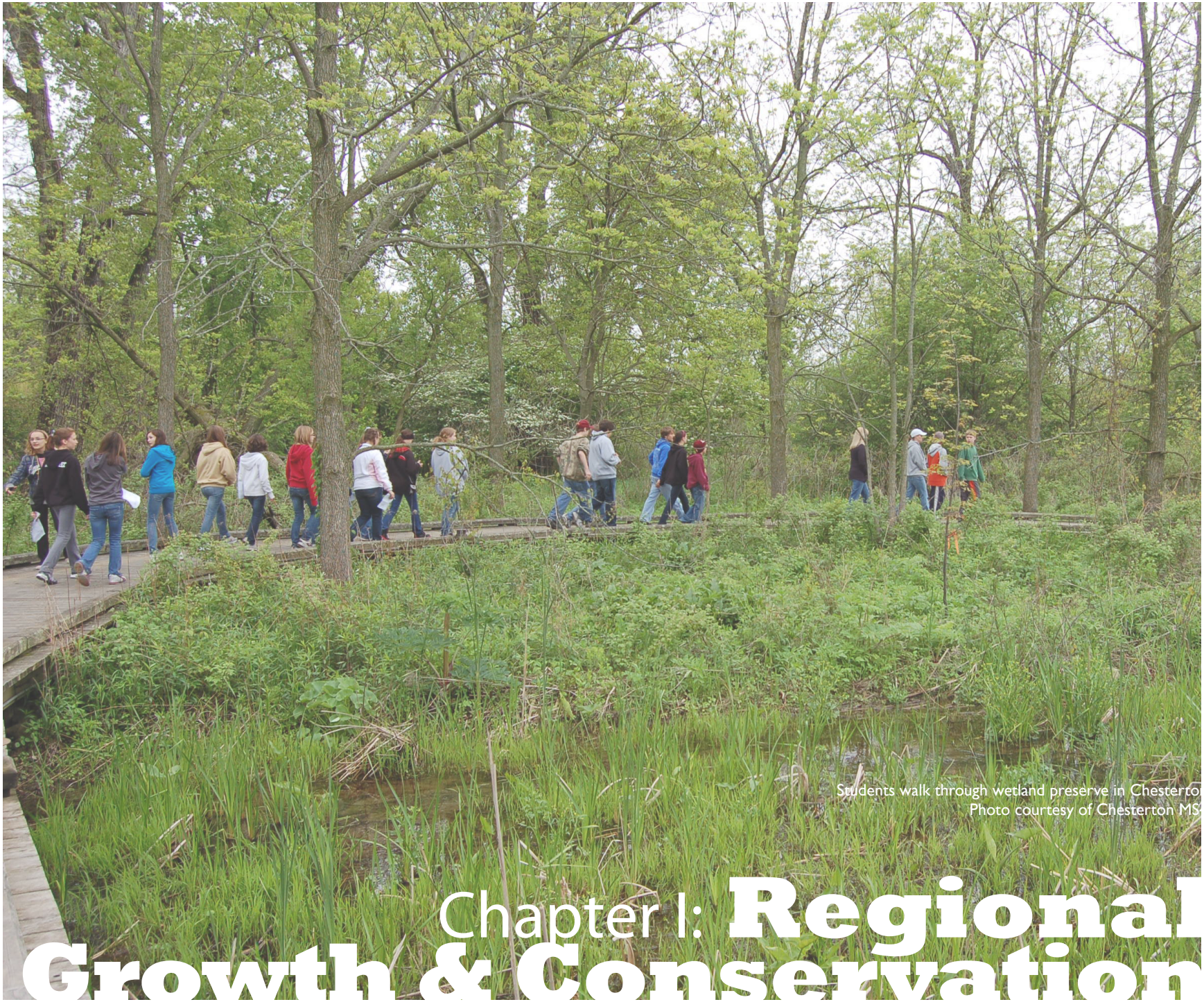

Students walk through wetland preserve in Chesterto
Photo courtesy of Chesterton MS

Chapter I: Regional Growth & Conservation

Contents/page

Overview/ 1
Growth & Revitalization Vision/ 2
Growth & Conservation Goals & Objectives/ 5
The Current Condition/ 6
Our People: Demographics of Northwest Indiana/ 7
Housing/ 14
Existing Land Use/ 20
Regional Growth Analysis (1992-2006)/ 23
Conversion of Agricultural & Open Space/ 26
Shifting Population & Development Patterns/ 30
Regional Urban Framework/ 33
Urban Framework Strategies/ 35
Performance Measure/Indicators/ 56
Rural & Unincorporated Framework/ 57
Developing Our Local Food Systems/ 62

Overview

The Vision for Northwest Indiana is one of vibrant communities providing for a range of lifestyles, living conditions and employment opportunities. While the region's diversity of community types are inherently driven by land use, they also are strongly influenced by their location, the natural environment, transportation, economics and governance. This vision for the future of Northwest Indiana is firmly grounded in the attitudes and perspectives of those who participated in the development of the CRP. This is apparent in the Vision and Goals first introduced in the plan as it is also apparent through the physical planning activities of the CRP process. Consider for example the following summary included in the Subregional Cluster Workshop Synthesis Report (December 2009). The term "centers" refers to different sizes of communities that were discussed for the future of the region, and they have been incorporated in the Growth and Revitalization Vision.

- Strong consensus on Gary and Hammond as the region's metropolitan centers
- Strong consensus on redevelopment and revitalization of the urban core
- Strong consensus that growth in Porter County should be concentrated in northern areas within the Lake Michigan watershed
- Strong consensus on steady, consistent growth in LaPorte County centers with greatest growth in the Michigan City-Westville-LaPorte/Kingsbury triangle
- Strong consensus and broad agreement that growth and development take place within and around existing communities
- Strong consensus on the need for intergovernmental coordination of services if not consolidation of communities
- Strong consensus that no new centers be introduced into the region

In short, the message was to focus new growth and development in existing community area where infrastructure and urban services would be most readily available. Residents were aware that the region expects to grow by approximately 170,000 people and 80,000 jobs by the year 2040, and the choices for how we plan – or don't plan – for this growth and development has significant implications for the future quality of life of the region.

To be effective, the Growth and Conservation element must quilt together key aspects of all other elements of the CRP. At the same time, it must not be overly ambitious in its scope, while at the same time meet critical needs and opportunities of the region. At its core, the many interconnected actions called for in the Growth and Conservation Element serve to focus resources in a manner that enables the region to be economically competitive and successful as a whole. Concepts of urban growth, development, conservation, transit and directed infrastructure when properly guided create an investment framework that builds communities and strengthens regional economies. To this extent, the Growth and Conservation element is a critical component of the region's economic development strategy that seeks to build on Northwest Indiana's strengths and overcome its weaknesses. Careful implementation of its policies, recommendations and actions by all involved will be necessary for the region to realize its vision.

As a result, achieving the Growth and Revitalization Vision is a collaborative exercise. While some might offer this as a risk or weakness to plan implementation, in reality it represents the CRP's greatest strengths. The communities, stakeholder and agencies of successful regions of the 21st Century, now more than ever must work together to remain competitive in the global economy. Those that do can retool and strengthen their economic base, create new identities for an entire region and demonstrate capability and wherewithal to meet challenges. These traits draw attention … and investment.

As noted above, a strong consensus on the direction of growth and development and the physical form of the region emerged through public engagement. These concepts have been synthesized into the Growth and Revitalization Vision, which sets the stage for implementation actions and roles on behalf of the regional community. The Growth and Revitalization Vision presented below was first presented in the Introduction to the Plan. Because of its importance as a central organizing feature to the Growth and Conservation Element, it is restated here.

Growth & Revitalization Vision

While the CRP Vision and Goals and Objectives provide a critical policy framework for the CRP, the Growth and Revitalization Vision (Figure I.1) presents a physical expression of the Vision and Goals combined. The Growth and Revitalization Vision was developed through the CRP's scenario-planning process, briefly described in the next section. The Growth and Revitalization Vision, illustrated below, includes several key components:

- **Community Type and Role** – As part of the Subregional Cluster workshops, preferences for growth and scale of the region's 41 communities, and expectations for the general size and character of the communities, were discussed. These basic preferences, along with the region's population and employment forecast, are discussed in more detail as part of the Growth and Conservation chapter of the CRP. All 41 communities are characterized as a Metropolitan Center or a Large, Medium or Small community.
- **Focused Revitalization** – There was broad consensus in the region that investment and revitalization of the region's core urbanized areas, generally located along the lakefront, is critical to long-term regional, social and economic stability. Policies and recommendations to meet this need have been made throughout the CRP. However, focused strategies are made a part the Growth and Conservation chapter.
- **Growth and Infill** – The CRP recognizes that the continued or improved economic health of all the region's communities requires continued growth and investment. Perhaps the greatest emphasis of the CRP is to suggest how new growth and infill development should best be accommodated. The region's communities and the CRP place emphasis on a Livable Centers growth concept. The Livable Centers approach is described in more detail in both the Transportation and Growth and Conservation chapters. Success of the Livable Centers approach also relies heavily on the implementation of rural and unincorporated area policies and a Green Infrastructure Network.
- **Green Infrastructure** – Northwest Indiana's "green infrastructure" is composed of a complex array of land and water resources features. These are discussed in greater detail in the Environment and Green Infrastructure chapter. The Green Infrastructure Network concept also includes the vast majority of the region's agricultural resources. Maintaining a sustainable Green Infrastructure Network for Northwest Indiana is highly dependent upon successful implementation of both the urban and rural growth and conservation strategies of the CRP.

While several aspects of the CRP highlighted above provide important reference points for the accomplishing the Growth and Revitalization Vision, this only can be effectively accomplished through implementation of all major recommendations of the CRP. Noteworthy to this effort is the adopted Marquette Plan, which has strong and consistent overlap with the fundamental economic, development and redevelopment principles of the CRP.

Horace Mann Hope VI Residential Project in downtown Gary. Photo courtesy of the city of Gary.

Northwest Indiana
Growth and Revitalization Vision

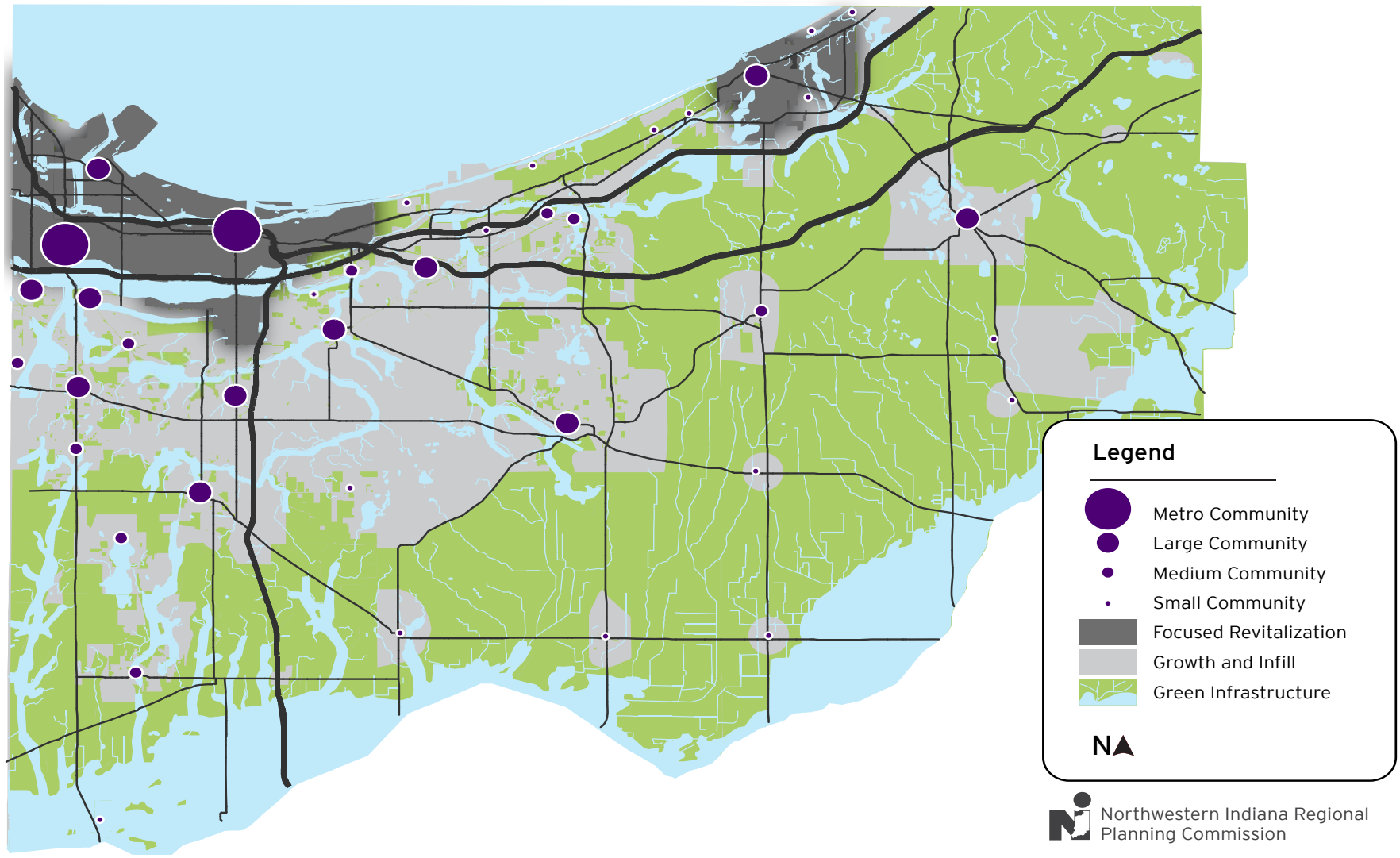

Figure I.1 Northwest Indiana Growth and Conservation Vision Map

Growth and Revitalization Values

In arriving at the Growth and Revitalization Vision, participants and stakeholders laid claim to a number of key "drivers" that are highly valued and which form the basis for key CRP assumptions and must be supported as part of CRP implementation.

- **Recognize a possible increase of approximately 170,000 people in the next 30 years** – The CRP assumes a regional population growth control total of approximately 170,000 and a regional job growth total of approximately 80,000 by 2040. The preferred scenario retains this forecast. More detailed information on the population forecast is provided later in this chapter.
- **Embrace constrained, planned growth and encourage sustainable development within existing communities whose population centers will be livable and vibrant** – Infrastructure will be constrained, as the 2040 Vision calls for balanced, sustainable growth throughout the region. This growth is focused through application of Livable Centers concept.
- **Develop a strong regional transit network** – Participants and stakeholders recognized the importance of a strong transit system to meet long-term regional mobility, land use and economic development goals. While the CRP supports improved multimodal connectivity overall, improved transit service in both regional coverage and varied technologies will be essential for the success of the region in the future.
- **Protect natural, rural and agricultural assets** - The CRP builds on consensus developed during the Subregional Cluster Workshops that identified a network of natural areas that included protected open space, conservation areas and agricultural lands. The CRP recommends a Green Infrastructure approach to the protection of waterbodies, wetlands, floodplains, groundwater protection areas, high-quality forest, prime agricultural land and areas of biodiversity and wildlife habitat.
- **Support local plans** – An important consideration was to recognize and continue to honor the autonomy of local governments and agencies in the implementation of local plans. A commitment to collaboration was made in realizing the intergovernmental aspects of the CRP, without over-stepping the planning and development responsibilities of local interests.

These connections have been recognized in other regionally focused plans such as the Marquette Plan, which calls for a bold transformation of the Lake Michigan shoreline to enhance the livability of the region's communities. The catalytic projects identified in the plan extend across the region, capitalizing on the assets of Lake Michigan and targeting the strategic actions necessary to create a livable lakefront, including those driven by land use, transportation and environmental policy changes.

The Growth and Conservation Element of the CRP includes the following sections:

- Growth and Conservation Goals and Objectives
- The Current Condition
- Urban Framework that includes:
  - Reinvest
  - Link Transportation and Land Use
  - Smarter Land Use Decisions through Land Suitability
  - New Ways of Determining and Addressing Housing Needs
  - Green Cities
  - Work Together
  - Create Livable Centers
- Rural and Unincorporated Framework
  - Preserving the Region's Rural Character and Resources
  - Healthy Communities – Developing our Local Food Systems

Growth & Conservation Goals & Objectives

The 2040 CRP Vision Statement addresses growth and conservation in its "Vibrant Region" and "Revitalized Region" themes.

> A ***vibrant*** region*: Our economy is thriving, our people are well-educated, and our environment is clean.*
>
> A ***revitalized*** region*: Growth is planned, urban areas are renewed, and natural and rural areas are valued and protected.*

Three goals and their related objectives provide the framework for further action and initiatives to bring about achieving these vision themes.

Vision Theme: Vibrant Region – *Planned Growth*
Goal: Livable urban, suburban and rural centers
Objectives:

- Encourage the compact mixing of uses
- Encourage a diverse mix of housing types and affordability levels near job centers and transit routes
- Facilitate the remediation and redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized land, including brownfields and greyfields.
- Promote community green infrastructure and access to public open space
- Promote the preservation of historic and cultural resources
- Promote the integration of Context Sensitive Solutions into transportation planning projects

Vision Theme: Revitalized Region – *Renewed Urban Areas*
Goal: Revitalized urban core
Objectives:

- Foster the development of livable, mixed-use downtowns
- Promote adaptive reuse, infill development and the remediation and reuse of underutilized properties, particularly brownfields
- Facilitate the rehabilitation of neighborhoods and maintenance of high-quality and affordable housing
- Promote the preservation of historic and cultural resources
- Expand visual and physical access to Lake Michigan and other open space
- Partner to protect threatened natural remnants
- Enhance community design and aesthetics

Vision Theme: Vibrant Region – *Protected natural and rural areas*
Goal: Managed growth that protects farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and important ecosystems
Objectives:

- Promote the development and preservation of regional greenways and blueways (water trails) and establish linkages between them
- Encourage the concentration of development around existing infrastructure
- Encourage redevelopment of infill sites within established centers
- Promote compact development and smart growth through techniques such as transit-oriented development, traditional neighborhood development and conservation design
- Foster the development of local food systems and a local food economy
- Preserve prime agricultural land and rural landscapes
- Encourage and plan for the protection and responsible use of shoreline areas
- Improve access to major regional parks and preserved open lands, including the Indiana Dunes

The Current Condition

NIRPC's coverage in Northwest Indiana is a three-county region of 1,761 square miles encompassing Lake, LaPorte and Porter counties. As a "lakeshore region," Northwest Indiana sustains a wide range of communities and living environments. Over the past few decades, residential growth trends have been a movement away from the northern tier cities in the region to southern tier communities. While Gary and Hammond have been most challenged by shifts in growth patterns, both still rank in the 10 most populated cities in Indiana and comprise 22% of the region's population.

To plan for the future, it is first important to have an understanding of the trends and patterns of development in the NIRPC region. Two land-use analyses were conducted — 1) an existing land use inventory; and 2) a regional growth analysis. The land-use inventory is a snapshot of the current land-use conditions of the region. Conversely, the regional growth analysis offers a recent picture of how the region's development patterns have changed over time. It presents a clearer understanding of the trends and patterns of growth and development and the impacts of zoning and land-use decisions.

While Gary and Hammond have been most challenged by shifts in growth patterns, both still rank in the 10 most populated cities in Indiana and comprise 22% of the region's population.

Downtown Gary. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

Our People: Demographics of Northwest Indiana

Importance

Demographics are the characteristics of populations. They describe who lives within our region and what they are like. Studying demographic trends is important because it provides guidance for our planning efforts. Put simply, we need to know for whom we are planning before we plan.

After losing population in the 1980s, the region has grown steadily over the past two decades. We expect this growth to continue through 2040. In addition, by 2040 the region will be more racially and ethnically diverse, and the elder population will make up a greater share of our residents. These changes present challenges that need to be addressed if our region is to thrive in 2040. For example: How do we address mobility for an aging population in our auto-centric region? How do we accommodate additional people without negatively impacting our environment and our overall quality of life? How do we encourage people to stop leaving core communities for suburban and exurban communities? These and similar questions are addressed throughout this plan.

This section focuses on recent demographic trends and what they can tell us about the future. Given our thirty-year planning horizon, trends from the previous thirty years are used when available. For population and employment projections between now and 2040, see the Human Resources and Economics chapter.

Key Issues and Opportunities

- The urban core is still losing population.
- The population is growing fastest in outer suburban areas and unincorporated areas.
- The population is getting older as a whole.
- Households and families are getting smaller, though this appears to be leveling off.
- The region is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse.

Trends and Analysis

Northwest Indiana – Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties – experienced rapid growth through the 1960s. After growth slowed between 1960 and 1980, the region lost population during the 1980s as steel and other industries declined. However, the past two decades have seen slow yet steady growth. In 2010 the region's population surpassed the previous high mark from 1980 by more than 20,000 people (Figure I.2). Given the location and assets of our region, we expect growth to continue between now and 2040.

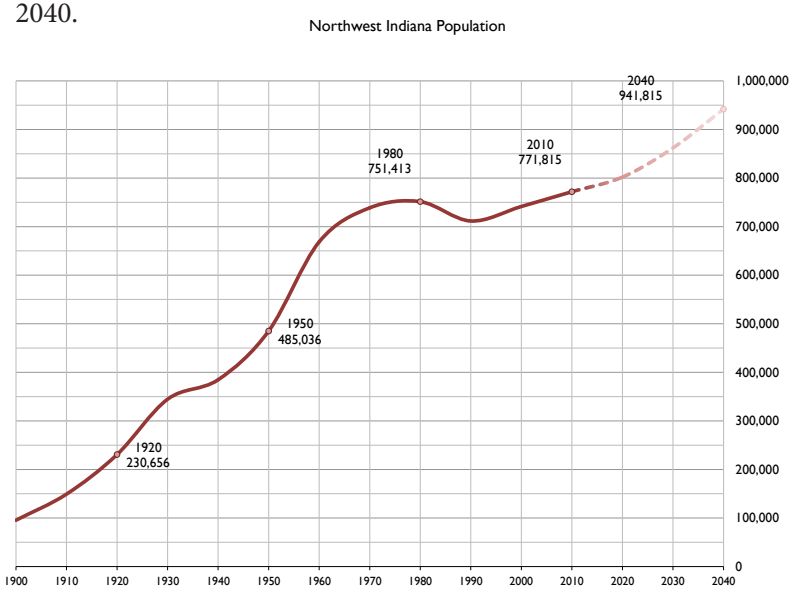

Figure I.2 Population Change Over Time

Chapter I

A Familiar Pattern

Despite the modest overall growth of the region in recent decades, the distribution of population has followed a pattern that is familiar throughout America. Population has shifted from the once-thriving industrial, urban core to surrounding communities and unincorporated areas (See Figure I.3). These trends by town and county are briefly described below and in Table I.1.

