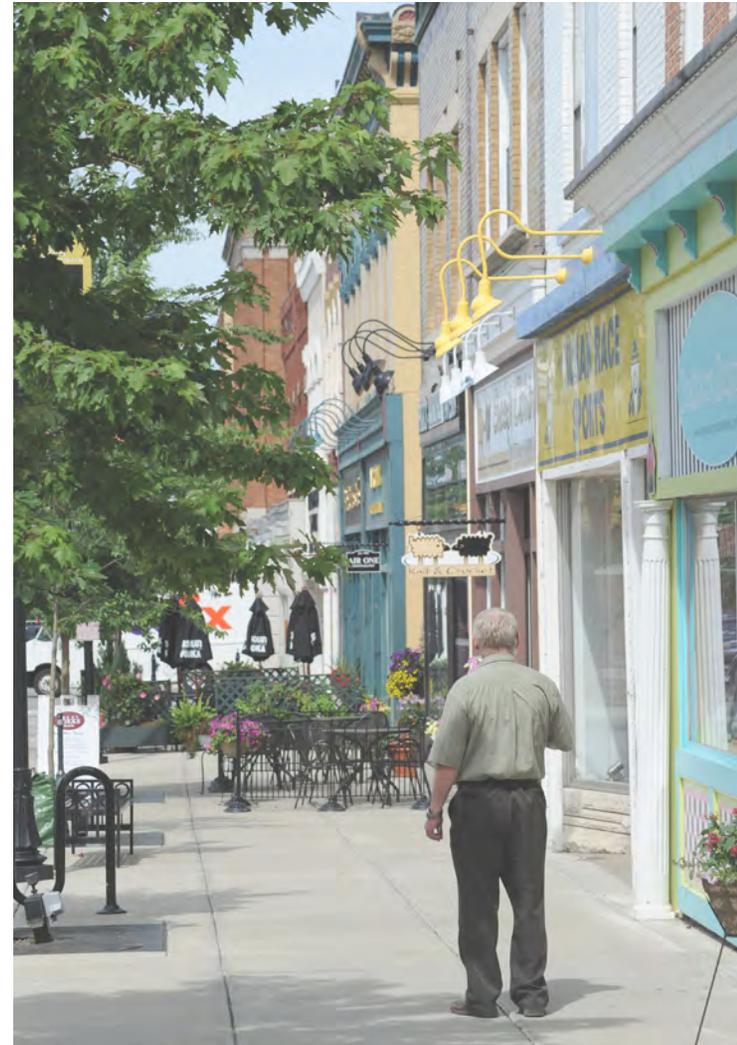
Northwest Indiana Paddlers. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

- **Little Calumet River Basin Development and Kankakee River Basin Commissions** – Charged with water resources protection and conservation, these agencies’ activities significantly impact major watersheds in the three-county area.
- **Environmental organizations** – active participants in resource management, conservation, and protection, the Save the Dunes Council, Sierra Club, Wildlife Habitat Council, Chicago Wilderness, Shirley Heinz Land Trust, Nature Conservancy, and Izaak Walton League are major regional champions of sustainable, livable communities.
- **Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM)** – The state agency responsible for addressing air, land, pollution prevention and water quality issues by providing environmental oversight and technical assistance.
- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources** – The state agency responsible for natural resource protection and conservation. IDNR staff members from the Lake Michigan Coastal Program are regular participants in the EMPC.
- **IL-IN Sea Grant** – Funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency (NOAA), the Sea Grant program provides resources and funding for research and educational outreach on issues of importance to the Great Lakes region.
- **Industries** – Representatives from NIPSCO, BP, and U.S. Steel are regular participants.
- **Others** – Representatives from the solid waste districts, tourism industry, the Purdue Extension program, Purdue Calumet, and Indiana University Northwest School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