The movement of so many people out of existing communities and into undeveloped areas presents challenges to our region both at present and in the future. Should we invest in new roads, sewers and other infrastructure and neglect the investments we've already made? What will happen to our existing communities' tax bases if we continue to leave them for more remote areas? Will our water supply be able to support more growth?

Current population trends suggest that these and other serious questions of regional importance have been given little, if any, consideration when accommodating growth in recent decades. It is critical that we address the myriad of issues associated with our future growth. Growth will occur; it is up to us to manage it in a responsible way.

Urban Core Communities

The urban core communities of Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City have lost about 100,000 people over the past 30 years. This loss is equivalent of 13 percent of the region's current population. Gary alone has lost more than 70,000 people (47 percent of 1980 population); Hammond has lost nearly 13,000 (13.7 percent), East Chicago has lost more than 10,000 (25.3 percent), and Michigan City has lost more than 5,000 people (14.6 percent).

Several other small- and mid-sized communities in the core area of northern Lake County – Highland, Griffith, Lake Station, New Chicago and Whiting – also lost population over this period, but this mainly occurred during the economic downturn in the 1980s. Since 1990, these communities have had relatively stable populations.

Lakefront Communities

The lakefront communities of Beverly Shores, Dune Acres, Long Beach, Michiana Shores, Ogden Dunes, and Town of Pines also have experienced population losses since 1980. However, unlike the losses in the core communities, this is mainly due to a shift in housing ownership from year-round residents to vacationers.

Porter County

Growth in northern Porter County has been steady in Portage, Burns Harbor, Porter and Chesterton. Also, pockets of population have sprung up in unincorporated areas between Portage and Valparaiso and to the west of Valparaiso. In addition, Valparaiso has been adding population steadily, averaging more than 3,000 people per decade. The most growth in Porter County has been in unincorporated areas, with almost 19,000 people added between 1980 and 2010.

Gary Neighborhood Clean Up Day. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

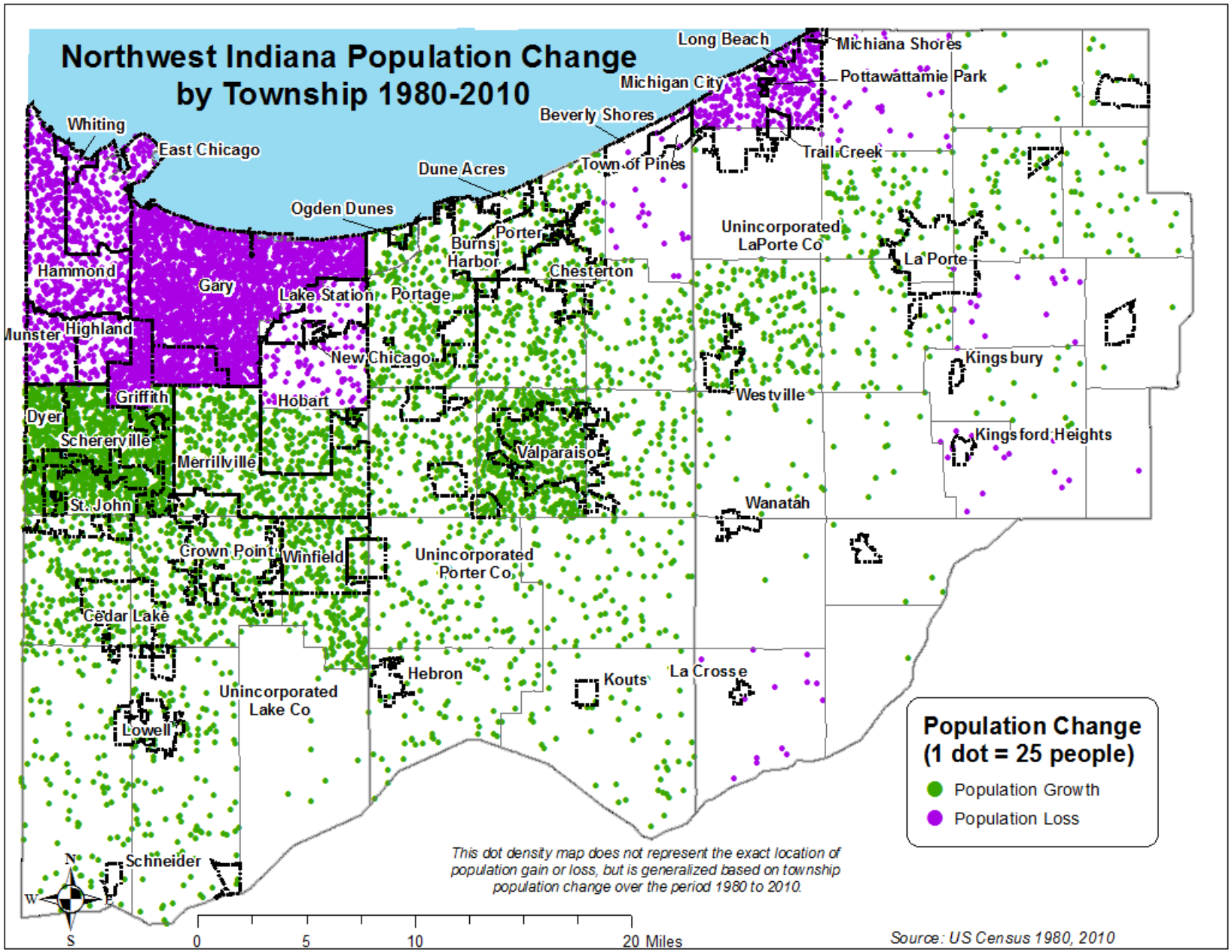

Figure I.3 Population Change 1980-2010 (Generalized)

	Population				Change by Decade			% Change by Decade		
Geography	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**1980-1990**	**1990-2000**	**2000-2010**	**1980-1990**	**1990-2000**	**2000-2010**
Lake County	**522,965**	**475,594**	**484,564**	**496,005**	**-47,371**	**8,970**	**11,441**	**-0.091**	**0.019**	**0.024**
Cedar Lake	8,754	8,885	9,279	11,560	131	394	2,281	0.015	0.044	0.246
Crown Point	16,455	17,728	19,806	27,317	1,273	2,078	7,511	0.077	0.117	0.379
Dyer	9,555	10,923	13,895	16,390	1,368	2,972	2,495	0.143	0.272	0.18
East Chicago	39,786	33,892	32,414	29,698	-5,894	-1,478	-2,716	-0.148	-0.044	-0.084
Gary	151,953	116,646	102,746	80,294	-35,307	-13,900	-22,452	-0.232	-0.119	-0.219
Griffith	17,026	17,914	17,334	16,893	888	-580	-441	0.052	-0.032	-0.025
Hammond	93,714	84,236	83,048	80,830	-9,478	-1,188	-2,218	-0.101	-0.014	-0.027
Highland	25,935	23,696	23,546	23,727	-2,239	-150	181	-0.086	-0.006	0.008
Hobart	22,987	24,440	25,363	29,059	1,453	923	3,696	0.063	0.038	0.146
Lake Station	15,083	13,899	13,948	12,572	-1,184	49	-1,376	-0.078	0.004	-0.099
Lowell	5,827	6,430	7,505	9,276	603	1,075	1,771	0.103	0.167	0.236
Merrillville	27,677	27,257	30,560	35,246	-420	3,303	4,686	-0.015	0.121	0.153
Munster	20,671	19,949	21,511	23,603	-722	1,562	2,092	-0.035	0.078	0.097
New Chicago	2,585	2,066	2,063	2,035	-519	-3	-28	-0.201	-0.001	-0.014
St John	3,974	4,921	8,382	14,850	947	3,461	6,468	0.238	0.703	0.772
Schererville	13,209	20,155	24,851	29,243	6,946	4,696	4,392	0.526	0.233	0.177
Schneider	364	310	317	277	-54	7	-40	-0.148	0.023	-0.126
Whiting	5,630	5,155	5,137	4,997	-475	-18	-140	-0.084	-0.003	-0.027
Winfield	0	0	2,298	4,383		2,298	2,085	NA	2.563	0.907
Unincorporated Lake	41,780	36,447	40,561	43,755	-5,333	4,114	3,194	-0.128	0.113	0.079

Table I.1 Population Change 1980-2010 by Region, County and Municipality

	Population				Change by Decade			% Change by Decade		
Geography	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**1980-1990**	**1990-2000**	**2000-2010**	**1980-1990**	**1990-2000**	**2000-2010**
LaPorte County	**108,632**	**107,066**	**110,106**	**111,467**	**-1,566**	**3,040**	**1,361**	**-0.014**	**0.028**	**0.012**
Kingsbury	329	258	229	242	-71	-29	13	-0.216	-0.112	0.057
Kingsford Heights	1,618	1,486	1,453	1,435	-132	-33	-18	-0.082	-0.022	-0.012
La Crosse	713	677	561	551	-36	-116	-10	-0.05	-0.171	-0.018
La Porte	21,796	21,507	21,621	22,053	-289	114	432	-0.013	0.005	0.02
Long Beach	2,262	2,044	1,559	1,179	-218	-485	-380	-0.096	-0.237	-0.244
Michiana Shores	464	378	330	313	-86	-48	-17	-0.185	-0.127	-0.052
Michigan City	36,850	33,822	32,900	31,479	-3,028	-922	-1,421	-0.082	-0.027	-0.043
Pottawattomie Park	284	281	300	235	-3	19	-65	-0.011	0.068	-0.217
Trail Creek	2,581	2,463	2,296	2,052	-118	-167	-244	-0.046	-0.068	-0.106
Wanatah	879	852	1,013	1,048	-27	161	35	-0.031	0.189	0.035
Westville	2,887	5,255	5,211	5,853	2,368	-44	642	0.82	-0.008	0.123
Unincorporated LaPorte	37,969	38,043	42,633	45,027	74	4,590	2,394	0.002	0.121	0.056
Porter County	**119,816**	**128,932**	**146,798**	**164,343**	**9,116**	**17,866**	**17,545**	**0.076**	**0.139**	**0.12**
Beverly Shores	864	622	708	613	-242	86	-95	-0.28	0.138	-0.134
Burns Harbor	920	788	766	1,156	-132	-22	390	-0.143	-0.028	0.509
Chesterton	8,531	9,124	10,488	13,068	593	1,364	2,580	0.07	0.149	0.246
Dune Acres	291	263	213	182	-28	-50	-31	-0.096	-0.19	-0.146
Hebron	2,696	3,183	3,596	3,724	487	413	128	0.181	0.13	0.036
Kouts	1,619	1,603	1,698	1,879	-16	95	181	-0.01	0.059	0.107
Ogden Dunes	1,489	1,499	1,313	1,110	10	-186	-203	0.007	-0.124	-0.155
Portage	27,409	29,060	33,496	36,828	1,651	4,436	3,332	0.06	0.153	0.099
Porter	2,988	3,118	4,972	4,858	130	1,854	-114	0.044	0.595	-0.023
Town of Pines	962	789	798	708	-173	9	-90	-0.18	0.011	-0.113
Valparaiso	22,247	24,414	27,428	31,730	2,167	3,014	4,302	0.097	0.123	0.157
Unincorporated Porter	49,800	54,469	61,322	68,487	4,669	6,853	7,165	0.094	0.126	0.117
NIRPC Region	**751,413**	**711,592**	**741,468**	**771,815**	**-39,821**	**29,876**	**30,347**	**-0.053**	**0.042**	**0.041**

Table I.1 Population Change 1980-2010 by Region, County and Municipality, continued

LaPorte County

In the mostly rural LaPorte County, most towns have experienced modest shifts in population. Westville has experienced the highest growth, but most of this is attributable to an increase of more than 2,000 inmates at the Westville Correctional Facility. By far the most growth in LaPorte County has occurred in unincorporated areas. While the entire county grew by less than 3,500 people, unincorporated LaPorte County grew by more than 7,000 people.

Central and South Lake County

The most rapid growth in the region has occurred in central Lake County. Since 1980, St. John has nearly quadrupled in population; Schererville has more than doubled; and Crown Point has grown by about two-thirds. Winfield, incorporated in 1993, has grown into a town of 4,383. In south Lake County, Cedar Lake and Lowell have experienced modest growth, while the small town of Schneider has lost population. Growth in unincorporated Lake County has been low, as most of the growth that has occurred has been adjacent to municipalities and has been incorporated.

Our Increasing Diversity

Northwest Indiana is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. African-Americans, Asians and other minority races have increased as a share of the region's population. Between 1980 and 2010, whites went from 78.5% of the region's population to 72.9%; African-Americans from 18% to 18.8%; Asians from 0.4% to 1.1%; and all other races from 3.1% to 4.8% (Figure I.4).

The most marked demographic trend in our region has been the increase in the Hispanic population over recent decades. Nationally, about 50% of the growth over the past 10 years has been attributable to the growth of the Hispanic population. In our region, the growth of the Hispanic population has occurred at a greater rate.

While the non-Hispanic population has been relatively stable for the past 20 years, the Hispanic population has grown. In fact, between 2000 and 2010, all of the growth in our region's population occurred within the Hispanic community. The total non-Hispanic population declined by 0.4% over this period, while the Hispanic population grew by 47.5% - outpacing even the robust growth of 39.3% from 1990 to 2000 (Figure I.4).

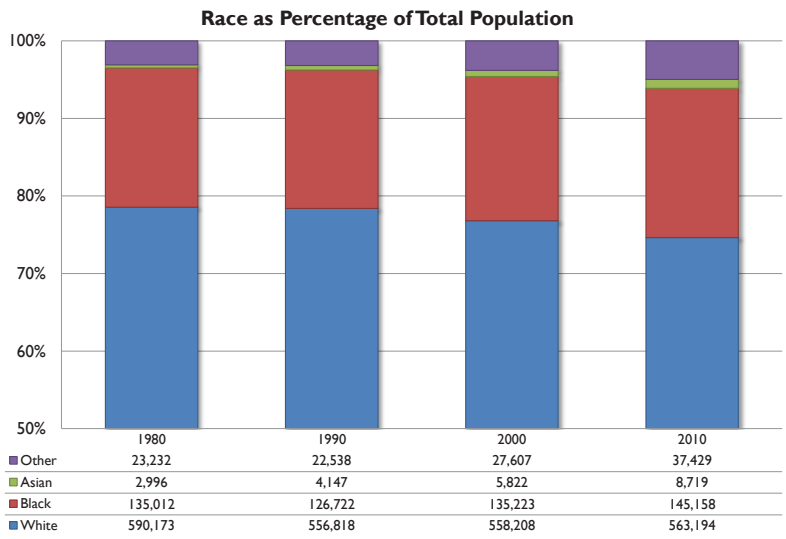

Figure I.4 Race as a Percentage of Total Regional Population, 1980-2010

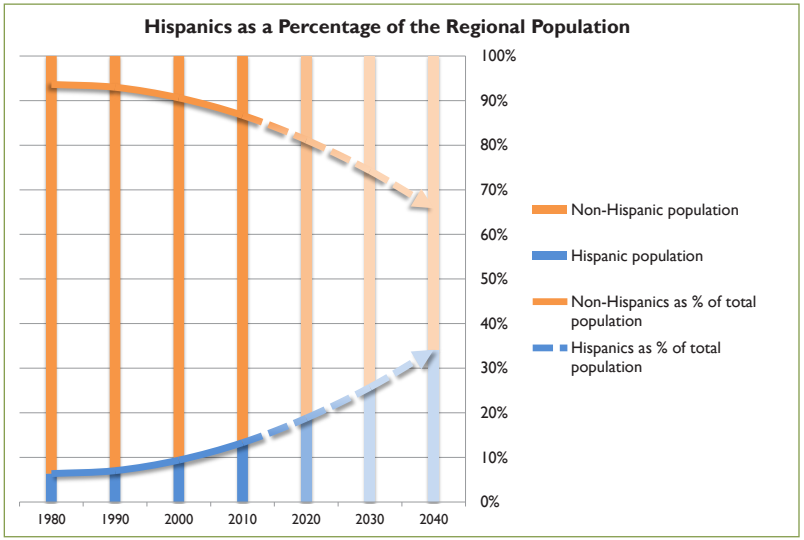

Figure I.5 Hispanic Population as a Percentage of Total Regional Population

Hispanics now represent 13.3% of the region's population, and could make up more than 25% or 30% of our population by 2040 if these trends continue (Figure I.5). Integrating this growing population into the regional community will be a challenge and an opportunity going forward.

Serving our increasingly diverse population will take on an even more important role in NIRPC's planning efforts between now and 2040. We will continue to strive for equitable distribution of resources, and shared benefits and burdens for all of our citizens.

Our Aging Population

Since 1980, the population in Northwest Indiana has grown steadily older. While this is a national trend, the region is aging more quickly than both the state and the nation. In 1980, Lake and Porter counties had lower median ages than both Indiana and the United States, while LaPorte County was at about the national level. Over the past 30 years, the situation reversed: The median age of all three counties now exceeds that of both the state and the nation (Figure I.6).

The region's population will get older as the Baby Boom generation ages. By 2040, we expect that a much larger proportion of our population will be over the age of 65 (Figure I.7). How we plan for our increasingly older population with reduced mobility is crucial.

The development of more walkable communities, more reliable and pleasant public transportation, and focusing growth in existing communities are long-term strategies that will allow our elders to "age in place".

In the short-term, our focus should be on making roadways friendlier to an older population, which will make our roadways safer for everyone. We should also explore ways to increase our demand-response capacity so that seniors, the disabled, and people without automobiles enjoy equitable mobility.

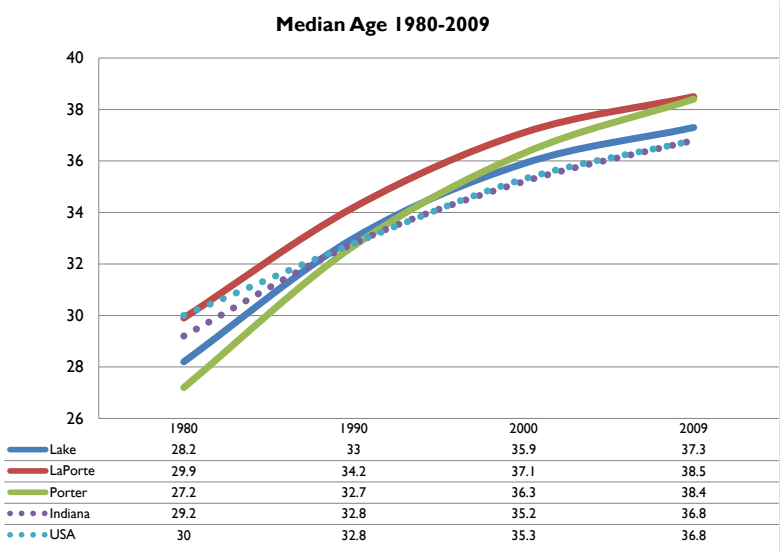

Figure I.6 Median Age by County, State and Nation 1980-2010

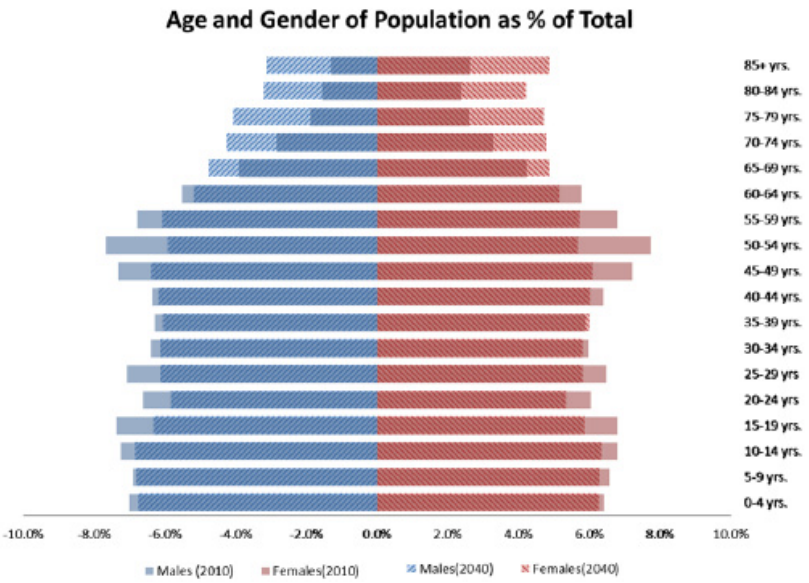

Figure I.7 Population by Age and Gender as % of Total 2010-2040

Housing

Choosing where to live is perhaps the most important decision that a person or a family can make. It is one of the few choices that directly affect people's quality of life. The NIRPC region should maximize housing options and make quality housing available to everyone regardless of status.

This section looks at the current condition of the housing market in Northwest Indiana, with respect to housing supply, affordability and vacancies. It provides a vision for housing in 2040 that centers on housing choice, mix and affordability, and it includes goals and strategies for achieving the vision.

Key Issues and Opportunities

- Housing supply has far outpaced population growth in recent years, and is therefore not a problem.
- Affordability is a concern, especially when you factor the price of travel into the equation.
- Core communities (Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City) have high vacancy rates, while suburban and rural communities' rates are lower.

Housing Supply

Northwest Indiana did not escape the housing boom and subsequent bust of recent years. Fortunately, the state and the region did not engage in as large a building surge as other areas of the country and were not as hard hit as those places when development significantly slowed, and nearly stopped. Nevertheless, between 1990 and 2009, new housing units were built at a pace of more than double that of population growth.[1] In an efficient market, the opposite effect would be expected. Given that average household size in the region is roughly 2.6 people, new housing units should be built at a rate of about 40% of population growth, not at a rate of more than 200% of population growth. In addition, the vast majority of new housing is for single-family homes (see Figure I.8), which are expected to have more residents on average than multi family units. Considering the current vacancy rates and that nothing in the data suggests this is the case, indications are that there is currently an oversupply of housing in the region.

[1] From 1990 to 2010, total housing units increased at a rate of 0.93% annually, while total population only grew at a rate of 0.42% annually. To look at it another way, during this period the population grew by 60,223, while housing units grew by 50,855. This means that for roughly every 12 people the region gained, 10 additional housing units were created. If we continue at this pace, by 2040 there will be half as many housing units as people in the region.

Between 1990 and 2009, new housing units were built at a pace of more than double that of population growth.

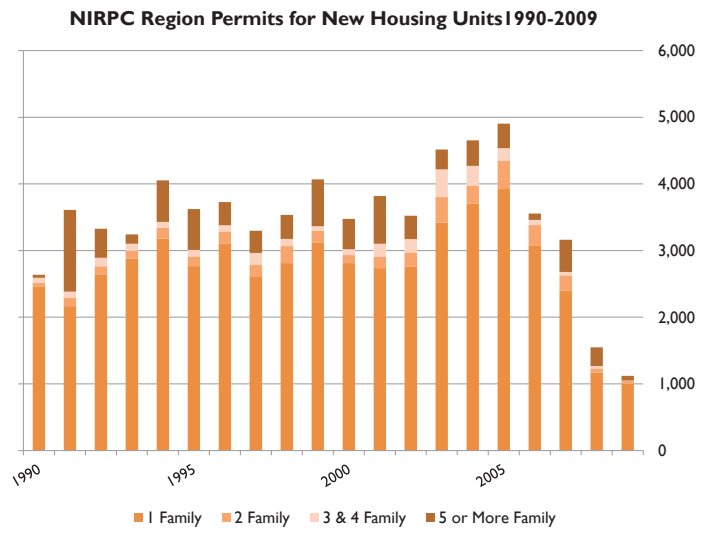

Figure I.8 NIRPC Region New Housing Permits 1990-2009

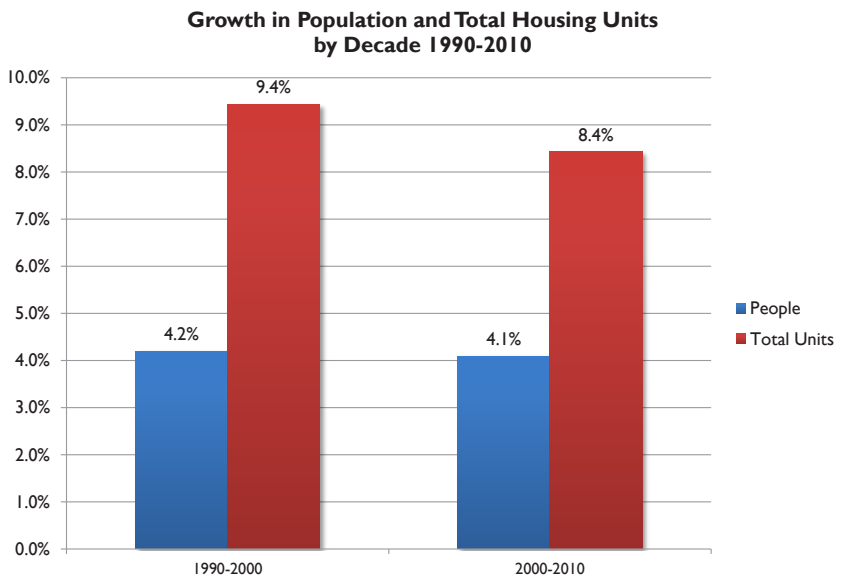

Figure I.9 Annual Growth in Population and Housing Units

Residential Vacancies

Some level of residential vacancy is necessary to have a well-functioning housing market as too few vacancies can limit options and drive up costs; however, in Northwest Indiana there are areas with far too many vacancies. A high number of vacancies can indicate that an area is losing – or has lost – its vibrancy and its ability to support local businesses. Vacancies also can shrink a municipality's tax base.

Housing vacancies in Northwest Indiana reflect recent trends in migration, and it is no surprise that vacancies are highest in areas that have experienced high levels of population loss. Data from the United States Postal Service (USPS) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), show that the areas that have experienced significantly high vacancy rates over a long period of time - greater than 5 percent vacant over three or more years – are exclusively within the Urban Core cities of East Chicago, Gary and Michigan City.

Further, it appears that there is a clustering effect to vacancy rates as areas with moderate vacancy rates (2.5% to 5%) are adjacent to the high vacancy areas, with downtown LaPorte being the only exception. This group includes parts of Hammond, Hobart, Lake Station, New Chicago, Whiting and unincorporated Lake County. Looking at shorter-term vacancies shows the same result, with vacancies appearing to spread out from three core areas: East Chicago/Gary, Michigan City and, to some extent, LaPorte.[2] All other areas in the region have very low vacancy rates; with medium- and long-term rates below 2.5 percent (see Figure I.10).

Nationally, vacancy rates are at an all-time high, an indication of an oversupply in housing units. Therefore, using recent data is not a sound option for developing a target vacancy rate for a healthy market. Taking a more stable period of time, for example, from 1990 to 2000, the average vacancy rate was 7.67% for rental units and 1.59% for owner-occupied units. These rates can serve as targets for a healthy housing market in our region. In 2000, rental units represented about 30%, and units for ownership represented about 70% of the region's housing units. Using this breakdown with the national average rate, a healthy housing market would have an overall vacancy rate of about 3.4%.

Areas that have experienced significantly high vacancy rates over a long period of time are exclusively within the urban core cities of Hammond, East Chicago, Gary and Michigan City.

[2] Some vacancies, especially recently vacant units, can be attributed to the formation of and bursting of the housing bubble and crash that happened throughout the country. However, the very high three-year-plus vacancy rates are endemic of larger forces at work. Such a concentration of vacancies – mainly in the urban core – is of great concern. That they appear to be spreading into adjacent areas is equally worrisome.

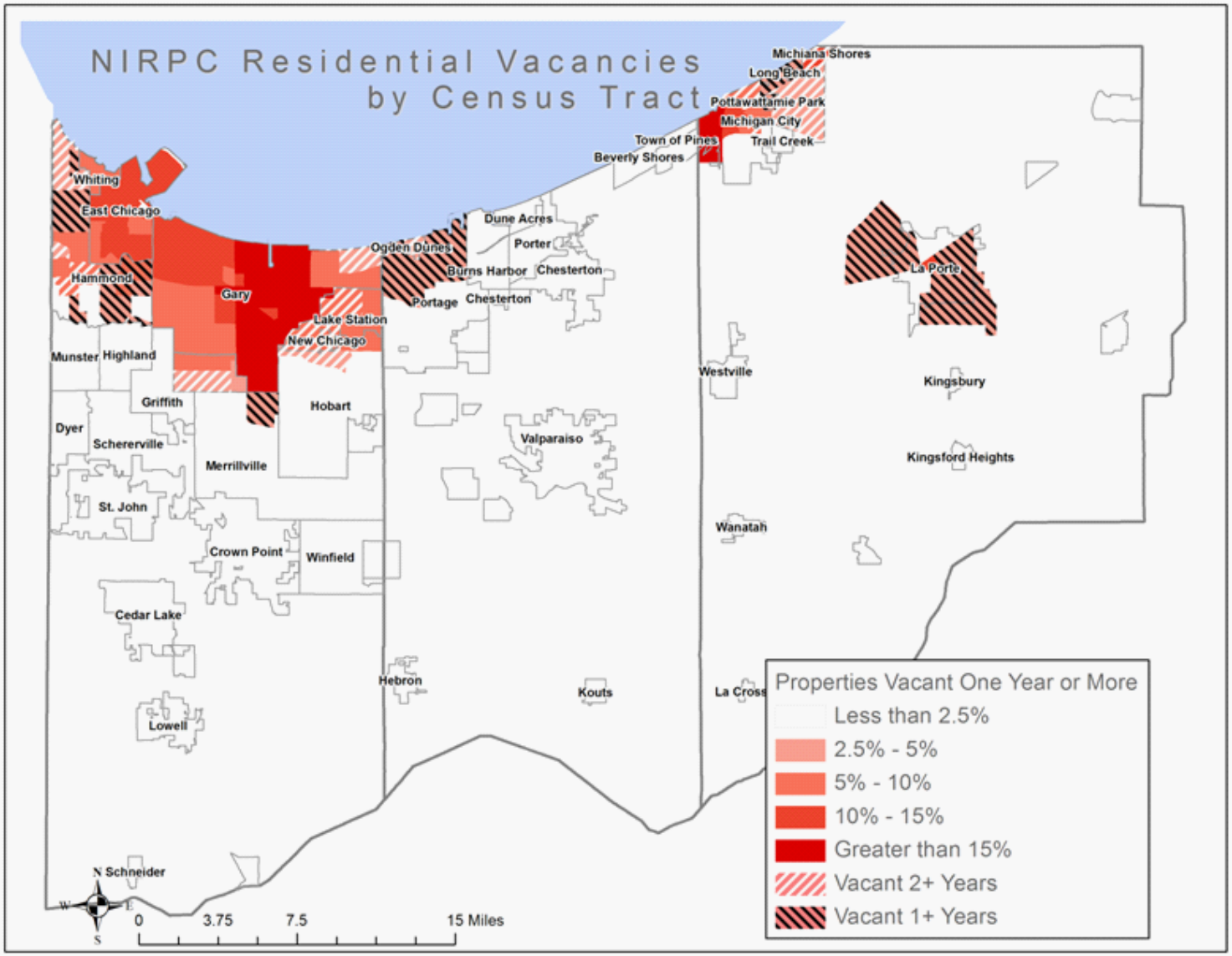

Figure I.10 Residential Vacancies. Unhashed areas in red represent tracts with three-year vacancy rates over 2.5%. Hashed areas represent tracts with one- and two-year vacancy rates over 2.5%. The underlying color represents the vacancy rate.

NWI Housing Affordability Index by County								
For Owner Occupied Housing 2000, 2009								
Geography	Year	Median Value of Owner-Occupied Single-Family Home	Mortgage Rate	Monthly Principle & Interest Payment	Payment as a % of Income	Median Family Income	Income Needed to Afford Median Home	Housing Affordability Index
US	2000	111,800	8.05%	659	15.8	50,046	31,651	158.1
Indiana	2000	92,500	8.05%	546	13.0	50,261	26,187	191.9
Lake	2000	96,300	8.05%	568	13.6	50,131	27,263	183.9
LaPorte	2000	92,300	8.05%	544	13.1	49,872	26,131	190.9
Porter	2000	123,000	8.05%	725	14.1	61,880	34,822	177.7
US	2009	185,200	5.14%	808	15.9	61,082	38,788	157.5
Indiana	2009	123,100	5.14%	537	11.4	56,432	25,782	218.9
Lake	2009	133,700	5.14%	583	12.1	57,819	28,002	206.5
LaPorte	2009	120,000	5.14%	524	11.5	54,520	25,133	216.9
Porter	2009	166,100	5.14%	725	13.0	66,843	34,788	192.1
Source: U.S. Census, the National Association of Realtors and the Federal Housing Finance Agency								

Table I.2 Northwest Indiana Housing Affordability Index by County

Housing Affordability

On the surface, housing within Northwest Indiana appears to be highly affordable. Using a modified version of the National Association of Realtors Housing Affordability Index[3], housing values for 2009 indicated an affordability index of 206.5 for Lake, 216.9 for LaPorte and 192.1 for Portage (see Table I.2). To put this in simplified terms, an affordability index of 100 indicates that a family earning the median income has exactly enough income to afford a house that has a price point equal to the median home value. In this context, an index of 200 indicates that a family has twice the income needed to afford that same median-priced home and therefore, the index for these counties indicates that housing is very affordable for Northwest Indiana families.

[3] The National Association of Realtors' index calculates housing affordability using data for sales of homes. Because this data is not available to NIRPC, the median home value as reported by the U.S. Census was used as a proxy.

While this illustration of affordability provides a useful and positive picture of housing affordability in Northwest Indiana as of 2009, it should not be taken at face value. In fact, in looking at the information a little deeper, there still is cause for concern about the affordability of housing in the region. One reason is because the housing affordability index is dependent upon and reflective of prevailing mortgage rates, which fluctuate over time. For any particular time period, the index references the annual national average of the effective mortgage rate as published by the Federal Housing Finance Agency. In 2009, the effective mortgage rate was 5.14% (is this for a 30-year mortgage?), the lowest it has been since tracking began in 1963 (see Figure I.11). We expect the mortgage rate will return to a higher rate once the market recovers. When that happens, if the rate were to increase to the relatively low 15-year average of 6.73% from 1995 to 2009, the current index would be lower than the year 2000 index. If it returns to year 2000 levels, the index will be even lower. This indicates that as the market normalizes, homes likely will become less affordable in the region.

Of additional concern is that the median value of Northwest Indiana homes increased at a greater rate than median family income. From 2000 to 2009, the median home value in Lake, LaPorte and Porter counties increased by 39%, 30% and 35%, respectively, while the median family incomes only increased 15%, 9% and 8%, respectively. In this light, the growth in home values (and therefore prices) has outpaced income growth in the region. If this trend continues, homes will become increasing less affordable for the region's residents.

While regional data is useful, the index does not address local issues of affordability, nor does it go beyond looking at housing costs in isolation or speak to the affordability of rental housing. In addition to housing, trans-

portation costs make up a large portion of household expenditures. The cost of transportation is a function of where a home is located. For example, homes located away from urban centers are generally more reliant on automobiles for transportation, which carry higher costs than other transportation modes such as public transit, walking and bicycling. To address these cost differentials, the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) developed a housing index that accounts for home values, income and transportation costs relative to location. CNT modeled the Gary region, including Lake and Porter counties, using their Housing + Transportation Affordability Index (H+T) (see Figure I.12). In comparison to a traditional housing affordability index, such as the National Association of Realtors model, which produced results that indicated a majority of the two counties is affordable, the H + T index illustrates that nearly all of the two counties are unaffordable when you consider the costs of transportation that are inherent in the location of a home. In this view, the most affordable places to live in Lake and Porter counties are largely located near Lake Michigan, in close proximity to transit and job centers.

With these issues in mind, housing affordability is clearly an issue that should remain at the forefront of Northwest Indiana's priorities. Ample opportunities exist within the context of the 2040 CRP to address housing affordability, including more efficient and expanded transit service, a focus on infill communities and the redevelopment of urban areas with mixed uses, and concentrating development in livable centers, which serve as centers of both jobs and housing. These strategies are discussed in depth in the next section of this chapter that outlines strategies for realizing the 2040 vision.

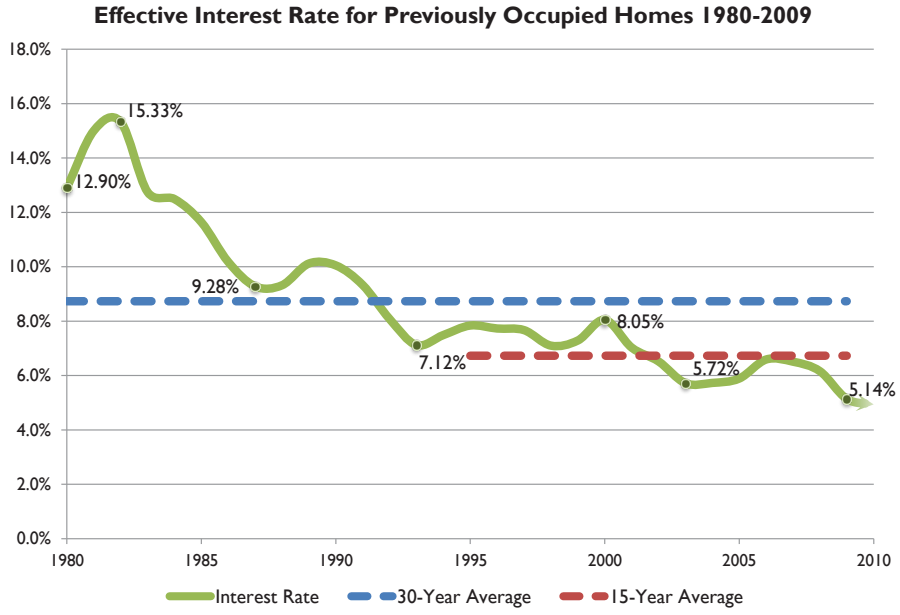

Figure I.11 Mortgage Interest Rates 1980-2009

New Urbanist Neighborhood, Gary. Photo by Allix Rogers via Flickr.

Horace Mann Hope VI residential project in downtown Gary. Photo courtesy of the city of Gary.

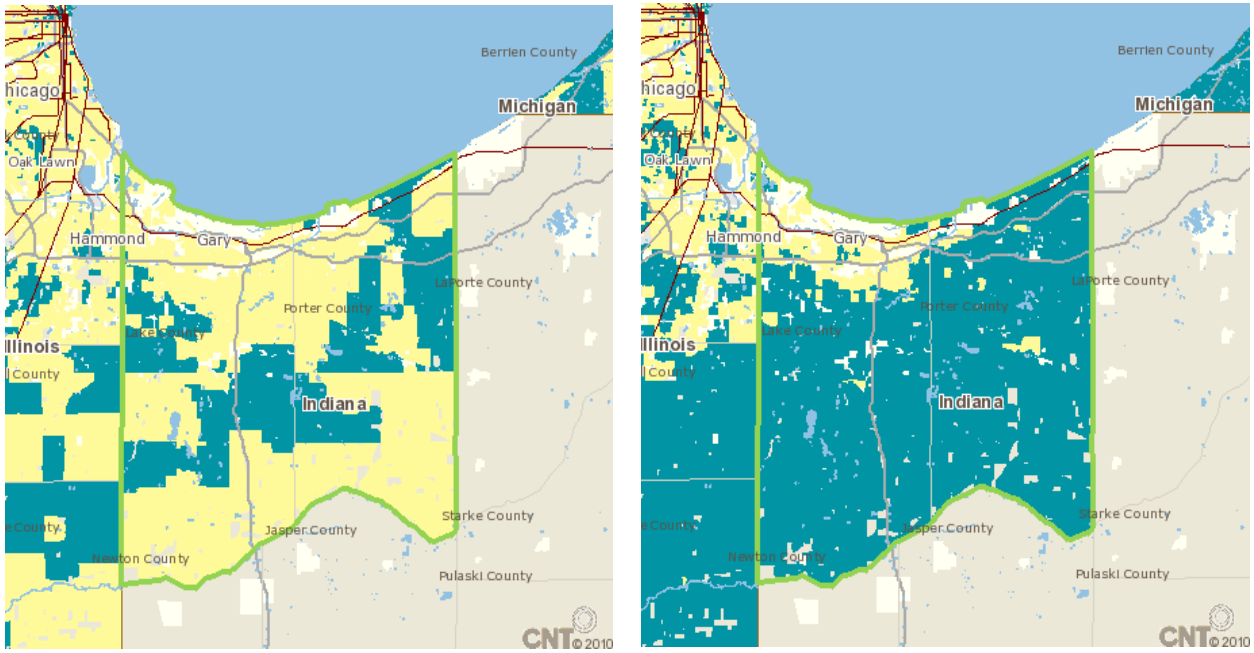

Figure I.12 CNT Comparison of Traditional Affordability Metrics and their Housing + Transportation Affordability Index for Lake and Porter Counties.

Above, CNT illustrates housing affordability as a traditional measure of affordability with no more than 30% of household income consumed by housing costs. At right, CNT's H+T Index shows how affordability is transformed when the cost of transportation is considered in the mix, with no more than 45% of household income being dedicated to housing and transportation costs associated with the home. In both images, yellow areas refer to those that are affordable and blue areas are unaffordable.

Growth in home prices has outpaced income growth in the region.

Existing Land Use

NIRPC developed the 2010 existing land-use inventory for the region based on available information from local communities and counties. To better compare land use across the region, communities' land-use data was consolidated into 16 regional categories. Brief descriptions of each of the 16 categories follows:

- **Low-Density Residential** includes detached single-family homes on larger lots at densities of 1 to 7 units per acre.
- **Medium-Density Residential** includes single-family homes on smaller lots, duplex/two-family units and townhomes at densities of 8 to 14 units per acre.
- **High-Density Residential** includes multiunit apartment/condominium buildings at densities of 15 units per acre or more.
- **Residential PUD** encompasses areas identified for residentially focused planned unit developments of a medium-density pattern.
- **Core Commercial/CBD** encompasses older central business district (CBD) areas within the larger centers, including higher-density areas that may rely on shared public parking areas in centralized locations.
- **Commercial** encompasses all other commercial areas in centers of all sizes, including lower-density areas that rely on dedicated private parking lots adjacent to commercial businesses.
- **Commercial PUD** encompasses areas identified for commercially focused planned unit developments in a manner similar to the Commercial category.
- **Mixed Use** encompasses multistory buildings that accommodate commercial uses on the ground floor and residential units on upper floors.
- **Office** includes purpose-built office buildings, primarily in master planned business park areas.
- **Light Industrial** encompasses employment uses typically located along older highway corridors or in master planned business park areas, including facilities used for light assembly, warehousing and/or distribution functions.
- **Heavy Industrial** encompasses large-scale facilities used for heavy manufacturing, materials extraction and/or processing, and which are typically located along the Lake Michigan shoreline and/or along major freight rail corridors.
- **Institutional** includes public and quasi-public facilities such as schools, hospitals and libraries.
- **Park/Open Space/Recreation/Conservation** includes both improved park and recreational areas and both publicly and privately owned natural areas.
- **Agriculture** includes land in active agricultural use.
- **Vacant** includes land anticipated to remain vacant.
- **Water** includes lakes, ponds and other water features.