## Partners in Human/Economic Development Resources

- **Northwest Indiana Forum (“the Forum”)** - The Forum is a nonprofit organization consisting of a diverse membership of small businesses, municipalities, health care, financial institutions, legal firms, local universities and large industry. The Forum is dedicated to the economic development of the region, to attracting and retaining jobs, quality of life improvement, and to an increased standard of living for all. The Forum connects Northwest Indiana to the rest of the world through its advocacy in expanding the Gary/Chicago International Airport as well as its role in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River Basin Compact.
- **Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NIEDD)** - The U.S. Economic Development Administration-designated district for the three NIRPC counties. Although it is a separate agency with its own board, it serves as the commission’s policy advisory committee on economic development. On the district’s board are local elected officials, public and private sector economic development planners, and region leaders in industry, business, finance, utilities, transportation, unions, and work force development.
- **Northwest Indiana is the Indiana Economic Development Corp (IEDC)** - The IEDC is the State’s lead economic development agency. This state organization focuses its efforts on growing and retaining businesses in Indiana and attracting new business to the State of Indiana. It also provided the grant to fund the development of this CEDS. IEDC responds quickly to help businesses locate, grow and thrive in Indiana. The state of Indiana’s lead economic development agency, IEDC oversees Indiana’s statewide business attraction and development efforts, coordinates state programs and incentives for companies looking to grow in Indiana and provides technical assistance, business expertise and funding to Indiana entrepreneurs and high-tech startups.
- **The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA)** - The RDA was enabled by the Indiana General Assembly in 2005 for the purpose of expanding the Gary/Chicago International Airport, extending the South Shore Commuter Rail Service, redeveloping the Lake Michigan shoreline and creating a regionalized bus transit system. It can

pursue other qualified projects of regional significance if warranted. The RDA receives \$27.5 million annually, \$10 million from the state of Indiana and \$17.5 million from local units of government in Lake and Porter counties. LaPorte County is not a member at present; however, the RDA statute contains a provision allowing for that county’s participation. A seven member board oversees the agency and has committed the RDA to fund



Downtown Valparaiso. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

more than \$169.9 million on 16 projects through calendar year 2011. The RDA has leveraged more than \$267.5 million from other sources of funding. For every one dollar of RDA funds invested to date, a return of an additional \$1.59 is generated toward implementing regional development priorities.

- **The Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center (NWI SBDC)** - The NWI SBDC offers free assistance for entrepreneurs starting or expanding their businesses. Through one-on-one consulting, the NWI SBDC helps guide small businesses toward their goals by offering referrals, workshops, training opportunities, and other essential business tools. It is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the Small Business Administration, the State of Indiana and other local partners.
- **The Regional Development Company (RDC)** - The RDC is a private, nonprofit Indiana corporation that was certified by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) in April 1994 to administer the SBA 504 loan program for a seven-county area of Indiana: Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Jasper, Newton, Starke, and Pulaski counties. The 504 program gives closely held small business owners access to the same capital markets as the larger publicly traded companies, and in the process, assists local communities in creating and retaining jobs and increasing their tax base by stimulating business investment into plant and equipment. The loan program blends private capital, bank financing, and government bonds to provide long-term, fixed asset financing to eligible healthy, expanding, and creditworthy businesses.
- **Construction Advancement Foundation (CAF)** - CAF represents Northwest Indiana union contractors. Its contributors work on a wide angle of commercial, industrial and civil projects. Their companies range in size from small to multinational. CAF works closely with the local building trade unions to promote the interest of the union construction industry. The CAF governing body is a 17 member Board of Trustees, eight of which are appointed by the Calumet Builders Association, eight by the Industrial Contractors and Builders Association, and one elected at-large by the Board. Construction Advance-

ment Foundation (CAF) promotes the union construction industry of Northwest Indiana by helping to enhance its efficiency and competitiveness via: Relations Management, Government Relations, Education, Training 67 Safety, and Workforce Development. The Construction Advancement Foundation also promotes economic environment and public policies that affect its contributors in a positive manner.