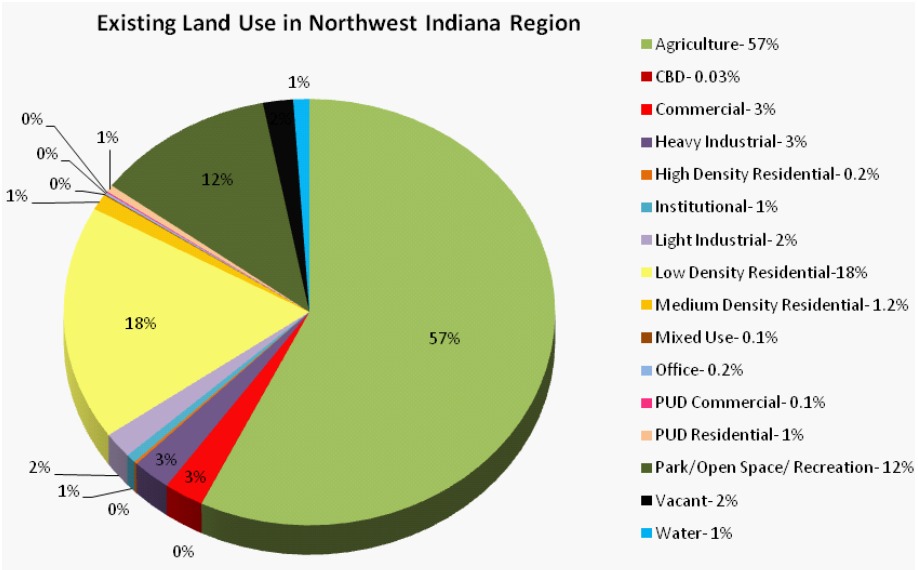

Figure I.13 Existing Land Use in Northwest Indiana Region

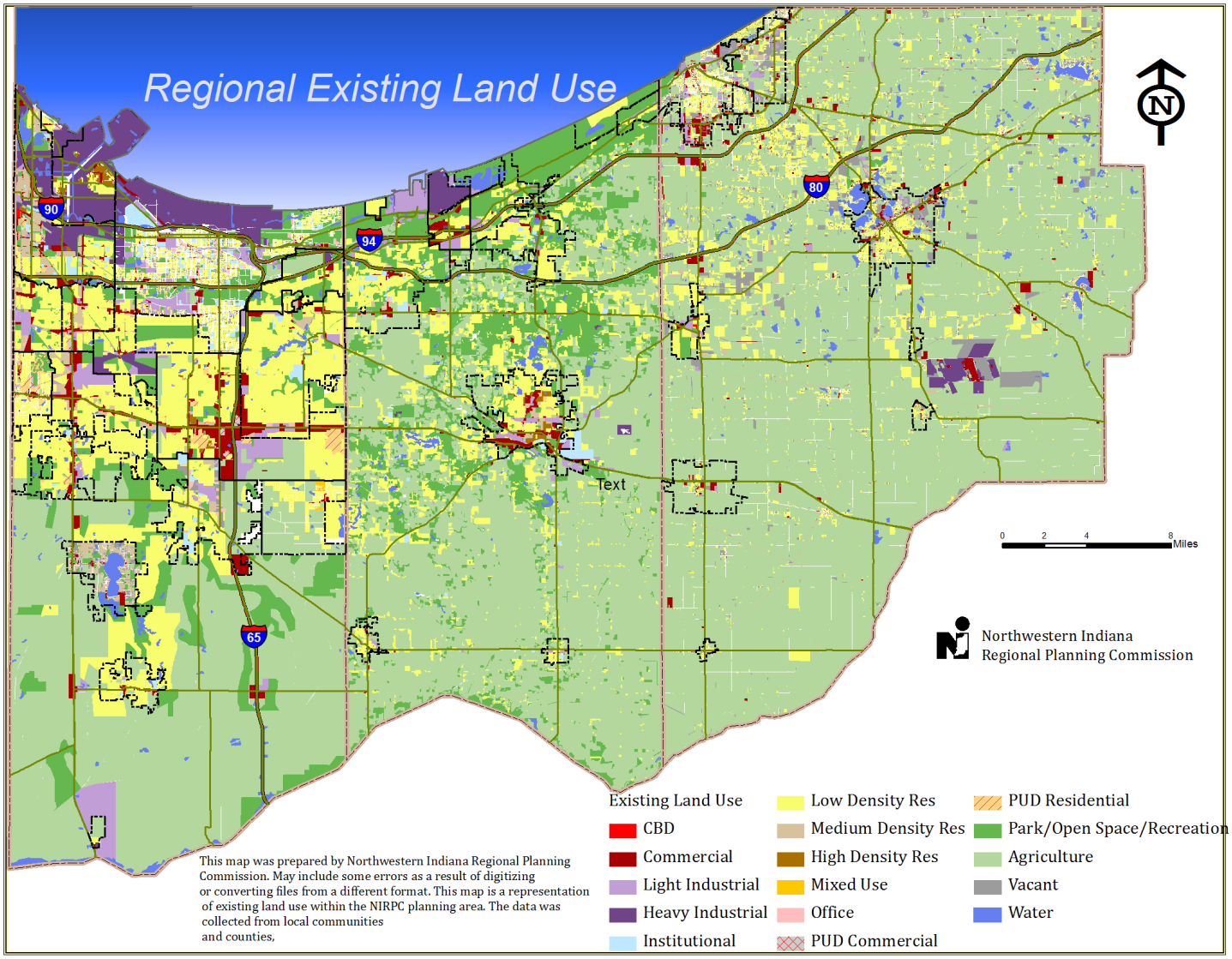

Figure I.14 Existing Land Use in Northwest Indiana Region

In Northwest Indiana, nearly half of the region (48%) is devoted to urban uses while 57% of the three counties remain devoted to agricultural uses. Among the urban uses, low-density residential land uses dominate (18 %), followed by park/open space/recreation at 12%. Commercial and heavy industrial uses represent 3% each of the total land use. These are summarized in Figure I.12.

From our analysis of existing development patterns, as well as from public participation, land-use trends within the region present the following issues and concerns:

- Substantial numbers of vacant land are available in urbanized areas within existing communities.
- In LaPorte, County trends have preferred development than in rural areas that provide infrastructure and other services and facilities.
- Nonfarm development in agricultural areas with limited access to major transportation, services and education facilities has been a significant trend in the region.
- Suburban and exurban development on septic tanks in areas with high water tables can present long-term environmental sustainability issues.
- Development on high-quality forested and steep and environmental-sensitive areas, particularly in Porter and LaPorte counties, threaten resources.
- Parks, open space and recreation areas are very limited in LaPorte County.
- 82% of the region's residential areas are low-density, single-family. The CRP vision and principles call for livability that support redevelopment, mixed-use and compact development.

Agricultural land in Cedar Lake. Photo by Naturally Clumsy via Flickr.

Downtown Crown Point. Photo by J. Stephen Conn via Flickr.

Regional Growth Analysis (1992-2006)

The regional growth analysis paints a different picture of the region and perhaps one that is more illustrative of the challenges and threats facing Northwest Indiana. In this analysis, the extent of the region's growth and urbanization over the past 15 years is expressed by delineating the limits of concentrated urban development at two points in time – 1992 and 2006 (see Figure I.13). To perform this analysis, land-cover data for the region was obtained. For 1992, land-cover data was obtained from the U.S. Geological Service (USGS), while data for the 2006 land cover came from NOAA's Coastal Change Analysis Program (C-CAP) Land Cover Data.

The data reveals that from 1992 to 2006, the amount of developed land used for residential, commercial and industrial uses increased by 42% (48,987 acres), while the area dedicated to agriculture and open space decreased by 1% (5,620 acres) and 20% (65,611 acres), respectively (see Table I.3). To make the point another way, on average, each year the NIRPC region lost 5,087 acres of agricultural and open space lands combined. While the amount of developed land dramatically increased during this time period, during a nearly comparable time period of 1990 to 2001, the population of the region only increased by 4.3%. These trends have important implications for the future of the region.

Land consumption is occurring at a disproportionate rate to population growth and, as shown in the Figures I.14 and I.15 illustrating changes in land cover, this pattern of growth is obviously consuming the region's agricultural lands. Residents' preferences are to take advantage of reuse and infill opportunities in existing urbanized areas. This development pattern also has implications for the quality of life and the sustainability of the region. The degradation of natural areas and agriculture land not only impacts the quality of life, it also impacts the regional finance such as higher taxes for taxpayers to support more infrastructures.

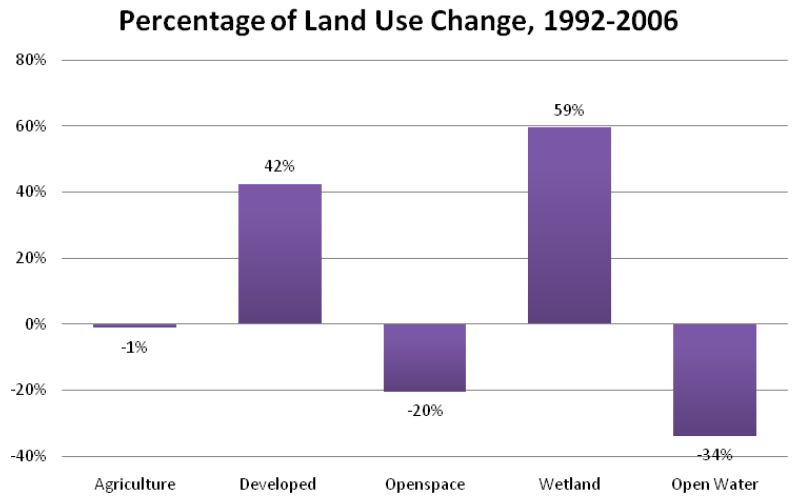

Figure I.15 Percent Land Use Change, 1992-2006

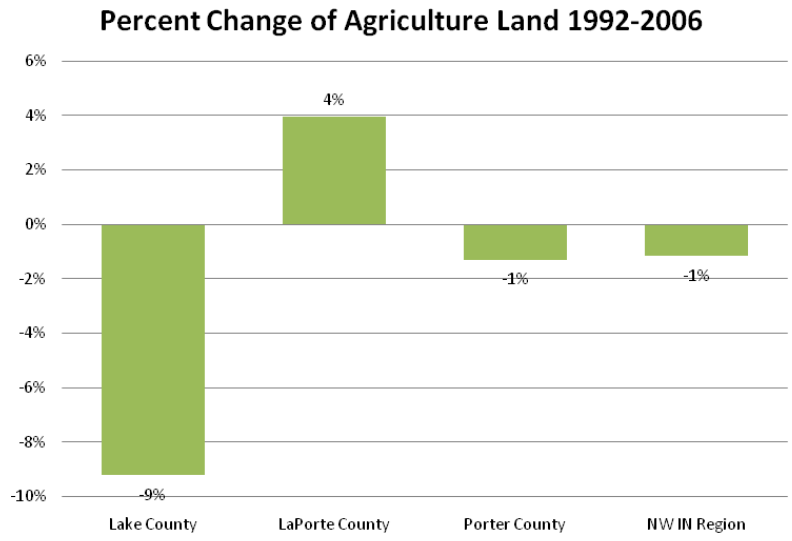

Figure I.16 Percent Change of Agricultural Land, 1992-2006

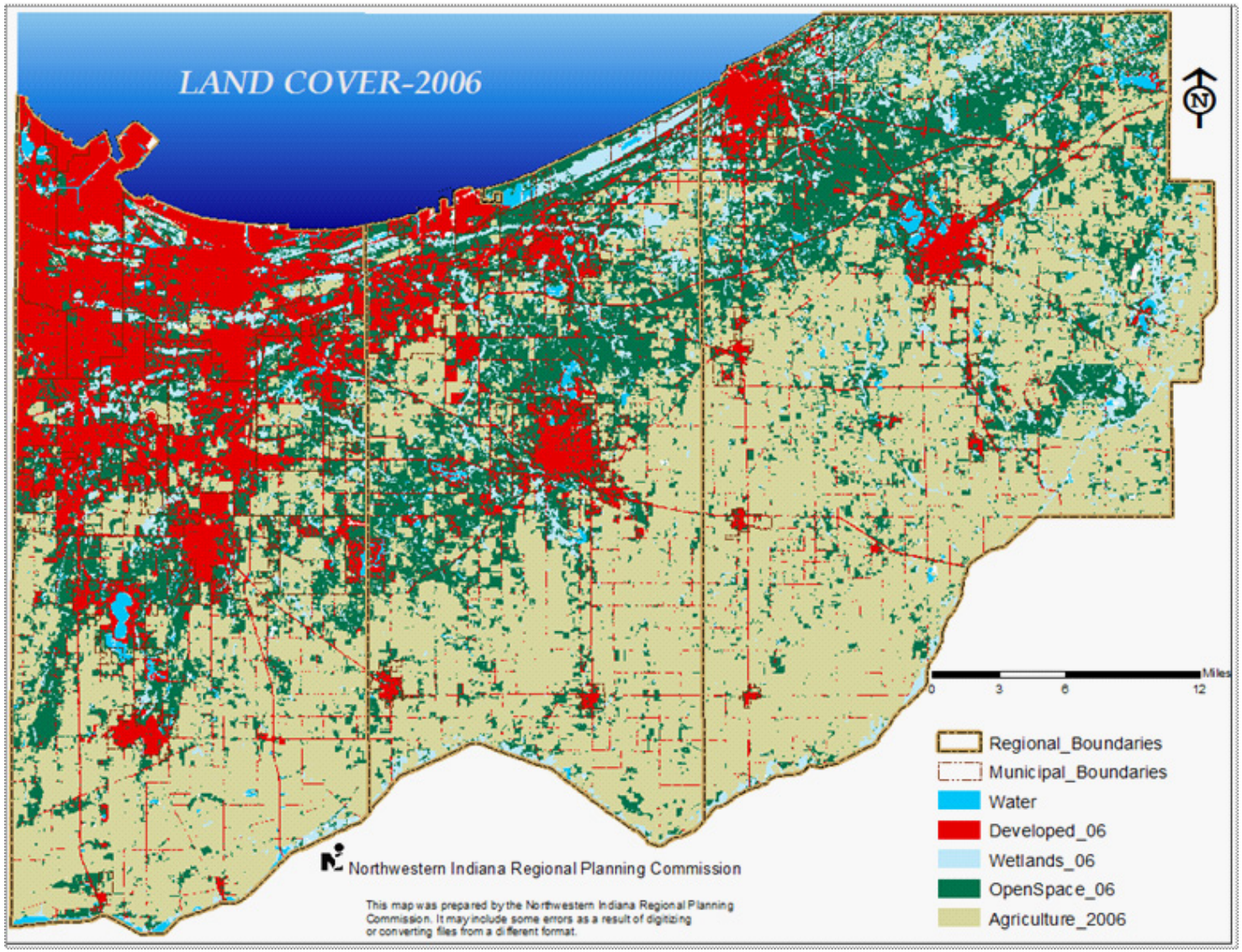

Figure I.17 Northwest Indiana Region 2006 Land Cover

Category	2006	2006%	2001	2001%	1992
Agriculture	475,948	49%	480,762	49%	481,568
Developed	164,472	17%	156,558	16%	115,485
Open Space/ Forested land	256,064	26%	313,199	32%	321,675
Wetland	72,525	7%	16571	2%	45,474
Open Water	9,406	1%	11,325	1%	14,214
Total	**978,415**	**100%**	**978,415**	**100%**	**978,415**

Table I.3 Breakdown of Land Cover 1992-2006 Land Use Changes in Acres

Grand Calumet Lagoon. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

U.S. Steel, Gary. Photo courtesy of the Times of Northwest Indiana.

Conversion of Agricultural & Open Space

Since 1992, Northwest Indiana lost 5,620 acres of agricultural land to non-farm growth. This is the result of both suburbanization of our communities and the establishment of nonfarm homes in agricultural areas. Figure I.16 illustrates this loss of farmland, which has been greatest in Lake County, where 9.5% (12,467 acres) of the county agricultural land has been converted to other uses. This is followed by Porter County, which lost 1,687 acres, or 1% its agricultural land. However, LaPorte County has seen an increase of 4% (8,534 acres) in the amount of the county agricultural land, which indicates that more land was farmed between 1992 and 2006.

Not only does the expansion of urbanized areas place development pressure on nearby agriculture, it also affects the region's open space areas (see Figure I.20). This is illustrated in Figures I.18 and I.19, which show that open space and forested land decreased by 20% between 1992 and 2006, from 321,675 acres to 256,064 acres. Due to the clearing of forested land (considered a part of regional open space), the amount of bare land increased by 1,482 acres, or 118%; this was a significant increase from 1992 to 2006. Deforestation affects a variety and number of locations that support the region's diverse wildlife and habitats, and can also affect drainage and soil-erosion patterns. Protecting these natural resources and the environment is a key way to improve the region's quality of life and enhance its attractiveness. Open space, or "green infrastructure" also plays a key role in a region's economic future. Quality businesses and residential contractors consider the region's quality of life in making location decisions with respect to the type and quality of open space.

Briar Ridge Country Club, Schererville. Photo courtesy of Northwest Indiana Forum.

Hobart farmland. Photo courtesy of Northwest Indiana Forum.

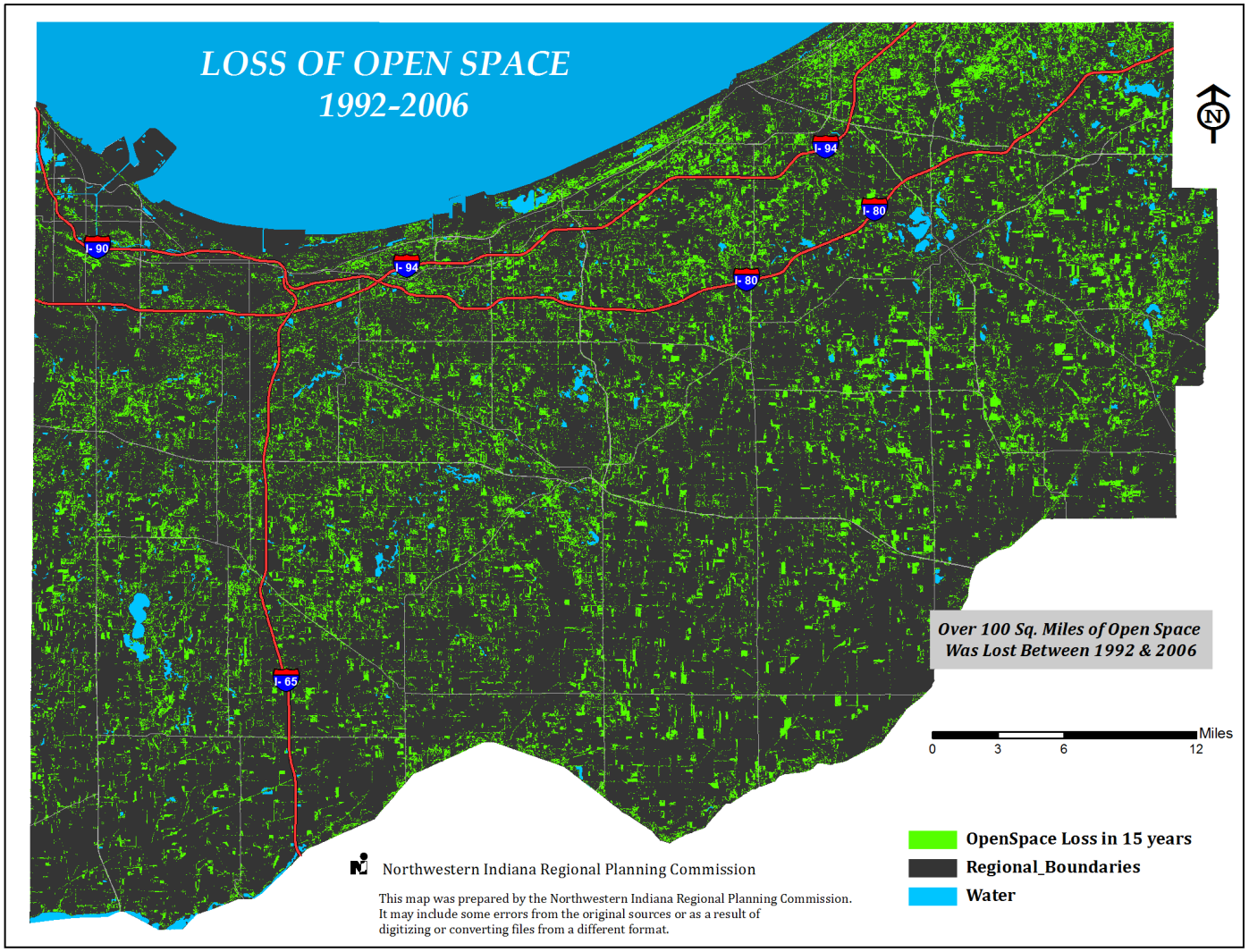

Figure I.18 Loss of Open Space 1992-2006

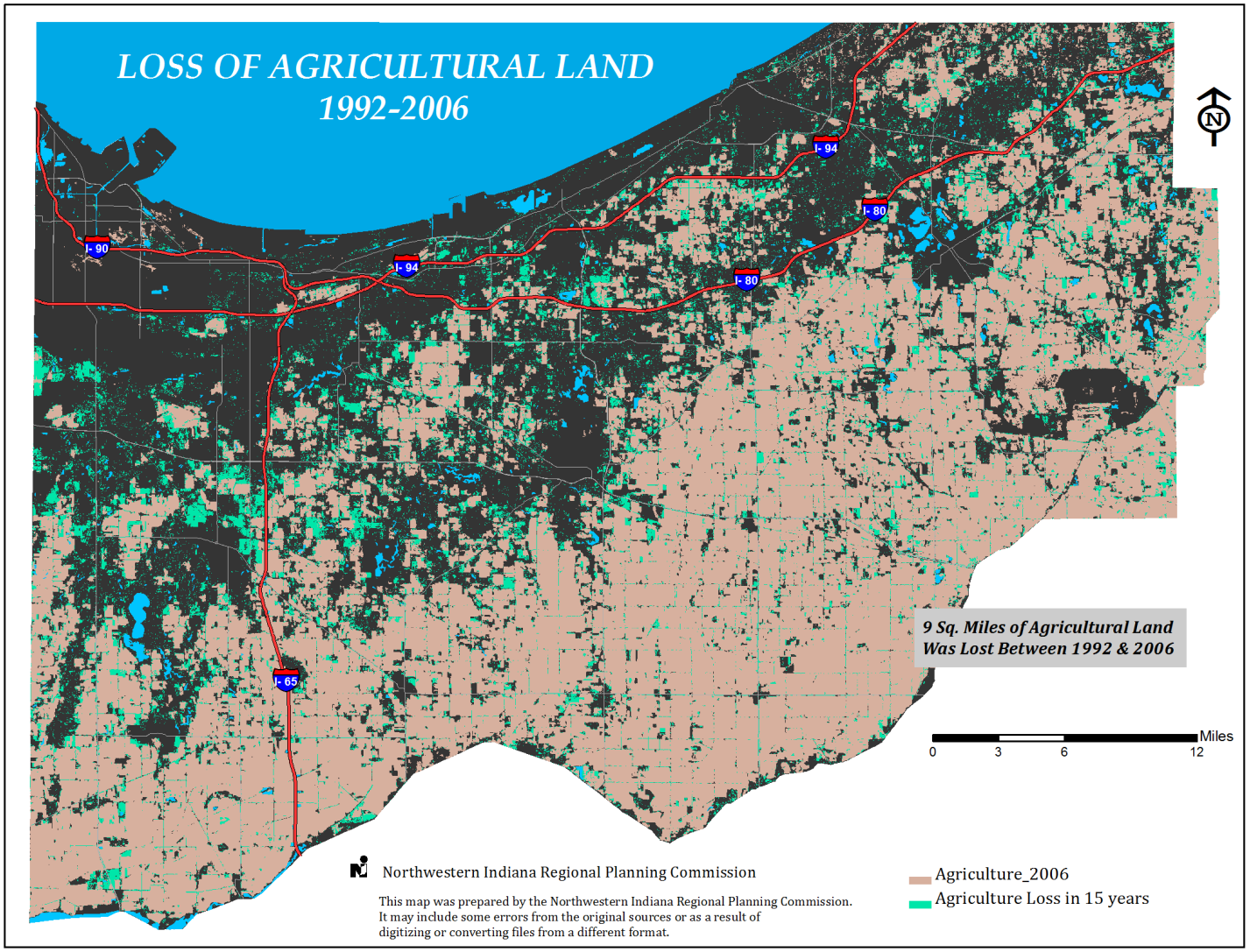

Figure I.19 Loss of Agriculture Land 1992-2006

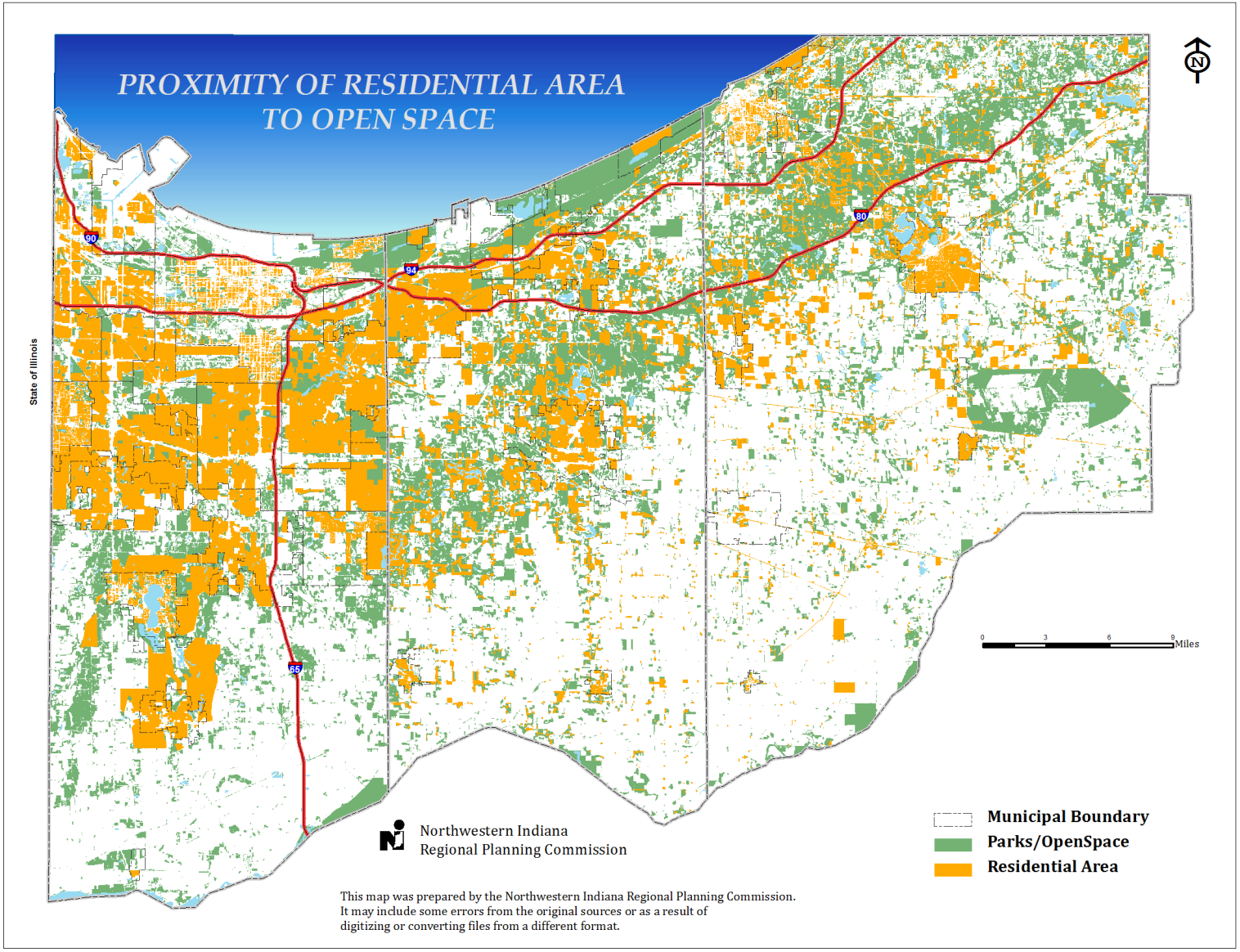

Figure I.20 Relationship of Residential Development to Open Space

Shifting Population & Development Patterns

Within the three-county region, the development trend, particularly for residential uses, has been a shift away from the more historically urban portions of the region. The greatest shifts in population have occurred in Lake and LaPorte counties, where people have moved away from the urban centers to growing suburbs or unincorporated areas. These urban area losses were offset by population gains in central and southern Lake and Porter counties. The highest population gains in unincorporated areas from 1992 to 2006 occurred in Porter and LaPorte counties.

More than 20% of our region's population now resides in unincorporated areas, largely on converted farmland or open space. In Porter and LaPorte counties, the rate is approximately 40%. As people move from more concentrated centers to suburban and rural areas, residential densities have decreased and more land is consumed to accommodate these households. This, along with incorporated suburban growth, explains why the amount of land consumption is high compared to the rate of population growth.

To illustrate how this can be reflected in the patterns of the region's land use changes, Figure I.21 illustrates the areas that were developed between 1992 and 2006. During this time an additional 68 square miles of unincorporated land was developed (a 125% increase from 1992 to 2006). To put this in context, the additional 68 square miles of developed unincorporated land accounted for 76% of the region's 90 square miles of additional development between 1992 and 2006.

What implications do these trends have for the region? In the absence of policies that direct growth to the region's urbanized areas and incorporated communities, these trends will continue and the costs to the region's quality of life, environment, transportation and community infrastructure will be significant. At this rate of development, in another 20 years, an additional 70,000 acres of land will be developed, and 97,320 acres of open space and 8,020 acres of agricultural land will be lost.

Consider also a parallel trend in the region's economy. While NIRPC's population continues to migrate to areas outside the region's centers, employment growth is expected to remain within and among established business locations and economic clusters in the northern portion of the region where they are supported by existing services, facilities and transportation access. As a result, commute lengths and times will become longer, affecting the region's quality of life, roadways will become more congested because of increased travel demands, and increased vehicle emissions will degrade air quality. Public involvement in the development of the 2040 CRP has clearly responded with interest in curtailing this trend by focusing development in urban areas of the region. Revitalizing and renewing the region's centers and planning for growth with livable urban, suburban and rural centers will help break this cycle and help to protect and preserve the rural and natural areas of the region.

The region is expected to add another 170,000 people by 2040 with a total population of 771,815 (see Figure I.22). Table 2 shows that Lake County will capture the majority of this growth with additional 126,945 people – 75 percent of the anticipated growth. Despite the fact Lake County's current population represents about 64% of the region's total, it is expected that the county will have a higher population share of the region. The CRP calls for redevelopment and revitalization of northern Lake County and, more specifically, in the urban core area of Gary, Hammond and East Chicago.

As the region experiences population growth and economic development resulting from the growth, there will be increasing development pressure on the region's natural lands, farmland and forest lands. Based on evaluation of the existing regional land inventory, the supply of land appears more than adequate to meet the growth needs through the year 2040. The major land use issue facing the region is how to effectively manage and direct this growth.

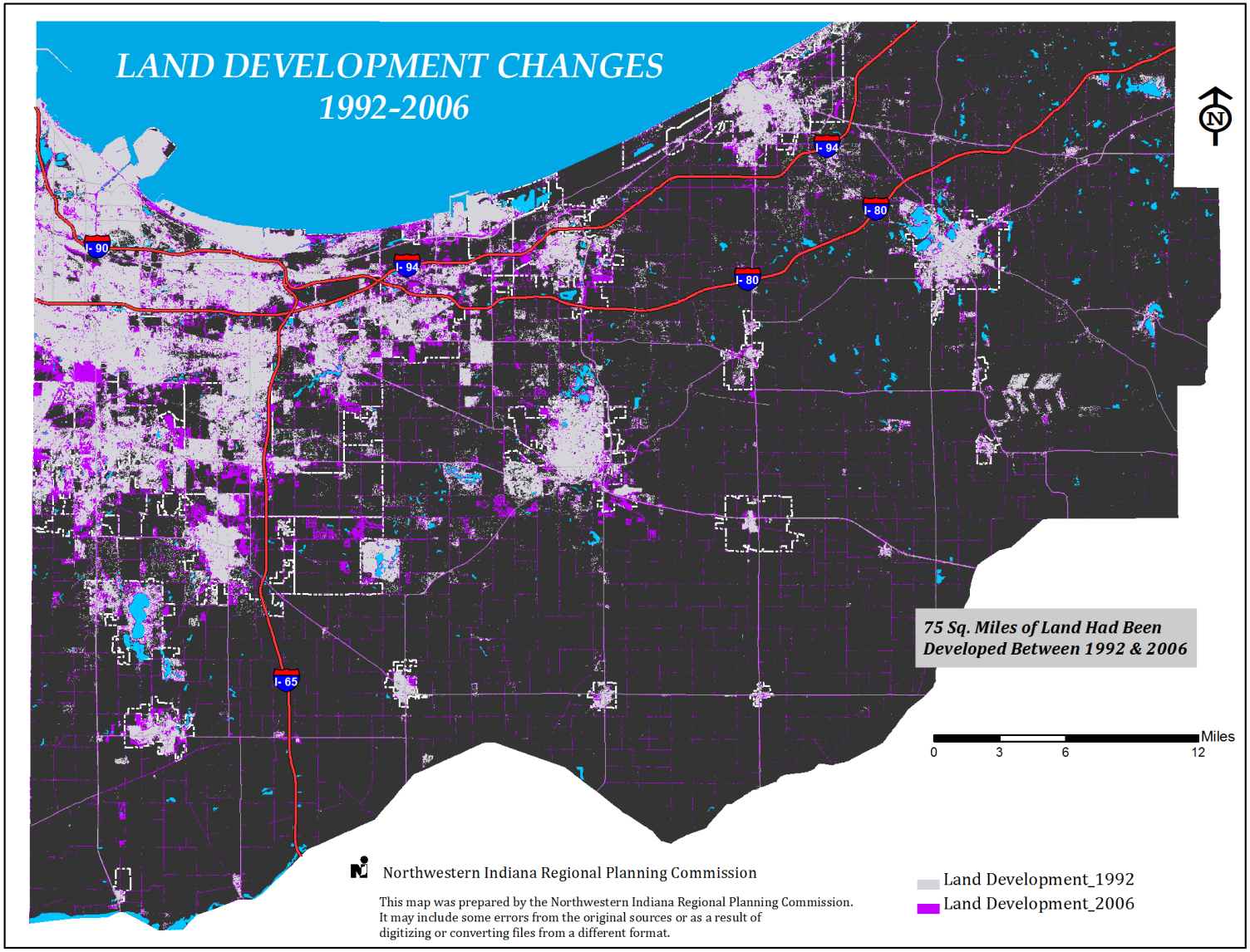

Figure I.21 Additional Land Development between 1992 and 2006

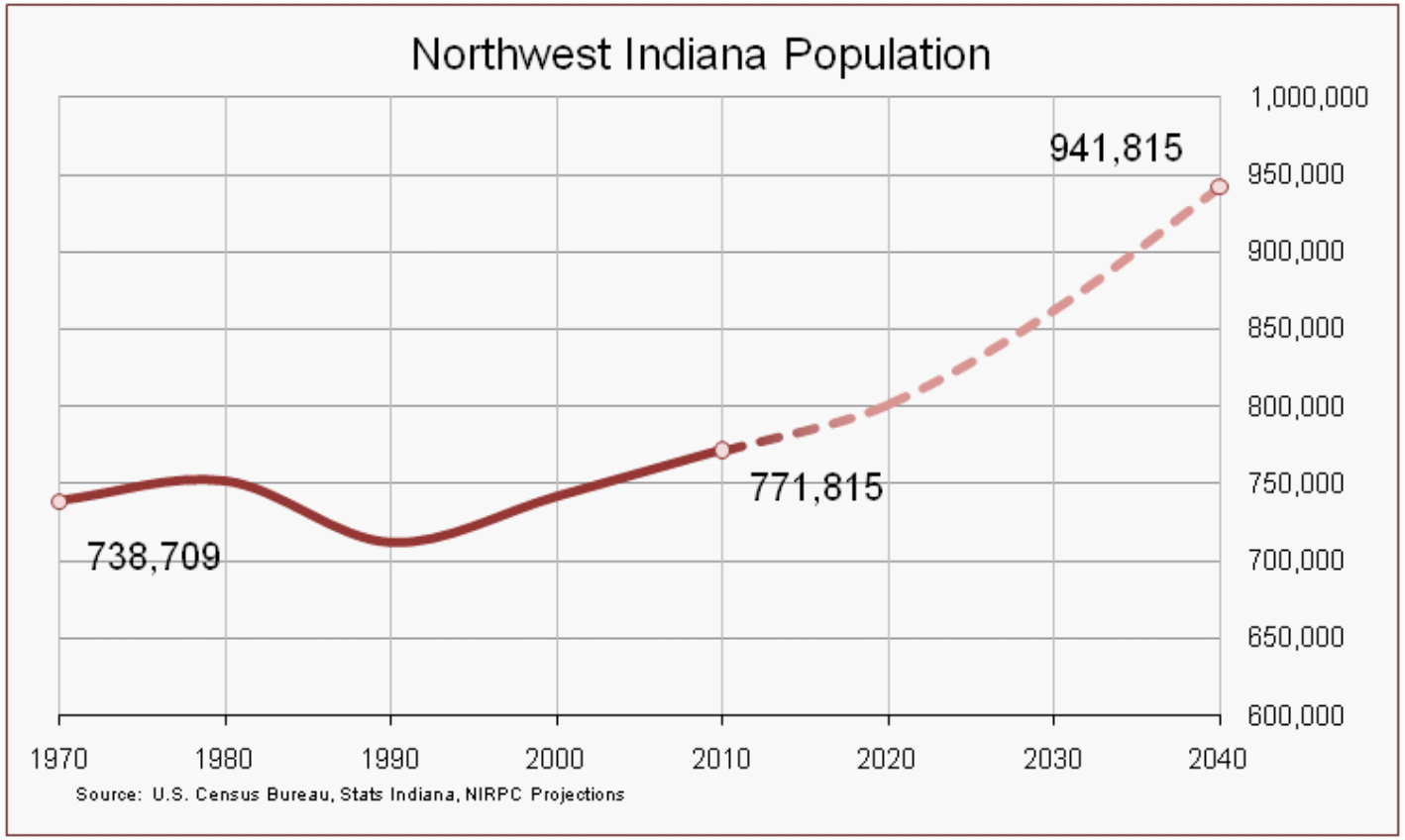

Figure I.22 Regional Population 1970-2040 (projected)

Place	2010 Population	2010%	2040 Population Projection	2040%	Population Growth 2040	Growth %
LAKE COUNTY	496,005	64.30%	622,950	66.10%	126,945	**75%**
PORTER COUNTY	164,343	21.30%	190,205	20.20%	25,862	15%
LAPORTE COUNTY	111,467	14.40%	128,660	13.70%	17,193	10%
Total	**771,815**	100.00%	**941,815**	100.00%	**170,000**	100%

Table I.4 Current and 2040 Population by County

Regional Urban Framework

Plan and Policy Recommendations

As detailed earlier in this chapter, regional growth over the last few decades has meant outward expansion. This pattern is part of a cycle where mature inner cities and towns build up and then decline as newer housing (often at a lower cost) is built in new community or unincorporated areas. Low initial costs attract people out to the urban fringe, and once-thriving communities are left with vacant lots and a dwindling tax base. Often thought to be the fate of cities only, recent population declines in Northwest Indiana's first-tier suburbs have proven this to be a larger issue.

Although some residents prefer low-density single-use neighborhoods, Northwest Indiana residents who participated in the CRP public outreach events expressed a desire for more choice and a range of living and working options.

At the Dec. 6, 2008, Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana, participants indicated that the vision for 2040 should include:

- "… 'whole communities' – vibrant neighborhoods, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use urban areas linked by transit."

Participants at the Forum on the Future also stated that the region should:

- "Aggressively redevelop abandoned industrial sites (brownfields) to take advantage of existing infrastructure."
- "Concentrate development around existing areas – 'Take advantage of existing downtowns.'"

These priorities were reflected in the regional goals, which include:

- Managed growth that protects farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and important ecosystems
- Livable urban, suburban and rural centers
- Revitalized urban core cities

Northwest Indiana residents who participated in the CRP public outreach events expressed a desire for more choice and a range of living and working options.

- Protected natural and rural areas

Growth Types – How will the region grow?

A vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united region in 2040 will require both dynamic growth and diligent conservation. The 2040 CRP establishes a framework for the future growth of the region's cities and towns and the protection of our natural resources. It does so by distinguishing different place types within Northwest Indiana and directing different levels of population and jobs to those areas. The typology employed here – Focused Revitalization areas, Growth and Infill areas, Centers and Green Infrastructure – though broad, reflects the clear priorities of the 2040 CRP goals and objectives and directs the implementation of those goals in a manner that respects different local contexts and preferences. The typology is identified in the Regional Planning Areas map (see Figure I.23).

Figure I.23 Regional Planning Areas. Source: NIRPC, 2011

Urban Framework Strategies

The foundation of the physical element of the CRP is the delineation of two areas as high priority locations for future growth: Growth and Infill and Focused Revitalization Areas. The key assets that these two areas possess are the region's communities and related investments and infrastructure. This approach shifts the focus of growth to established communities and promotes investment in and redevelopment of the places where we already live and work.
Concentrating new growth around this infrastructure will allow us to preserve our environmental assets and use our funds more efficiently to create livable, pedestrian-friendly communities that offer a high quality of life for all residents.

Policy recommendations in this section apply to the Growth and Infill and Focused Revitalization planning areas. More detailed recommendations regarding the region's rural and unincorporated areas follow.

Strategy 1: Reinvest

Infill and Adaptive Reuse

Infill development refers to new development or redevelopment of sites situated in an existing developed setting. Because infill development occurs within a built-up area, it is often on smaller sites and blocks rather than large tracts of land like those that are available outside of cities and towns. Infill development is a key strategy because it uses the infrastructure and community capacity for growth within the existing urbanized area and reduces development pressure on natural and agricultural lands.

Adaptive reuse is the conversion, update and/or expansion of a building originally designed for one purpose to a completely different and new use. This practice is commonplace. Many of the downtowns in Northwest Indiana sustain commercial and residential buildings that have been adapted for different uses again and again. Some of the most charming and interesting areas in cities and towns are those that were developed for certain uses and then adapted for others. In many cities, the successful redevelopment of obsolete industrial areas into loft districts is a prime example. The key is to encourage and incent it as a preferred choice of development over the option of developing previously undeveloped lands.