- **Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB)** - The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board mobilizes and integrates the leadership, services and resources of the community to support the creation of a workforce that is highly skilled, motivated and diverse. Appointed by local elected officials, NWIWB is charged with overseeing the seven-county work force system, including Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties. The NWIWB is supported by the Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI) which serves under contract as staff support for the board and Regional Operator and Fiscal Agent for the region's one stop career center system. Together, NWIWB and CWI connect private sector leaders with policy makers from government, education, economic development, labor, and community-based organizations to analyze regional labor market trends, needs and issues in order to develop strategic work force solutions for the system in Northwest Indiana.
- **Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA)** - The Indiana OCRA works with local, state, and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid rural communities in shaping their visions for economic development. Some of OCRA's initiatives include: the Indiana Main Street program, which emphasizes downtown revitalization in community development; HomeTown Competitiveness, which is a framework for rural groups to create more viable, sustainable communities in today's challenging economic climate; and also administers federal Community Development Block Grant funds for community-level infrastructure and quality of life projects. OCRA has eight community liaisons who serve as a resource for their region of the state.

## Partners in Legislative Advocacy

- **Legislative Policy Advisory Committee** – NIRPC staff-supported advisory committee to the commission. Members are NIRPC commissioners and all are elected officials.
- **Council of Towns and Smaller Cities (TASC)** – NIRPC staff-supported forum for building collaboration and cooperation among the region's smaller communities.
- **Regional Mayors' Roundtable** – NIRPC staff-supported forum for mayors from the three-county area.
- **Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT)** – IACT annually develops a list of priority legislation or issues that it will promote or address during the legislative session. Most of NIRPC's constituent cities and towns are also members of IACT.
- **Association of Indiana Counties (AIC)** – Similar to IACT, the AIC legislative agenda is developed by members, including Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties. NIRPC draws on the legislative agendas of AIC and IACT, as well as addressing issues pertinent to Northwest Indiana.
- **American Planning Association, Indiana Chapter** – The Indiana Chapter of the APA is an organization of professionals and citizen planners providing vision and leadership for the future development of Indiana communities. The association serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, as a network in support of planning professionals, and as a bridge to build cooperation among planners, allied professionals, and the public through education and awareness. In collaboration, APA-IN and NIRPC can advocate for legislative proposals that positively impact planning and development in Northwest Indiana and throughout the state.

## Partners in Environmental Justice

- **Race Relations Council** – Regional advocacy group that addresses race relations through sponsoring and conducting study circles and building partnerships with social service agencies, municipal race relations councils, diversity task forces, and human relations commissions, and church-affiliated diversity networks.
- **Northwest Indiana Urban League** – The Urban League is an historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in order to elevate the standard of living in historically underserved urban communities.
- **Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council, Inc. (QLC)** – The QLC was established by the area's universities as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization in July 2000. The Quality of Life Council seeks to inspire regional leaders to take actions that simultaneously improve the economy, environment and society for the benefit of current and future generations in Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties. The goals of the QLC are to 1) set agenda for critical issues in sustainable development across the Region, 2) hold Quarterly public meetings to present awareness of issues and to encourage action, and 3) publish an Indicators Report every two years.
- **Northwest Indiana Federation** – The Northwest Indiana Federation is “Working for Justice in Northwest Indiana.” Its mission is “to create and maintain a powerful, faith-based, multi-racial metropolitan citizens organization that represents the metropolitan majority in the cities of Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and the first-ring suburbs in Lake County, IN, and the neighboring counties of Porter and LaPorte. The organization is pursuing a Metropolitan Issues Agenda to create equity and destroy concentrated poverty by effecting changes in public policies and institutions.” The federation has been involved in regional transportation planning from time-to-time and is extremely supportive of transit and environmental justice policy and programs.

# Current Initiatives

There are a number of current and ongoing activities in the region that encourage coordination, the practice of collaboration, and the facilitation of dialogue among elected officials, agencies and stakeholders. NIRPC supports these efforts in a variety of ways. Current initiatives include:

- Study circles are held to discuss issues related to race relations in the region. NIRPC has hosted study circles for staff and promotes the practice among cities and towns.
- Some services are shared among municipalities, including:
  - Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Partnership – NIRPC staffs a coordinated approach to storm water management that is paid for by the participating communities.
  - Grants Inc. – A nonprofit organization that offers funding searches, grant writing assistance and project management to municipal and county governments. NIRPC promotes the use of the organization to local governments.
- Cooperative agreements have been developed to address the following:
  - Tri-State Accord – In 2002, an accord was executed between NIRPC, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SWRPC), the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC) and Chicago Area Transportation Study (CATS) (NIPC and CATS have since merged to form the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP). In 2008 it was expanded to include the Southwestern Michigan Regional Planning Commission. The accord is an historic agreement in which the planning agencies have committed to work together as they consider major environmental and economic issues, enabling planning at the watershed or aquifer scale without the limitation of traditional political boundaries.
- Bike and Water Trails – Implementation of the Ped and Pedal Plan and the Greenways and Blueways Plan has been facilitated through cooperative agreements between municipalities and counties sharing bike/hike corridors, and the National Lakeshore and communities bordering the lake for water trails.
- Marquette Plan – NIRPC, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Regional Development Authority have developed a cooperative agreement on implementation of the Marquette Plan: The Lakeshore Reinvestment Strategy, which calls for sharing staff resources to develop projects identified in the plan.
- Information sharing and peer mentoring between elected officials occurs through the following entities:
  - Council of Towns and Smaller Cities – NIRPC staff-supported activity.
  - Northwest Indiana Mayors’ Roundtable – NIRPC staff-supported activity.
  - Northern Mayors’ Roundtable of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT) – IACT-staff supported activity that NIRPC staff participates in.
- The Local Government Assistance Advisory Committee - NIRPC staff-supported initiative that provides direction and oversight to staff in the provision of direct services to local governments.

## Fostering New Inter-Local Partnerships & Cooperation

Building on the established relationships that are described above, NIRPC should foster new forms of cooperation and shared service provision among municipalities and with regional and statewide organizations that share common cause in the policy arena. NIRPC will need to continue enhancing internal capacity and building external partnerships and alliances in order to implement the 2040 CRP vision, in particular to address an increased focus on Growth and Conservation issues.

## New and Renewed Partnerships

- **Colleges and Universities** – Northwest Indiana is home to two regional campuses of Purdue University, one Indiana University regional campus, Valparaiso University and Calumet College of St. Joseph. The region also is served by small campuses operated by Indiana Wesleyan and St. Francis University. Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana facilities also are located in all three counties. Areas where NIRPC and universities could share or develop resources include internships in areas where NIRPC or other agencies lack staff resources, special studies to support economic development, land use, sustainable development, natural resource management, social equity, public finance and urban redevelopment and public leadership development.
- **Developers** – Achieving sustainable development requires the buy-in of private developers as well as municipal and county governments. Strengthening the relationship could be facilitated by closer interaction with the Northwest Indiana Forum, or direct representation on appropriate NIRPC committees as well as targeted outreach by NIRPC to developers.
- **Social/Environmental Justice Partners** – Integrating social equity/environmental justice concerns into regional public policy calls for creating new partnerships with agencies and organizations that NIRPC has not traditionally been active in.

## New and Renewed Initiatives

Several regional initiatives could be undertaken that would further improve efforts to coordinate service delivery and to facilitate dialogue among local elected officials regarding shared policy concerns.

Potential initiatives include:

- Continue to encourage and support a regular convening of mayors focusing of the three counties of Northwest Indiana. An independent organization will create the policy environment for direct and uninhibited policy development on issues important to the municipalities. Providing an autonomous environment for engagement on issues important to the group will help strengthen policy making and place NIRPC in an even stronger implementation role. NIRPC would provide technical assistance and support to the group.
- New task forces could be established within the overall structure, and guided by the interest of members, to focus on policy areas of particular interest to some - such as public transportation, core community revitalization efforts, environmental justice/social equity, lakefront initiatives, annexation policy, or the provision of shared services. A task force could serve a valuable role in providing “arms-length” policy advocacy at the state level based on the consensus views of its membership, bring together a diverse range of stakeholders to address regional issues, and provide a valuable forum to foster understanding among the region’s elected leaders in addressing shared challenges. Such an initiative could build on the established IACT Northern Mayor’s Roundtable, but it should be focused around the NIRPC region’s issues.
- Continue to support bistate (tristate and quadstate) coalitions in cooperation with other Councils of Government to address issues extending beyond NIRPC’s regional boundary - poten-

tially to include public transportation, lakefront and trail system enhancements, watershed management and others.

- Continue to participate in other regional initiatives such as the Quality of Life Council, GRIP, and the One Region, One Vision.