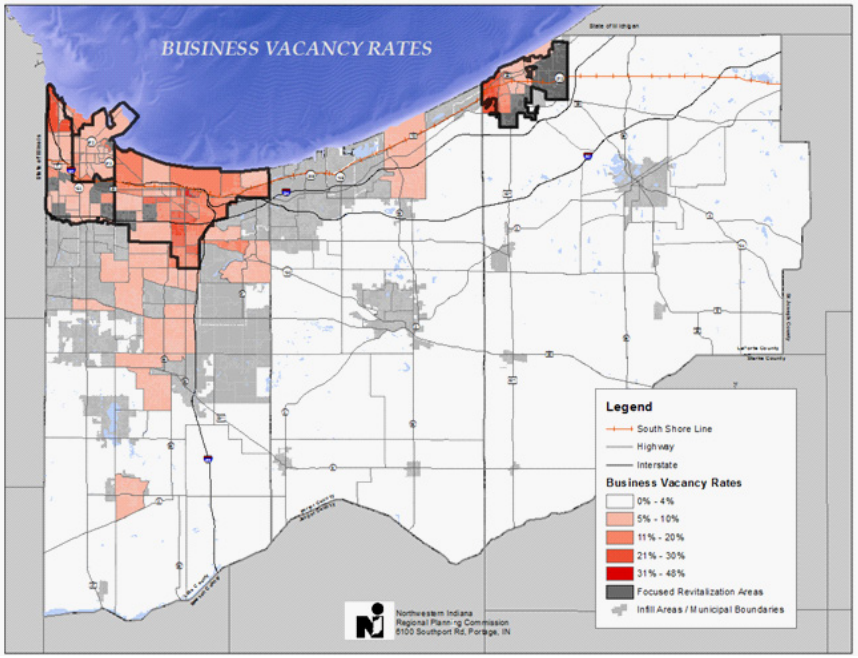

Figure I.24 Potential Infill Areas. Source: U.S. Postal Service, 2010.

Distressed properties often have the potential to be profitably reused, but can be hampered by zoning restrictions that do not reflect market opportunities. This is often the case with urban and suburban commercial corridors. Because older structures that were built under different rules may not conform to current use codes and lot requirements, the changes that would bring them back from obsolescence – such as a new use or a building expansion – are restricted.

Infill and adaptive reuse are most successful where there is some degree of regulatory flexibility. This can be accomplished through a number of means. Conventional rezoning to allow higher densities and mixed-uses or different scales, such as smaller setback requirements, is helpful. This allows adaptive reuse without requiring special approvals and streamlines the development process.

Infill and adaptive reuse are both strategies that promote the preservation of historic and cultural resources, which is listed as an objective for the revitalization of the region's urban core and the development of livable centers. As a regional organization, NIRPC can offer technical assistance and facilitate sharing of information between communities through the following.

- Mapping historic preservation districts and sites.
- Identifying the purpose and function of the necessity and benefit of having the districts.
- Identifying the difference between National Register and local districts.

Suburban Retrofit or Sprawl Repair

Suburban retrofit could be considered large-scale adaptive reuse. This technique involves reworking conventional, automobile-oriented areas like single-use housing developments, office parks and shopping centers into more walkable, mixed-use, transit-ready urban places. Unlike traditional urban renewal that relies on destruction of the old, this pragmatic approach to redevelopment modifies and adds to the existing urban fabric to promote a new design among uses and generate opportunity. It does so by reorienting activity on the site to face the street, reestablishing a street pattern that connects with the streets of the surrounding community and emphasizing public space for shared activity.

Many of the Livable Centers in Northwest Indiana could be "retrofitted." Disinvestment and poor design has been disruptive to the cohesiveness of many of our community centers. The Livable Centers-oriented approach advocated in the 2040 CRP supports the preservation of Northwest Indiana's built environment and its adaptive reuse to promote sustainable development patterns and economic growth.

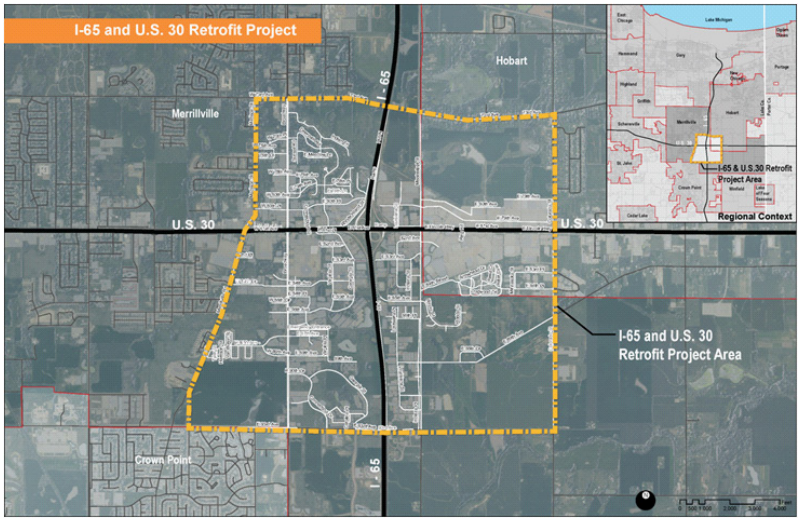

Figure I.25 Case Study Illustration: I-65 and U.S. 30 Retrofit

Local Context

Over the past 30 years, the intersection of Interstate 65 and U.S. 30 has developed into a prototypical suburban retail, office and service corridor. While very successful in its purpose, this regional employment center sprawls across the border of the town of Merrillville and the city of Hobart at relatively low densities. During the public workshops for NIRPC's 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, this area was identified for growth into a major Metropolitan Center. Though portions of the area are intensively developed - home to a regional mall, high-rise office towers, hotels and a performing arts venue - uses are wholly separated and automobile dependent. All the components of urban living are there, but not assembled into a sustainable whole. It also lacks housing and housing choices, pedestrian infrastructure and amenities. It is built around unwalkable "super blocks" with poor street connectivity; wide, dangerous and congested roadways; lack of public space; and inadequate public transit.

Project

Yet there is tremendous potential for improvement in this area. Changing demographics and the preferences of Americans toward high-quality, vibrant and sustainable urban environments point to the potential to retrofit the I-65 and U.S. 30 area into a livable urban center. A practical plan is needed that can demonstrate this opportunity and guide development to correct its current deficiencies. This project would require a sophisticated program for capital planning, finance, redevelopment and intergovernmental cooperation to accomplish it.

Such an intervention would create a new walkable center with features residents and businesses alike would enjoy, increase the feasibility and efficiency of transit, increase local connectivity, reduce congestion, improve public health and increase choices in housing type and affordability.

Figure I.26 The Marquette Plan, source: NIRPC 2008.

Implement the Marquette Plan.

The Marquette Plan: The Lakeshore Reinvestment Strategy is a comprehensive plan for Northwest Indiana's Lake Michigan shoreline that aims to create a livable lakefront by repositioning the lakefront and the lakefront communities as a destination and a place that attracts new residents and investment. The principle objectives of the plan are to: increase public recreational access to the shoreline and recapture 75% of the shoreline for free public access; require a setback from the water of at least 200 feet for any new structures or facilities not associated with open public access; and develop a continuous pedestrian/bicycle trail contiguous to the shoreline.

The Marquette Plan identifies a series of "catalytic" projects among all lakefront communities of Northwest Indiana, several of which are located in the Focused Revitalization Area. These are being funded in part by the

Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority.

- *Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk* – The first major success of the Marquette Plan, the 60-acre Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk, is a former National Steel sanitary sewage plant and hazard waste processing area located at the confluence of Lake Michigan and the Burns Waterway. Owned by the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and managed by the city of Portage, this park exemplifies the Marquette principles of collaboration, brownfield renewal and increased public access to Lake Michigan.
- *Gary Marquette Park Lakefront East Master Plan* – Marquette Park is a 241-acre historic regional park in the Miller section of Gary. The study area for the Marquette Park Lakefront East Master Plan includes the entire boundary of Marquette Park, as well as a portion of the National Lakeshore, the east and central lagoons and the city of Gary parcels east of Marquette Park.
- *East Chicago North Harbor Redevelopment Initiative* – This initiative seeks to redevelop the entire North Harbor, including its key corridors of Main Street, Broadway, Guthrie and Indiana Harbor Drive. The Main and Broadway strategy responds to the community investment goals of the Marquette Plan by providing a community revitalization strategy intended to link with the forthcoming lakefront redevelopment plan between the East Chicago Marina and Buffington Harbor in Gary.
- *Hammond Lakes Area Marquette Plan Improvement Project* – This project contains three related projects: 1) Lake Michigan Lakefront Park Public Access & Landscape Enhancement; 2) Wolf Lake Recreational Area Development Project; and 3) the George Lake Trail Bridge.

Prioritize Transportation Funding to Support Centers, Revitalization Areas and Infill & Growth Areas

As a Metropolitan Planning Organization, NIRPC is responsible for the long-range planning for and programming of federal transportation funds. The 2040 CRP is the policy plan that guides this process. NIRPC is updating its transportation project selection criteria to support the goals and objectives of the CRP and to prioritize transportation projects that support the development of Livable and Economic Centers, Revitalization Areas and Infill and Growth Areas. Project selection criteria is one key way to implement the plan.

Strategy 2: Link Transportation & Land Use

Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

Northwest Indiana's existing transit network, particularly the South Shore commuter rail, is a key regional asset that is unique in the state of Indiana. The 2040 CRP recommends that the region fully capitalize on this transportation asset through land use planning for Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Transit Oriented Development is a planning and development approach that concentrates mixed-use development within rail transit station areas. This includes a range of integrated residential, retail, service and office uses. TODs are walkable areas of compact development. A critical feature of a TOD is that many of the residents are "transit dependent." Whereas a typical household may have two cars, the transit dependent household has one, and also requires rides for work and other trips.

The 2040 Regional Transit Vision, outlined in the Transportation Chapter, identifies a regional transit framework for a system of transit-supported centers, including TOD around existing South Shore Stations, along the West Lake Corridor and at regional bus and multimodal hubs. Some planning for TOD already has been accomplished. Transit Oriented Development around existing South Shore Stations is a key recommendation of the Marquette Plan. Municipalities including Portage, Munster and Valparaiso have TOD plans, and NICTD is studying the realignment of the South Shore through Michigan City.

NIRPC encourages the development of a regional South Shore Corridor TOD Study to develop context-appropriate strategies for creating a network of transit-oriented places and sites that integrate different functions and activities within easy access of transit.

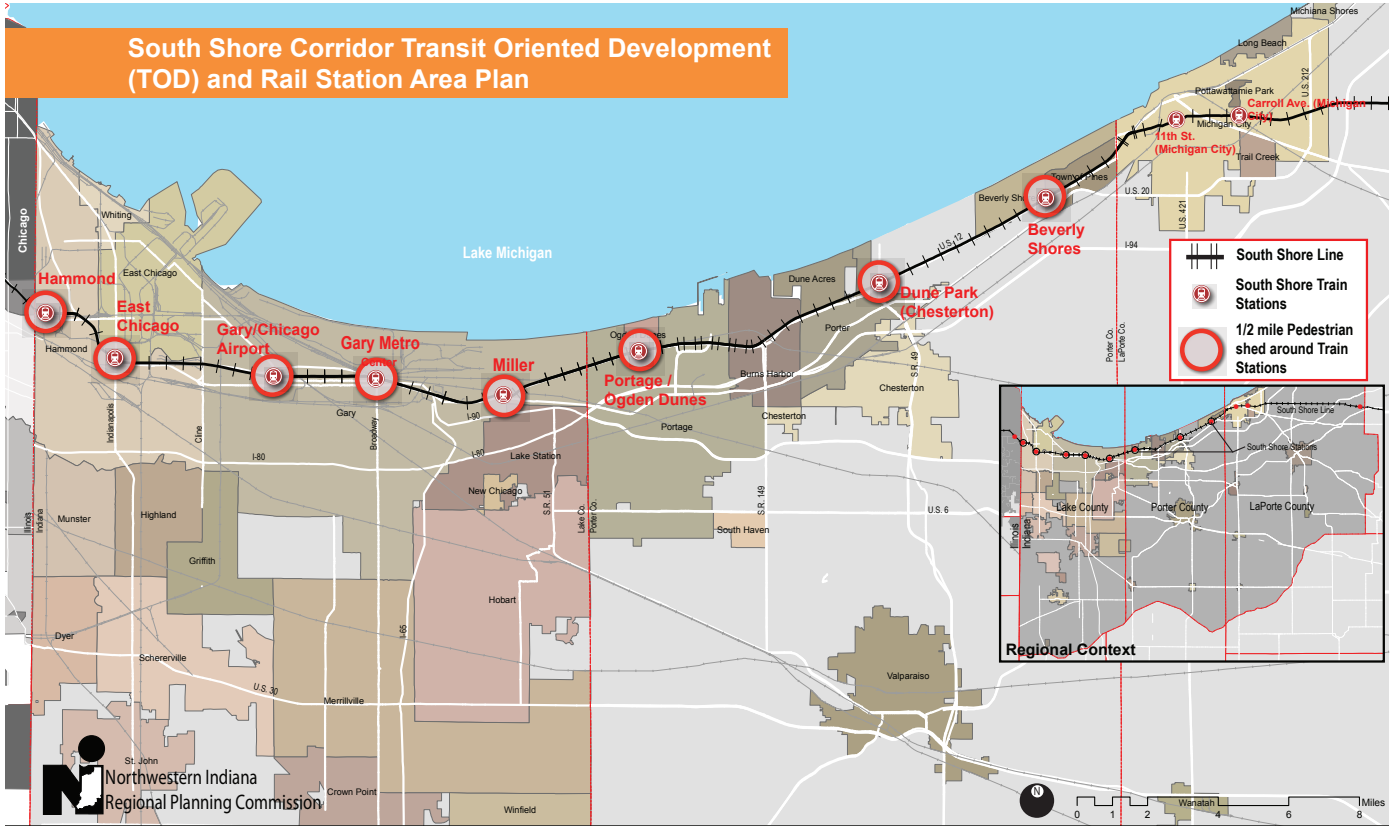

Figure I.27 South Shore Corridor Transit Oriented Development and Rail Station Plan.

Freight Supportive Land Use Planning

NIRPC, in coordination with local governments, can identify lands along freight rail lines and truck routes in Northwest Indiana and prioritize them according to their potential for freight-related development. Many of these sites are brownfields or underutilized land that could be brought back into more productive use to the benefit of the community and region. This is an opportunity to bring high-opportunity corridors and sites to interested public- and private-sector parties in order to facilitate redevelopment.

Local communities are encouraged to create development regulations that establish "good neighbor" practices, such as buffers, open space requirements, low-impact design, context-sensitive lighting and green building techniques.

Corridor Studies

Corridor studies are a key planning activity undertaken by NIRPC. Corridor studies coordinate transportation and land use usually along a major transportation link, such as a state highway, which may cross political boundaries. Corridors may be defined narrowly, to include only one road and its adjoining land use, or more broadly, to include a network of parallel routes and transit lines. Recent corridor studies in Northwest Indiana include the Porter County 12/20 Corridor Study, which grew out of the Marquette Plan, and the Porter County U.S. 6 Corridor Study.

Corridor plans integrate state, regional and local land use and transportation objectives to develop a comprehensive vision for a corridor. They often include descriptions of capital improvements, implementation phasing, access and circulation issues and protected lands.

Strategy 3: Smarter Land Use Decisions through Land Suitability

The Growth and Revitalization Vision for Northwest Indiana offers an overall consensus framework for a preferred growth pattern. Within this framework, NIRPC will continue to work with communities, counties and other agencies and stakeholders in affecting policy to realize this growth and conversation vision. Environmental features and assets have played an important role in framing the vision for the region. The use of land suitability as a development "screening" technique can be helpful in determining where future development is most appropriate. While local agencies will continue to develop and manage their own planning programs, NIRPC can help support the local assessments of existing conditions to help inform what areas of region are most suitable for development and those areas that warrant stronger consideration for conservation. Thus, land suitability is directed toward CRP implementation.

An assessment of the region's natural resources provides insights as to where conservation is desirable and land is less suitable for development. This is particularly true where natural assets overlap in combination. NIRPC developed a systematic approach to evaluate the region land development suitability based on both natural and built environments by assessing and mapping all environmental assets in a single composite map. The environmental asset components are listed below, but more detailed descriptions of the components can be found in the Environment and Green Infrastructure chapter.

- Managed lands
- Save the Dunes Properties
- Forest Land
- Streams 100 feet buffer
- Wetlands 25 feet buffer
- Floodplains
- Hydric soils
- Hobart Prairie Corridor
- Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure
- Priority Biodiversity Habitats

The assessment of each of these assets provided the basis for a land suitability evaluation process by categorizing the environmental assets into three tiers of suitability. The features included as part of each tier follow. The importance of these features ranks highest to lowest – the highest-ranking tier is the first.

- **Tier 1** – Water resources and managed lands. These areas include some of the highest-quality and most sensitive natural resources in Northwest Indiana. Managed lands include lands that are under public or institutional control such as the National Dunes, or local parks and recreation sites. Water resources include wetlands, streams, lakes and floodplains.
- **Tier 2** – Ecological areas and hydric soils. Ecological areas include forest, wildlife habitat, prairies and other unique assets of the region. This tier also includes hydric soils, or areas that were once wetlands but are now dry. However, because they are in low-lying areas, they provide an important natural function for stormwater absorption and replenishment of ground water supply. They also have the highest potential for environmental mitigation and restoration.
- **Tier 3** – Limited Productive Soils. These are located in urban and suburban areas. In many cases, these areas already have been moderately to severely impacted by urbanization. They could be considered for restoration or retrofit opportunities where possible.

IDNR water quality surveyors. Photo courtesy of Joe Exl.

The three tiers of classification form the basis for land suitability ranking. This represents an inverse relationship where lands of poorest quality or productivity (Tier 3) represent the areas of greatest development opportunity. Likewise, those tiers of significant natural importance rank lowest for development desirability. The three classes of land suitability include:

- ***Suitable Land*** is characterized as unrestricted from any of the features from the three tiers of land suitability.
- ***Less Suitable Land*** includes all lands classed in Tier 3, which primarily consist of soils in nonrural areas. This area is located within the urbanized urban core area, which includes Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City. These areas already have been moderately to severely impacted by adjacent land uses.
- ***Unsuitable Land*** includes all land within Tier 1 or Tier 2.

A land suitability analysis was prepared, which applied the classes of suitability in combination with other development consideration. These included:

- The growth and revitalization vision
- Current local land use plans
- Transportation network connectivity
- Fire protection services
- Municipal utilities of wastewater and water services
- Employment/services areas
- Educational facilities
- Public transportation
- Parks and recreational facilities

As described in further detail in the **appendix B** of the CRP, these features were applied to the region to arrive at a prioritization of developable lands. The following basic methodology was used and is geographically illustrated in Figure I.27.

Development Prioritization

1. **Very High Priority:** includes city/town centers and infill development. There are significant opportunities to use vacant and underutilized buildings to accommodate future growth. Reinvesting in these places can mitigate negative impacts, and remediating brownfields is an important component of this priority.
2. **High Priority:** includes areas within the urban core of Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City.
3. **Moderate Priority:** includes areas within municipal service areas and all other factors that were mentioned before under developable land. There are significant chances to accommodate future growth by reinvesting within the borders of our municipalities. Livability of these areas can be supported by transit-oriented development, mixed-use and denser areas.
4. **Low Priority**: includes areas that have ongoing plans or are under development and located within the Lake Michigan watershed area.
5. **Very Low Priority:** includes areas in proximity to municipalities and have conservancy district wastewater packaging plans and drinking water from public water supply wells for the development.
6. **Least Priority:** this land sustains no significant environmental restrictions, but is scattered in unincorporated areas— not encouraged for development in the 2040 CRP.

It is NIRPC's intent to make this system available for use and support to the region's planning and development agencies and organizations, development interests and other stakeholders for the use in local planning activities. Ideally, to be most effective, the system would be used in the preparation of local land use and development planning programs.

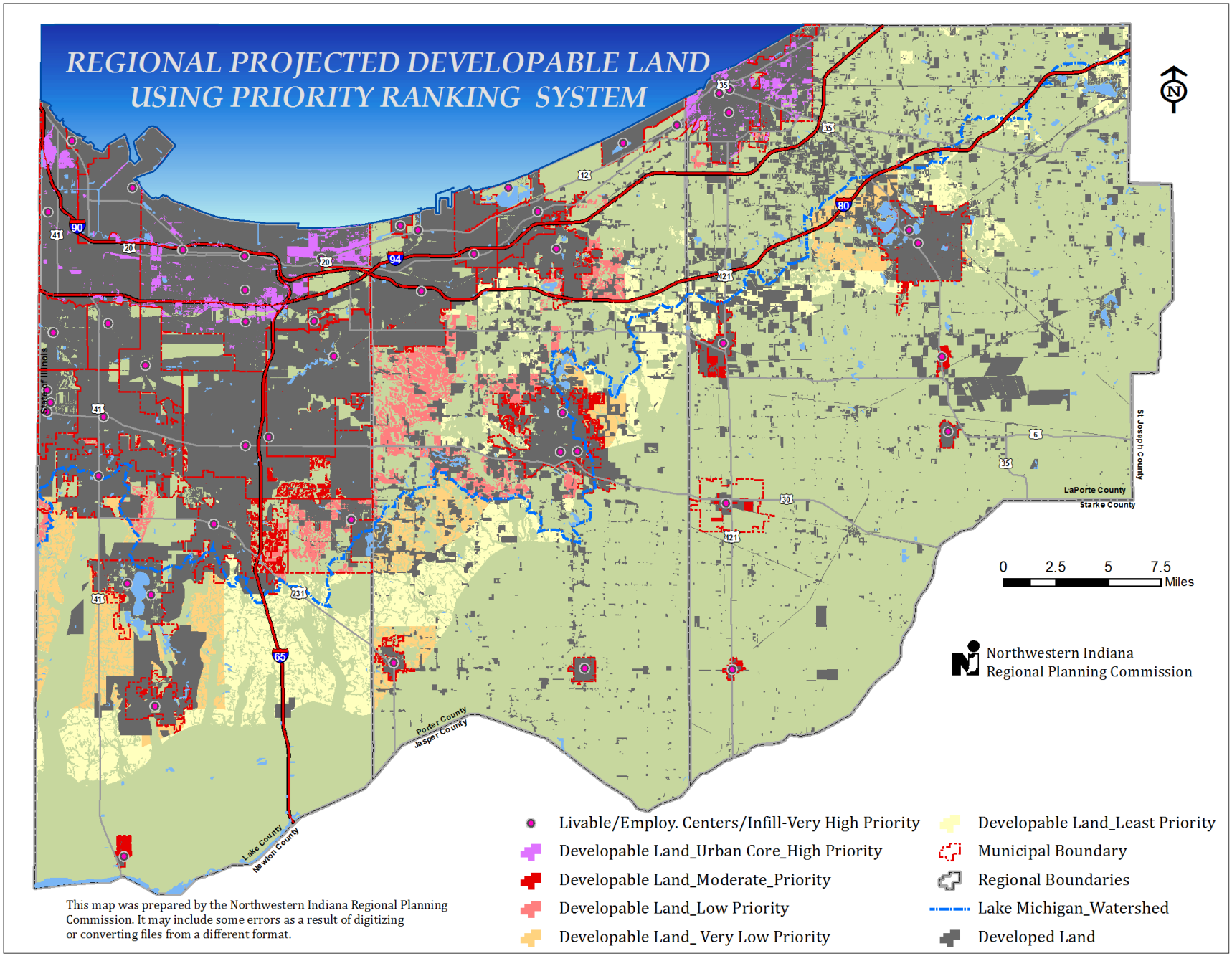

Figure I.28 Regional Projected Developable Land Using Priority Ranking System, NIRPC

Strategy 4: New Ways to Determine & Address Housing Needs

A region of livable centers with a vibrant, revitalized urban core requires a variety of housing to accommodate its residents. There will be a diverse mix of housing types that are close to transportation, jobs, shopping, cultural places and open space. Neighborhoods will have complete streets to allow all residents access to community resources and the opportunity to achieve an independent lifestyle.

By making strategic land use decisions and providing for transit and complete streets, the region can ensure that all residents have access to good schools, grocery stores, community centers, medical facilities, reliable transportation and job opportunities.

By reinvesting in the region's core communities and prioritizing where and how development occurs, people will be drawn to revitalized communities that offer a high quality of life, access to transit and opportunities for employment and community engagement. By making strategic land use decisions and providing for transit and complete streets, the region can ensure that all residents have access to good schools, grocery stores, community centers, medical facilities, reliable transportation and job opportunities.

To accomplish this, the region must focus on three primary strategies:

Housing Choice

Northwest Indiana must provide a range of housing choices to accommodate the needs within the region, including housing for both those with a limited income and those who are in different phases of life. In some communities, like East Chicago and Hammond, parcelling consolidations into larger lots is necessary to be able to accommodate more contemporary housing and retail preferences and foster infill development. In East Chicago, which has one of the highest concentrations of subsidized housing in the region, affordable housing needs must be balanced with the need for additional owner-occupied market-rate housing that will help to stabilize neighborhoods.

Housing Mix

As emphasized in the Livable Centers strategy, a regional emphasis will be placed on encouraging the compact and diverse mixing of housing types and affordability levels near job centers and transit routes. Adaptive reuse of existing buildings and facilities and infill development will help to minimize the occurrence of single-use types. Coordination between local governments and prioritization of investment in centers will further improve development opportunities and facilitate mixed-use centers.

Housing Affordability

While the region's housing is currently considered affordable to the region's residents, there is great potential for housing affordability to significantly decline as the market normalizes. Further, while the region as a whole may be affordable, there are many pockets where neighborhoods

Hammond homes. Photo by Liza P via Flickr.

are in decline and housing is of a poor quality and is not considered affordable. Facilitating the rehabilitation of neighborhoods and the maintenance of high-quality and affordable housing will help to stabilize neighborhoods. Additional efforts, such as inclusionary housing policies, must be undertaken now to preserve the affordability of the region's housing stock before market conditions change (e.g. interest rates increase) and as the region is revitalized. A vibrant and thriving region needs not be accomplished in such a way that its current and longtime residents are priced out of the market.

Strategy 5: Green Cities

Green Streets

Streets comprise a significant portion of the impervious surfaces in a community and are a major source of stormwater runoff. A green street is a street that is designed with less impervious surfaces and more landscaped green space in order to capture and absorb stormwater on and under the street itself. By reducing storm runoff and creating attractive streetscapes, green streets reduce flooding and its associated costs, enhance community and property values, clean and cool the air and water, beautify urban areas and enhance the pedestrian and bicycle environment.

Streets of all scales, from local neighborhood streets to major regional highways, and in all contexts, including urban, suburban and rural areas, can be designed with green street amenities. Many of these retrofits can be installed during a city's regular street, curb, parking lot and sidewalk capital improvement programs for minimal additional cost.

Several common practices for greening streets include:

- *Skinny Streets:* A narrower street is the simplest form of a green street. By reducing the width of the street, the amount of impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff is reduced as well. This approach is most applicable in residential areas with low automobile trips and where the pedestrian takes precedence.
- *Bioswales:* These are vegetated open drainage channels designed to accept water runoff, disperse it and absorb it in the ground. The intent of swales is to reduce stormwater volume through ground infiltration, improve water quality through vegetative and soil filtration and reduce water flow speed by increasing channel roughness. In the simple roadside grassed form (ditches), they have been a common historical component of road design. Additional benefit can be attained through more complex forms of swales, such as those with bioretention soils, gravel storage areas, underdrains, weirs and thick, diverse vegetation.
- *Stormwater Capturing Curb Extensions and Sidewalk Planters:* These techniques resemble typical street landscaping, but include an excavated area behind a reinforced curb with curb cuts for inflow and outflow of stormwater and landscaping with appropriate vegetation. Curb extensions (also called bump-outs) extend into the street to transform the curb lane into a landscape area. Curb extensions are often placed at intersections and other pedestrian crossings to reduce the length of the

Curb cuts let stormwater into a roadside infiltration basin on a residential street. Photo from web.

Permeable pavers in Chicago's Lincoln Park. Photo by Kathyrn via Flickr.

Green streets strategies employed in the Indianapolis Cultural Trail. Photo by Beth Shrader.

crossing and improve safety. Street planters in the parkway between the sidewalk and the curb work well in areas with limited space, and they allow for adjacent street parking or travel.

- *Permeable Pavement*: Permeable pavements are an alternative paving material that allows rainwater to pass through the pavement surface, percolating into the soil below. Much like swales, they help recharge groundwater and also remove contaminants that typically gather on pavement surfaces as a result of parked vehicles. The use of permeable pavement can also reduce the overall impermeable footprint of a development that triggers the need for large and expensive detention basins. In addition to parking lot applications, permeable pavement can be a viable solution for public alleys, low-traffic streets and the on-street parking lanes of wider streets.
- *Street Trees:* Another traditional streetscape element, street trees are an important element of a green street. However; before the installation of Street Trees coordination with Public Works department should happen. Trees reduce stormwater runoff in a number of ways. The leaf canopy intercepts, slows and filt3ers rainwater, preventing it from hitting the ground or giving it time to percolate into the soil. According to the U.S. Forest Service, 100 mature trees catch about 139,000 gallons of rainwater per year and remove 53 tons of carbon dioxide and 430 pounds of other air pollutants per year.

More information about green streets strategies can be found at the Low Impact Development Center http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/greenstreets/background.htm.

Link Open Space Fragments

Northwest Indiana ecosystems are fragmented and under constant, diverse stress from multiple sources (see the Environment and Green Infrastructure section for more details). This is particularly true in highly developed urban and suburban areas. In an urban and suburban context, open space is important for flood control, wildlife habitat, recreation, scenic landscapes and an overall improved quality of life.

In addition to the regional vision of conserving the natural and agricultural portions of the region, the 2040 CRP recommends linking the remaining fragments of open space that exist within the urbanized areas. This is based on the realization that by itself, a piece of open space can easily lose its economic, ecological, aesthetics, social and health values, but linked with multiple neighbors, these values can be secured.

NIRPC's Greenways and Blueways plan identifies linear open-space corridors throughout Northwest Indiana. It includes stream corridors, utility rights-of-way, off-road trails and road corridors.

Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture is a system of growing, processing, distributing, consuming and ultimately reusing crops, livestock or fuel at the local level. Community gardens, urban beekeeping and other urban agricultural practices are increasingly being implemented around the country and in Northwest Indiana. It has proven to be an effective means of reusing vacant lots, beautifying urban neighborhoods, fostering a local economy, developing a stronger community and eliminating food deserts (areas without easy access to fresh produce).

As a first step, NIRPC is working with stakeholders on a Local Food Study to foster the development of a local food economy in Northwest Indiana. Identifying barriers to urban and suburban agriculture and developing tools to encourage local food production is a key next step.

Strategy 6: Work Together

Provide Technical Assistance to Incorporate 2040 CRP into Local Plans

Because the 2040 vision is a comprehensive vision for growth and revitalization, the Comprehensive Regional Plan contains recommendations for both transportation and land use. As the region's Metropolitan Planning

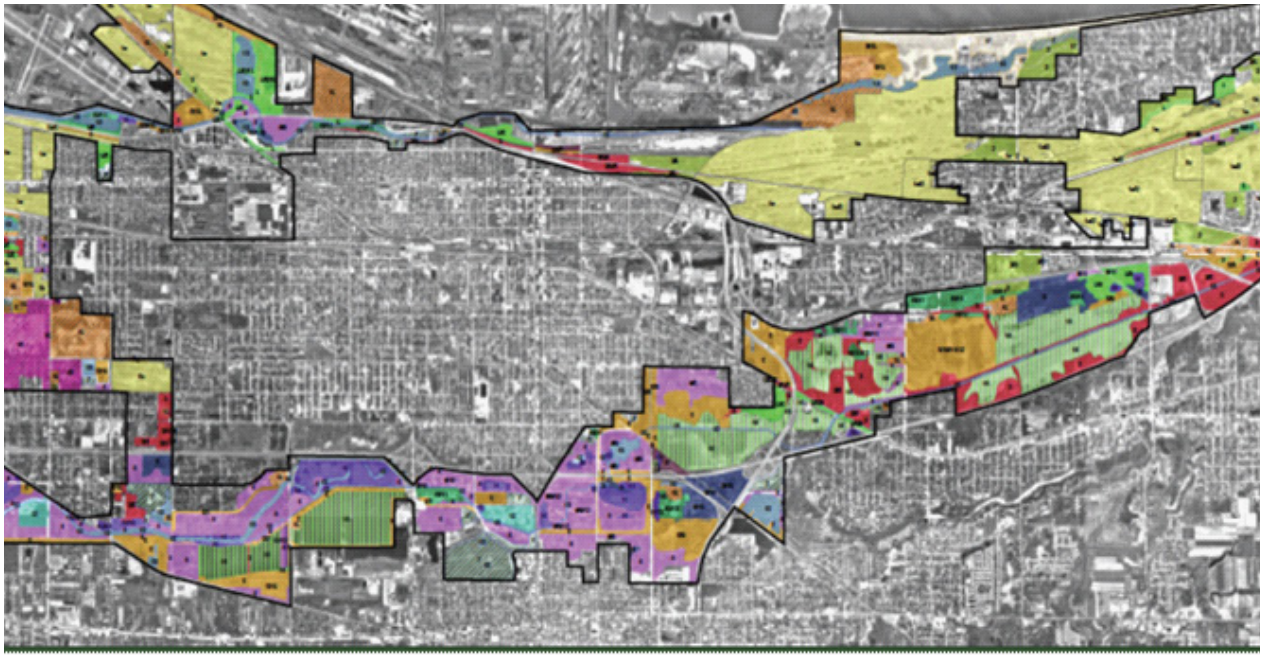

Figure I.29 Gary Green Link. Source: City of Gary, Indiana, 2011.

Best Practice: The 2005 Gary Green Link Plan is one of the best examples of local environmental planning, with an exhaustive analysis of sensitive environmental areas and greenway linkages for potential conservation and/or restoration. The Gary Green Link is a master-planned, 30-mile, multi use trail. The trail is a green infrastructure project that connects the unique Lake Michigan shoreline with the Little Calumet and Grand Calumet rivers.

Organization, NIRPC is charged with planning a multimodal transportation network and prioritizing transportation funding. Land use planning and regulation, however, remains a prerogative of local government.

Local plans, codes and regulations, therefore, are key tools for accomplishing the regional vision of the CRP. The recommendations of the CRP are not a substitute for and will not supersede local land use planning. Instead, the CRP is intended to serve as guidance for local plans and a means to incentivize good planning decisions. The Comprehensive Regional Plan does not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach to growth, but rather the integration of local and regional priorities. Just as local plans guided the development of the CRP, local contexts and decisions will influence how these recommendations are implemented.

In order to facilitate this integration, NIRPC will provide 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. NIRPC can serve as an important 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.

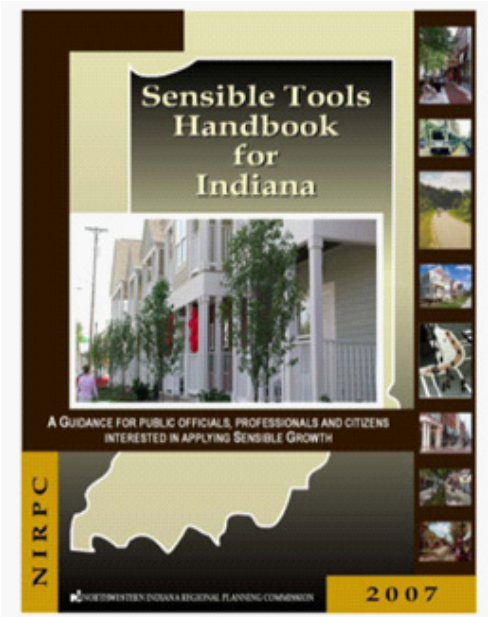

Figure I.30 Sensible Tools Handbook for Indiana. NIRPC, 2007

In 2007, NIRPC published the Sensible Tools Handbook for Indiana. This is a guidebook to the implementation of principles of sensible growth in Indiana. It is intended to serve as a reader, reference source and handbook for public officials, professionals and citizens interested in applying principles of good planning and sensible growth in their communities. The workbook is based on Indiana planning and zoning laws and best practices of smart growth that have been applied within the state and the region. The Sensible Tools Handbook identifies both the principles for building livable communities and the means to incorporate them into local comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and subdivision controls.

Update and Refine the Vision

The Centers, Focused Revitalization and Growth and Infill Areas Vision map was developed through the integration of regional goals and objectives with local planning priorities. Planning is a continual process that needs updating and refining. NIRPC will work with local governments to continue to identify centers and growth areas and to refine the 2040 concept. In addition, NIRPC will develop a more detailed community and center typology in order to understand similar communities and develop stronger, more tailored recommendations. The Towns and Smaller Cities and Local Government Assistance committees provide a precedent for groups of comparable communities working together.

Provide Support for Regional Initiatives

NIRPC will continue to provide planning support to major regional initiatives.

Partner with the RDA

The RDA is a key partner with NIRPC in implementing infrastructure and reinvestment projects in Northwest Indiana. The Comprehensive Regional Plan's focus is on livable communities, and thus provides the planning context in which the RDA's funding decisions will be made. Through

coordination with the RDA, NIRPC will ensure that investments will support the framework of livable centers and focused revitalization identified in the Comprehensive Regional Plan.

The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority is a quasi-governmental, development entity funded by casino revenue and local economic development taxes that makes public investment decisions within a regional framework for supporting catalytic infrastructure projects and inducing private sector investment. The RDA enabling statute specified four project priorities, all of which overlap with NIRPC's planning mission:

- Expansion of the Gary/Chicago International Airport
- Extension of the South Shore commuter rail system
- Creation of a regionalized bus transit system
- Restoration of the Lake Michigan shoreline

A fifth category allows for the consideration of other economic development projects.

Gary/Chicago International Airport Development

Northwest Indiana's largest airport, the Gary/Chicago International Airport (GCIA) has long been a cornerstone for economic development for Gary and the Northwest Indiana region. The airport has commenced a three-phase capital improvement program. By the end of the development program, GCIA will be a major commercial aviation center, similar in size to the Indianapolis International Airport. The entire capital improvement program carries a price tag of more than $630 million. In return, the regional economy is expected to grow by $82.6 billion and add more than 86,000 jobs. The airport's Strategic Business Plan (2010) also recommends:

- Focusing on low-frequency passenger carrier and charter service as the "core" business initiative. Heavy emphasis should be placed on outbound leisure travelers.
- "Regionalizing" the airport's branding, support and governance.

Breaking ground on runway 12-30 at Gary Chicago Airport. Photo from Gary-ChicagoAirport.com.

- Developing a land-use inventory and plan for the entire airport area to better identify development opportunities and constraints.
- Identifying opportunities for freight and logistics-related development.

The Gary/Chicago International Airport also presents opportunities for transportation-related development as a multimodal passenger center and as the anchor of a logistics- and cargo-oriented district. NIRPC will continue to support this effort through coordinated land use, transportation and economic development planning.

Gary and Region Investment Project

The Gary and Region Investment Project (GRIP) is a multiyear revitalization initiative sponsored by The Times of Northwest Indiana as part of its One Region, One Vision initiative. This project, which includes technical assistance from the Metropolitan Planning Council, aims to bring together local community leaders, regional stakehold-

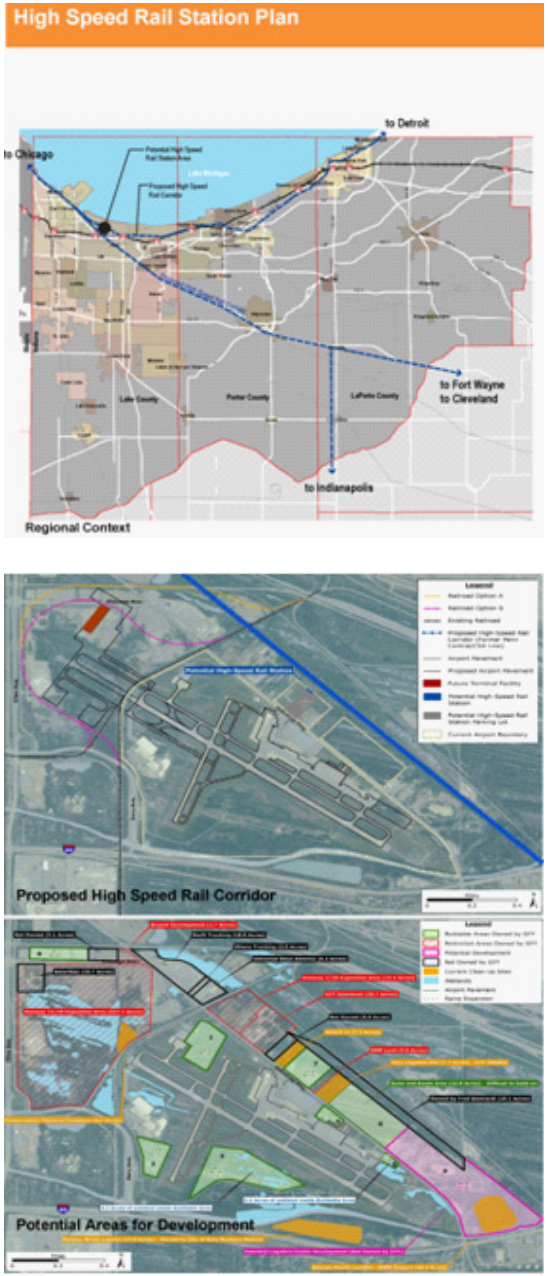

Figure I.31 Preliminary High-Speed Rail Station Planning Concept. NIRPC, 2010

ers, national experts and federal representatives to develop an investment strategy for Northwest Indiana's urban core, primarily northern Lake County. It is seeking consensus around a set of major catalytic projects identified in previous plans.

Secure Support from Washington, D.C.

In addition to the MPO-controlled federal transportation dollars that NIRPC prioritizes and programs, new funding streams are being made available to regions. These include grants for planning and infrastructure for which NIRPC is eligible to apply. As the only regional body in Northwest Indiana, NIRPC also is in a unique position to provide feedback to federal representatives regarding the local effects and effectiveness of federal actions. Coordination between these levels of government is essential to removing barriers to livable communities.

Strategy 7: Create Livable Centers

The development of "Livable Centers" within the Growth & Infill areas is fundamental to achieving the preferred regional strategy for land use, transportation and environmental stewardship in Northwest Indiana. Stakeholders clearly identified the elements of the Livable Centers concept – walkability, mixed uses, infill development – as part of the region's goal-setting exercise. Focusing future growth and development within established communities also was a development preference consistently observed as part of the Subregional Cluster Workshops conducted in the fall of 2009.

In a region such as Northwest Indiana, where significant physical constraints to ever-expanding urbanized areas often do not exist, strong and consistently implemented public policies regarding land use and transportation benefits are needed to ensure that population and employment growth occurs in a sustainable and responsible manner. It is with this understanding that the Comprehensive Regional Plan strongly endorses a future pattern of focused growth based on the concept of Livable Centers.

NIRPC will provide critical technical assistance to local communities as they plan for and implement improvements to support Livable Centers, and reflect a preference for investment in Livable Centers in funding allocation decisions. NIRPC will encourage and support the preparation of local plans specifically addressing Livable Centers by compiling and sharing information on best practices, providing model ordinance language and advising communities on achieving desirable regional outcomes through their planning initiatives as local policies are developed.

What Defines a Livable Center?

The development and evolution of Livable Centers can be guided by the principles of "place-making" in that consideration should be given not just to ensuring a mix of uses to serve each community's needs, but to the relationship of these land uses to one another.

- Livable Centers support existing communities, leveraging public investment to encourage an efficient pattern of population and employment growth that maximizes the use of areas already served by the roadway network and utilities.
  - *While the ongoing evolution of Livable Centers will require continuing investment in infrastructure, public investment should be focused on **maintaining and expanding existing capacity** rather than continuing to expand the urbanized area outward in an increasingly dispersed pattern.*
  - *Depending on the size and purpose of each Livable Center, appropriate **overall density will vary**. In every Livable Center, there is support for the **physical integration** of development, either vertically (differing uses within the same structure) or horizontally (differing uses in close proximity).*
- Livable Centers are compact in form and support a vibrant mix of uses within a concentrated area. Retail, office, civic, institutional and housing uses are all present to varying degrees within the Livable Center.
  - *Provide **residential options** in close proximity to supporting commercial and institutional uses, including higher-density alternatives that provide for a full "life cycle" of housing types within each community.*
  - *Uses and activities should be **complementary to one another**, with retail and services that meet the needs of nearby residents, and activity at different times of the day and week to balance traffic and parking demands.*
- It is not enough that Livable Centers provide a mix of uses; these uses are provided in an integrated pattern that promotes ease of movement between them, requiring coordinated land use and transportation planning as both public and private investments are made.