## A Renewed Commitment to Environmental Justice

Since passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, each federal agency has been required to ensure that all programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance that affect human health or the environment do not directly, or through other arrangements, use criteria, methods, or practices that discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin. Since 1994, every federal agency has been further directed to make “environmental justice” (EJ) part of its mission by identifying and addressing the effects of all programs, policies and activities on “minority populations and low-income populations.” The order promotes nondiscrimination in federal programs substantially affecting human health and the environment, with the intent to provide minority communities and low-income communities access to public information on, and an opportunity for public participation in, matters relating to human health or the environment.

NIRPC’s role in the allocation and management of federal transportation funds obligates the organization to fulfill these requirements in its transportation-related activities. More broadly and in acknowledgement of the inter-related nature of regional planning efforts, a commitment to environmental justice should permeate all of NIRPC’s activities, with a focus not only on fulfilling the “letter of the law” but on reducing regional patterns of inequity over time and supporting revitalization efforts in areas experiencing the impacts of prolonged disinvestment and economic challenges.

Focusing regional efforts on supporting livable centers throughout the region, with an urban strategy focused on the core communities, will ensure that public resources are both used efficiently and that the benefit of public expenditures will accrue to the greatest number of

Northwest Indiana residents, including EJ populations. Efforts to stabilize the core communities as described elsewhere in this plan, including investments in transportation, housing, employment opportunities and civic facilities and amenities, will enhance the quality of life for residents of these communities. The resulting improvements in regional mobility, reductions in congestion, improvements in air quality and conservation of critical environmental resources through a more compact development pattern will benefit all residents of Northwest Indiana.



South Shore commuters in Michigan City. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

# Plan & Policy Recommendations

The 2040 CRP describes a vision and establishes a direction for both cooperative regional actions and local actions to improve stewardship and governance. This section describes recommendations related to intergovernmental relations, funding, advocacy, environmental justice, education and communications. Plan recommendations include:

## Planning, Review & Coordination

1. Promote coordination of local government land use and planning activities in order to achieve joint planning or shared review for areas of multi-community interest such as shared corridors, unincorporated areas, environmentally significant lands, and regionally significant projects
2. Review comprehensive plans for consistency with the goals and objectives of the CRP and with those of county and adjacent municipality plans, providing policy direction to better coordinate planning efforts
3. Review proposed amendments to zoning and/or subdivision regulations, providing recommendations to better align local land use controls with CRP objectives over time
4. Assist with the negotiation of intergovernmental agreements, particularly as they relate to land use and development issues that will have implications for future transportation needs and/or resource protection
5. Pursue watershed planning, including a bistate planning effort in coordination with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)
6. Pursue regional plans for flood control, including a coordinated strategy to implement stormwater best management practices (BMPs)
7. Consult with local businesses in the development of strategies for encouraging infill redevelopment activity through voluntary remediation programs (VRPs) for brownfield sites

## Funding Support

1. Continue ongoing NIRPC support for capital improvements, and other county and municipal infrastructure programming
2. Utilize project selection criteria that reward municipalities that demonstrate a commitment to CRP implementation
3. Explore regional financing strategies for public infrastructure projects that impact multiple communities
4. Facilitate and promote shared service arrangements among municipalities to leverage available resources for the benefit of all participants
5. Continue to assist municipalities with fiscal sustainability planning, including discussions regarding potential shared service arrangements with neighboring municipalities
6. Investigate and share opportunities for municipalities to engage in revenue-sharing strategies, resulting in reduced financial inequities across the region when addressing issues of regional importance and impact
7. Secure external resources to provide incentives for infill redevelopment activity through voluntary remediation programs (VRPs) for brownfield sites

## Advocacy & Environmental Justice

1. Direct program dollars and investments to communities committed to implementation of the CRP policies and recommendations related to environmental justice. Funding “carrots” could include awarding bonus points during project selection for commitments to cooperative sub-regional planning and projects that directly support a livable center, for example
2. Facilitate a working group focused on the planning needs of the “core” communities, to provide technical support and ensure that external resources and opportunities for coopera-

- tion are being fully leveraged
3. Support agencies and organizations dedicated to social justice and improving race relations, and commit NIRPC to educating local elected officials on the need to think regionally and embrace diverse interests in planning decisions
  4. Facilitate significant public outreach efforts at all levels of planning, either through direct staff assistance or technical assistance in developing and implementing outreach strategies. In particular, seek to reduce barriers to participation and better engage minority and low-income populations in outreach efforts
  5. Establish mechanisms to address bistate issues, in particular those that directly impact the region's core communities near the state line – including transportation, trail system expansion, and watershed management

## Education & Communication

1. Host an annual forum on CRP implementation, primarily for elected and appointed officials, to review accomplishments and the status of performance measures
2. Continue annual outreach and coordination meetings with counties and communities, to ensure ongoing awareness of issues and concerns
3. Host a biannual or quarterly series of “planning roundtables” with community and stakeholder groups to address current issues of shared local and regional concern
4. Make available to interested municipalities and groups a community training program on the basics of land use and transportation planning, to foster increased understanding and involvement in decision-making among stakeholders
5. Collect or develop model ordinances and inter-local agreements addressing various issues relevant to municipalities in the region, and make them available as a resource for local planning efforts
6. Develop systems to improve access to information, foster transparency, support community involvement and increase

accountability across all levels of government in the region and with the general public

7. Facilitate open and efficient access to regional information and decision-making tools through further development and enhancement of the NIRPC website, including feedback mechanisms to allow interested citizens to share their ideas and concerns on an ongoing basis



Interpreting Native American heritage at the historic Bailly Homestead in Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

# Legislative Priorities

An important role for NIRPC is as a vocal advocate at the state level for the needs and concerns of municipalities in Northwest Indiana. Working with regional and local partners as appropriate, NIRPC should determine how to most effectively foster understanding among state lawmakers about the planning issues confronting the region and the appropriate policy response at the state level.

NIRPC's legislative list should be regularly reviewed and refined, so that NIRPC and its member counties and communities speak with one voice with regard to major regional policy needs.

Potential issues for NIRPC to consider in the future might include legislation, which could:

1. Provide a reliable and long-term source of funding for public transportation system expansion and ongoing operational support.
2. Place transit funding on par with highway funding, to ensure a balanced and sustainable transportation network is developed and maintained over time.
3. Increase funding support to plan for, and mitigate the impacts of, freight transportation at the regional scale.
4. Seek to secure federal funding to support revitalization efforts in the core communities – including transportation, housing, education and other related initiatives. EDA funding and the support from the HUD-DOT-EPA Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities will be key resources in this effort.
5. Continue to fund and support the Marquette Plan and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
6. Reform local match requirements for securing federal grants (eliminate local share requirement in some cases) to increase flexibility in NIRPC's allocation of resources.
7. Provide funding to support meaningful education, outreach and participation efforts as local plans are developed and adopted.

8. Develop and implement state tax policy that favors development in infill locations, including brownfield reuse.
9. Enable more flexible funding options at the local level, potentially to include:
  - a. Local tax base sharing for any cooperative venture that may be lawfully undertaken under the Inter-local Cooperation Act.
  - b. State tax policy that increases local capital improvement funding options, allowing more alternatives such as a local option sales tax, hotel tax, and/or food and beverage tax.
  - c. Local governments to impose both elective and non-elective payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTS) for general governmental services provided to nontaxable properties in the municipality. Current law only allows voluntary payments, and then only for purposes of economic development.



July 4 parade in Crown Point. Photo by Joe Marinaro via Flickr.

# Best Practices

**B**est practices in stewardship and governance are those that result in consensus and effective action to address regional problems, issues and goals. There are many models of successful strategies for NIRPC and partner agencies and organizations to consider, some of which NIRPC has successfully employed in the past.

NIRPC has a long history of engaging public and private sector partners to achieve success in a variety of areas. The strong participation of the federal and state legislative delegations, municipal and county officials, environmentalists, and others was key to the success of these initiatives. Outstanding major regional projects that were completed through NIRPC-led initiatives include:

**Borman Task Force** - Caused INDOT to reconstruct six interchanges to meet modern standards, set new parameters for highway beautification, install noise barriers, and changed how lighting on the expressway was paid for.

**Lake Michigan Marina Development Commission** - Formed and staffed by NIRPC and led to the construction of marinas in East Chicago, Hammond, and Portage, and lakefront improvements in Whiting and Michigan City.

**Kankakee River Basin Commission** - Facilitated by NIRPC staff interaction with agricultural and sporting interests as well as county and municipal officials in the river's drainage basin.

**Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission** – Originally created as the Little Calumet River Basin Commission, the agency was staffed by NIRPC from its inception in 1971 until 2010, and was charged with construction of a flood protection system along the Little Calumet River from I-65 west to the Illinois state line. The federally funded Army Corps of Engineers project is to be completed by the end of 2011.

**The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus** - First convened at the invitation of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in 1997, with participation from mayors representing nine suburban municipal associations that encompass the 272 municipalities in the Chicagoland region<sup>1</sup>. The first meeting resulted in a commitment to serve as a forum for regional cooperation. An Executive Board (with representation from the city of Chicago and each of the municipal conferences) meets every other month, with full caucus meetings three times each year. The caucus views itself as an informal organization, with wide-ranging discussions between mayors “developing joint solutions and positions of consensus on critical municipal and regional issues.” The caucus has addressed issues such as: economic development, school funding and tax reform, work force readiness, energy reliability and security, air quality, funding for transportation and infrastructure, housing and emergency preparedness. The caucus is a strong advocate for the adoption of consensus positions at the federal, state and local levels of government, seeking to achieve a “single vision and focus so we can leverage the strength of a unified position on key issues.”

**One Region, One Vision** – Led by the Times of Northwest Indiana, One Region, One Vision has engaged people from all sectors in a long term project to identify and support regional projects to improve the economy and quality of life in northwest Indiana. It was through the efforts of One Region, One Vision that the Gary and Region Investment Project (GRIP) initiative was formed to focus on the revitalization of the City of Gary.

<sup>1</sup> [www.mayorscaucus.org/pages/Home/About\\_the\\_Caucus/Mission\\_History.html](http://www.mayorscaucus.org/pages/Home/About_the_Caucus/Mission_History.html)

# Performance Measures

There are a variety of ways to measure the success of increased efforts to improve stewardship and governance as defined by the 2040 CRP goals and objectives. Selecting the preferred measurements must be based on availability of data and NIRPC's capacity to staff detailed analyses. The following performance measures meet these criteria:

- Municipal participation in NIRPC initiatives, attendance at events, including from EJ areas
- Number of Northwest Indiana legislative issues addressed at the state level, track progress
- Amount of funding secured from external sources that supports implementation of the CRP goals and objectives
- Rate of participation in shared or regional programs (purchasing, advocacy, service coordination)
- QLC government efficiency and fiscal health indicators (adequate reserves, etc.)



Merrillville Pirates cheer on their team. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

# Implementation Strategies

**N**IRPC's Board of Commissioners must prioritize where it wishes to direct staff commitments and invest financial resources to support stewardship and governance. The 2040 CRP process has identified a long list of potential activities, most of which would contribute to achieving the Plan's goals and objectives. It is to NIRPC's credit that it already engages in some best practices to build coalitions and engage partners to achieve regional goals. The efforts required to pursue many of the 2040 CRP initiatives will require expanded staff and financial capacity.

Another key need will be to approach potential partners that share the same priorities as the Commission. In some cases this can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of addressing these shared priorities, by allowing partners to focus on their respective areas of expertise within the context of shared objectives.

Strategies, to be pursued related to stewardship and governance, include the following:

- Explore funding resources for NIRPC and regional partners to support greater cooperation and interaction among non-traditional partners
- Provide support for integration of livable communities' standards and social equity considerations into local planning decision-making.
- Facilitate and foster opportunities for shared local government services and improving the fiscal sustainability of the counties and existing cities and towns.
- Build/renew partnerships at the regional, state and federal levels to improve and strengthen advocacy efforts.
- Increase and broaden public participation activities to ensure an ongoing and meaningful process for citizens.



Preparing to surf in Lake Michigan. Photo courtesy the Times of Northwest Indiana.