Downtown Valparasio during Popcorn Fest. Photo by Steve Johnson via Flickr.

  - *Provide **adequate parking** that is conveniently located, but that does not result in an over-supply of poorly utilized parking lots.*
  - *Provide **on-street parking** that counts toward the overall parking requirements for the Livable center.*
  - *Promote the use of **shared parking**, in particular for uses that have parking demands at different times of the day and week. Where feasible in retail and civic activity areas, provide **structured parking** to maintain a compact development pattern.*
- Livable Centers promote regional connectivity between Livable Centers, including being supportive of public transportation.
  - *Streets within each Livable Center should be designed to facilitate safe and comfortable use of transit vehicles, even if public transportation is not yet provided. This includes **planning for transit stop locations** and **providing appropriate amenities** at current and potential future transit stops, such as benches and shelters.*
  - *In several Livable Centers, **TOD (Transit Oriented Development) opportunities** should be facilitated to mutually support transit investments.*

- Livable Centers promote local walkability within the Livable Center, offering pedestrians and bicyclists a convenient and safe alternative to driving for local trips. This is achieved through the provision of a well-connected street and sidewalk network, and "complete streets" that are designed to accommodate all modes of travel.
    - *A **traditional street grid** provides direct and multiple routes, which can encourage pedestrian movement, reduce congestion and facilitate emergency vehicle access.*
    - ***Utilize access management techniques** (medians, shared curb cuts, rear service alleys) to increase pedestrian safety and facilitate bicycles and public transportation.*
    - *Within the core of the Livable Center, **make circulation of private automobiles secondary** to other travel modes, incorporating pedestrian-friendly speed limits, short block lengths, clearly delineated bicycle lanes and minimal dead-end street conditions.*
    - ***Balance street width and sidewalk width** to slow down traffic and enhance pedestrian safety. Sidewalks should be wide enough to **accommodate streetscape amenities and shade trees.***
    - ***Provide public spaces** that are accessible, well-lit, comfortable and visually interesting.*
    - ***Minimize building setbacks** and provide prominent entrances for pedestrians, relying on **on-street and rear parking areas** so that parking lots do not dominate the Livable Center.*
    - *A **balance of jobs and housing** within each Livable Center should be pursued, matching the types of jobs and the types of housing provided to reduce the burden of lengthy commuting for more residents of Northwest Indiana.*

While all Livable Centers share a need to be mixed in character, compact in arrangement, walkable and well-connected to their surroundings, they can vary in purpose based on their overall scale and location and on the role they play within the local and broader re-

Where are the livable centers in Northwest Indiana?

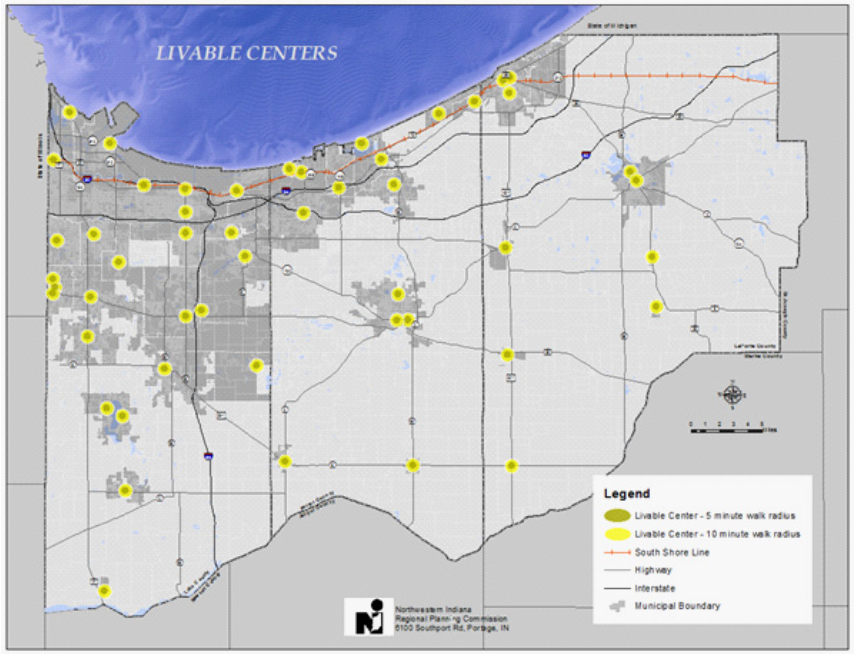

Figure I.32 Northwest Indiana's Livable Centers. Source: NIRPC, 2011.

Valparaiso storefront. Photo by Steve Johnson via Flickr.

gional planning context. Some Livable Centers can serve as a "regional center" that encompasses a concentration of employment opportunities and/or major trip generators, such as a university or hospital. Others can serve a more traditional "downtown" purpose by providing both retail and employment options for a larger area. Smaller Livable Centers can serve as a "town center" with a more local focus to their retail and civic destinations.

At any scale, it is important that each Livable Center provides some measure of housing capacity and accommodate both present and future public transportation. The relationship between investments in public transportation services and Livable Centers is direct and critical. These land use and transportation initiatives are mutually supportive and both of vital importance in ensuring the long-term quality of life in Northwest Indiana.
Where are the Livable Centers in Northwest Indiana?

As a major defining element of the Comprehensive Regional Plan, Livable Centers (see Figure I.31) have been defined in each of the 41 established communities in Northwest Indiana. These Livable Centers vary widely in scale, use, mix and purpose within each community today, but all represent areas of regional significance. The Livable Centers concept will concentrate future growth within a defined perimeter around this central location that has been defined within each community. These existing activity centers already are served by utility infrastructure and the roadway network. While in some cases, significant reinvestment will be needed to upgrade existing utility and roadway capacity in the future, to do so is a more efficient use of limited public resources than to extend new capacity to the perimeter of the community.

Some of these locations already exhibit many of the desirable features of Livable Centers, while others are "works in progress" that will benefit from concentrated future planning and development effort and investment, both public and private, in order to achieve their full potential.

The four categories of Livable Centers established in the Comprehensive Regional Plan process are:

- **Metropolitan Livable Centers** – Communities with a current population greater than 70,000, and include Gary (population 80,294) and Hammond (population 80,830).
- **Large Livable Centers** – Those with a current population between 20,000 and 70,000, including 11 communities ranging from LaPorte (population 22,053) to Portage (population 36,828).
- **Medium Livable Centers** – Those with a current population of between 7,000 and 20,000, including seven communities ranging from Lowell (population 9,276) to Griffith (population 16,893).
- **Small Livable Centers** – Those with a current population of less than 7,000, including 21 communities ranging from Dune Acres (population 182) to Whiting (population 4,997).

Whiting Public Library. Photo by Phyllis Rose from Kalamazoo Gazette.

As part of the Cluster Workshops conducted in the fall of 2009, the 41 incorporated centers (communities) in the planning area each was classified as one of these center types principally based upon existing population, as depicted in Figure I.31. This distribution of centers provides an important framework to guide future planning and investment decisions, both locally and regionally.

What Are the Benefits of Livable Centers?

As future population and employment growth in Northwest Indiana is concentrated in these Livable Centers through effective planning and development management at the local level, both the local municipality and the broader region will benefit in several ways.

- Community Benefits – A strong policy of support for Livable Centers establishes the value of existing communities and neighborhoods, bolstering the sense of community among residents. Livable Centers, once well established, provide an appealing and comfortable environment in which residents can interact more frequently, on an impromptu basis or at organized community events. Parks, plazas and a complete sidewalk network accommodate public gatherings and encourage community building. Livable Centers also provide the region with stable communities that are successful and offer amenities for residents.
- Mobility Benefits – Livable Centers increase mobility options and reduce mobility costs for residents by concentrating destinations closer together and making walking, bicycling and use of public transportation safer and more convenient. Support of public transportation initiatives with related improvements (such as TOD projects) in Livable Centers will reduce dependence on automobiles. With fewer local driving trips needed to conduct daily business, the region benefits through lower vehicle emissions and reduced congestion on regional thoroughfares.
- Sustainability Benefits – Livable Centers reap rewards for the region from a sustainability perspective by making the most efficient use of limited public resources for investment in transportation and development initiatives. Existing assets are maintained and actively used, keeping development patterns compact and maximizing the utility of existing infrastructure. If public funds are invested in expanding outward at the community's perimeter, the long-term financial burden for infrastructure maintenance will continue to grow. Investment in Livable Centers is instead a far more resource-efficient strategy.

Whiting's Hoosier Theatre. Photo by Phyllis Rose from Kalamazoo Gazette.

Downtown park in Chesterton during Taste of Duneland. Photo by Beth Shrader.

Downtown Chesterton. Photo by Beth Shrader.

- Economic Development Benefits – Livable Centers enhance regional competitiveness by creating high-quality aesthetic environments, increasing civic pride and identity and serving as a catalyst for private investment. Expanded employment and housing options benefit the region as a whole, in particular as the jobs-housing balance improves and average commuting trip distances can be reduced.
- Environmental Benefits – Livable Centers benefit the environment through improvements in air quality as a result of reduced vehicle emissions and by reducing the further incursion of impervious surfaces that negatively impact regional watersheds. With less land required for development, larger and contiguous natural areas can be maintained. In developed areas, more responsible design practices that reduce stormwater run-off can also reduce impacts.
- Lifestyle Benefits – Health benefits can accrue for local residents who avail themselves of safer and more convenient opportunities to walk or bicycle, rather than drive, within each Livable Center, including children who can walk or bike to school rather than carpooling or riding the bus.
- Housing Benefits – Livable centers provide an excellent opportunity to include a mix of housing types, style and costs. Because of the full service nature of all uses within a livable center, daily needs including work, shopping and entertainment can frequently all be met within a single Livable Center.

Precedents/Best Practices

- Coffee Creek Center near Chesterton was developed in 1995 and is becoming a national benchmark for conservation design and development. The 675-acre development not only follows conservation design principles, it also incorporates principles of transit-oriented development, including walkable neighborhoods and pedestrian-oriented streetscapes, and strives to provide a range of housing to accommodate residents.

- The Harrison West development in Valparaiso received the 2003 Indiana Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in Land Use. In establishing the 60-acre site plan, the developer preserved six acres of natural resources, as well as existing mature trees on individual building sites. Site preservation and environmental function also was ensured by the establishment of conservation zones and vegetated swales planted with native grasses.
- The city of Brentwood and Contra Costa County in California have incorporated agricultural buffers in their planning provisions to reduce the conflict between farm and nonfarm uses. The buffers have been used to reduce nuisances from operations like pesticide spraying or to provide transition and separation areas, windbreaks and wildlife habitats. The city also has a Right to Farm ordinance that protects farms from complaints and encroachment from non farms.

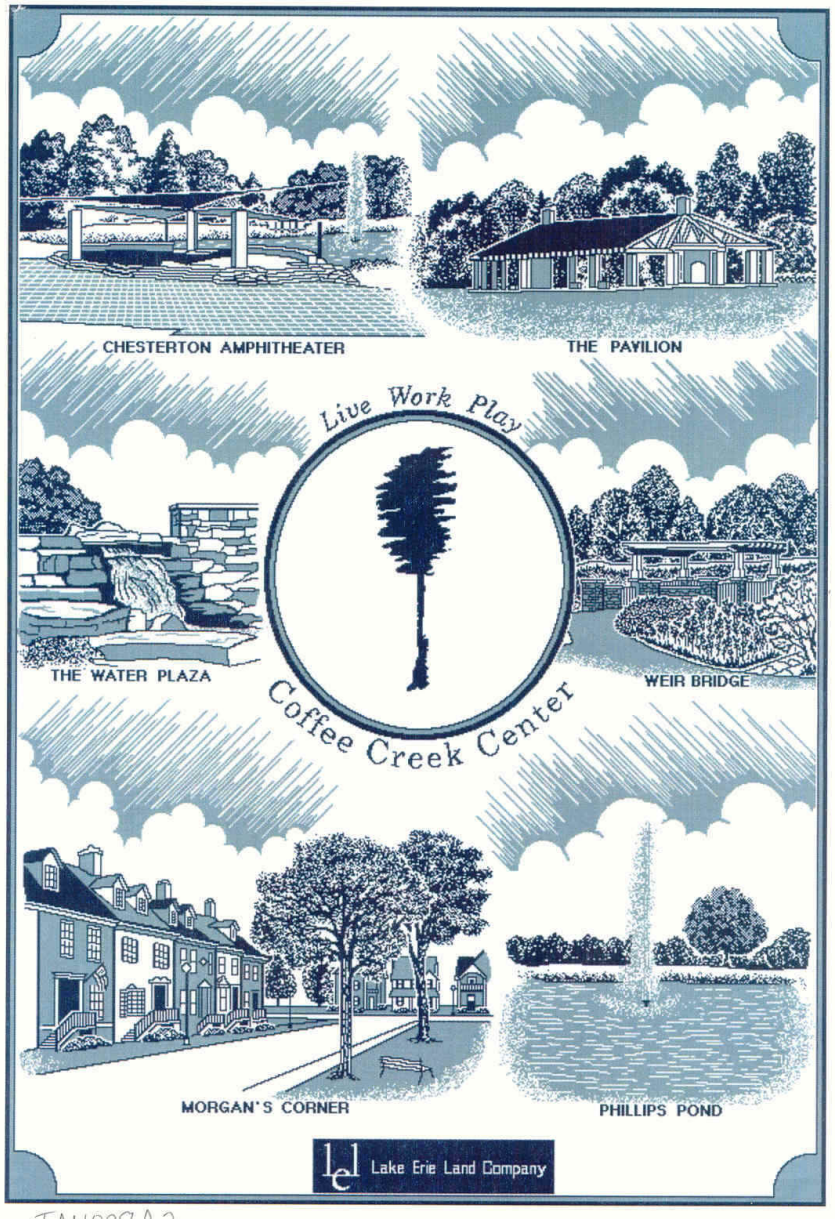

Photo from Coffecreekwc.org.

Performance Measure/Indicators

- *Number of comprehensive or other plans or development regulations adopted that support the development of Livable Centers*
- *Change of population and employment density in Livable Centers*
- *Proportion of buildings or blocks with a mix of uses (increase over time)*
- *Variety of housing unit types (single-family vs. multifamily percentage, a balance over time)*
- *Population and employment within a half-mile of transit*
- *Dwelling units per gross acre (at least eight units/acre is desirable)*
- *Job-housing balance – 0.8 jobs per 1.5 housing units*
- *Residential and business vacancy rates*
- *Population and employment change in the Focused Revitalization Areas*
- *Population change in unincorporated areas*
- *Acres of agricultural land converted to another use*
- *Acres of open space converted to another use*
- *Acres of land converted from undeveloped to developed*

Kids playing in Gary neighborhood. Photo by Samuel A. Love via Flickr.

Rural & Unincorporated Framework

The vast majority of rural and unincorporated lands in Northwest Indiana lie in the southern part of the region within the Kankakee River basin. While unincorporated and rural areas do exist in the northeastern part of the region, this is also where some of the region's larger and faster growing communities are located. Further, of the 41 communities in the three-county area, 29 are located within the Lake Michigan watershed (Figure I.32). As discussed in more detail in the element on Environment and Green Infrastructure, many of the region's more pristine environments and natural systems lie within the Kankakee River basin.

While largely agricultural in character, the unincorporated areas of each of the region's three counties have seen significant nonfarm residential growth over the last decade. Between 1992 and 2006, total land developed in the incorporated areas of the region grew from 35,902 acres to 78,889 for an increase of 43,800 acres (125%) in 14 years. This level of unprecedented growth has significant implications for the conservation and character of the region's rural and unincorporated areas.

The need and interest to conserve the region's open lands and agricultural and environmental features was a subject of significant discussion in the preparation of the Comprehensive Regional Plan and led to the infill growth strategy to encourage residential and employment growth within the region's core communities.

Preserving the Region's Rural Character and Resources

The Comprehensive Regional Plan focuses on the protection of natural resources while supporting the agricultural and rural economy, and allowing for limited compatible nonfarm development. For the benefit and advancement of agricultural activities, the following recommendations are generally applicable in the region's rural and agricultural areas.

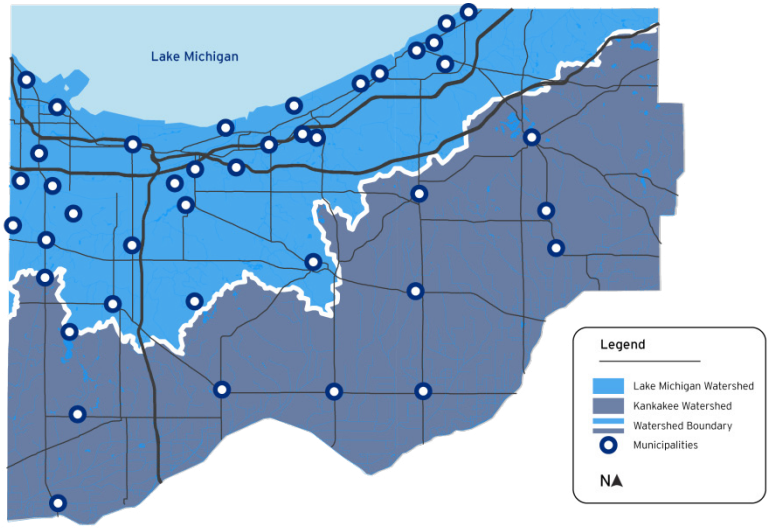

Figure I.33 Northwest Indiana Watershed Areas

- **Agricultural Districts** – In Indiana, farmers are permitted to voluntarily form agricultural districts or they can be designated within a comprehensive plan. The districts do not restrict nonfarming uses, but they do protect the farmer from nuisance complaints and also provide assessment benefits. Indiana districts can require that agricultural land meet some eligibility requirements, including minimum acreage, minimum time within the district and minimum production capabilities.
- **Agricultural Buffers** – Consider the establishment of additional setbacks for new residential developments within agricultural areas to reduce conflicts with common farm operations.
- **Goods Movement Route Network** – The importance of goods movement in sustaining the region's rural economy makes it advantageous

to maintain a network of routes that serve processing facilities, distribution centers and farms. NIRPC staff can work with state, county and local officials in establishing a goods movement network for the region.

- **Differential Assessments**– In Indiana, tax benefits can be made available to farm owners who agree to preserve their farmland for a specific period of time. This can be accomplished through deferred taxation or through restrictive agreement.
- **Deferred Taxation**- With deferred taxation, the property is taxed at a lower level, but if the owner sells the land for development at a later time, the owner will be obligated to pay back taxes at the higher rate.
- **Restrictive agreement**- Through a contract between the local government and a landowner, a local use-value tax assessment can be established in exchange for an agreement not to sell a farm for development.
- **Encourage conservation/development/design**– The counties of Northwest Indiana should encourage the use of conservation design in the development and facility plans for new non farm developments. Conservation design techniques should be voluntary, but should offer potential incentives to encourage their use. The concept of conservation development is to carefully consider the physical limitations of land and determine its capacity and the conditions under which development should be allowed. In other words, the conservation development approach does not seek to restrict development, but encourage it in a manner that minimizes its impacts to rural features and natural systems. Conservation design techniques offer the following advantages:
    - Minimized impacts to environmental features
    - Coordinated transportation improvements and minimized impacts to areas that lack capacity for service
    - Conservation of the most productive agricultural lands
    - Minimized effects from development on stream corridors, flood plains and wetlands, as well as stormwater runoff
    - Minimized impacts from farming operations to nonfarm uses

Sun at 4 o'clock at Coffee Creek Watershed Preserve. Photo by Joe Marinaro via Flickr.

The Comprehensive Regional Plan recommends that Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties develop uniform conservation design regulations that establish predictability for development requirements across the three counties of the region. The protection of Northwest Indiana's natural and environmental resources is a shared responsibility and uniform development requirements will help minimize undesirable concentrations of unincorporated nonfarm growth.

The Comprehensive Regional Plan recommends that Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties develop uniform conservation design regulations that establish predictability for development requirements across the three counties of the region.

Combine on industrial scale farm. EPA photo via web.

Paddling down the Little Calumet river. Photo courtesy of the Northwest Indiana Paddling Association.

Conservation design is a strong national movement toward agricultural conservation and responsible nonfarm development. Numerous examples of this technique can be found across the country and in Indiana. The Coffee Creek Center development near Chesterton is a notable example. Although only 17 acres would be considered undevelopable land, almost 250 acres will be part of the network of preserved green space, parks and constructed wetlands.

Unincorporated land divisions – All three counties in Northwest Indiana allow for the division of agricultural lands for nonfarm land uses. Most often this is done for single-family residential uses. These land divisions do not require the creation of a subdivision, the dedication of public ways or the installation of public facilities improvements. Platting exceptions such as these are a vehicle for much of the region's unincorporated development. The lack of control over these land divisions has the potential for a number of detrimental consequences:

- Roadway access issues/conflicts
- Groundwater contamination
- Stream and drainage way obstruction
- Soil erosion
- Unnecessary loss of productive farmland.

Each county in Northwest Indiana allows for the division of land to establish the land use rights to construct a single-family home in agricultural zones. In Lake County, the minimum division is 20 acres per dwelling; in Porter County, the minimum is 10 acres in most agriculturally zoned areas; and in LaPorte County, the minimum is 30 acres. In many instances, the owner will continue to farm the majority of the land himself or lease the land to nearby farmers or tenant farmers to keep the land in agricultural production. However, there are instances where smaller tracts of land fallow and create a nuisance to adjoining owners.

While the Comprehensive Regional Plan acknowledges the need to continue to provide rural residential living opportunities, steps can be taken to encourage a more thoughtful approach to the manner in which land divisions occur. The following illustrations show how a 150-acre, five-lot

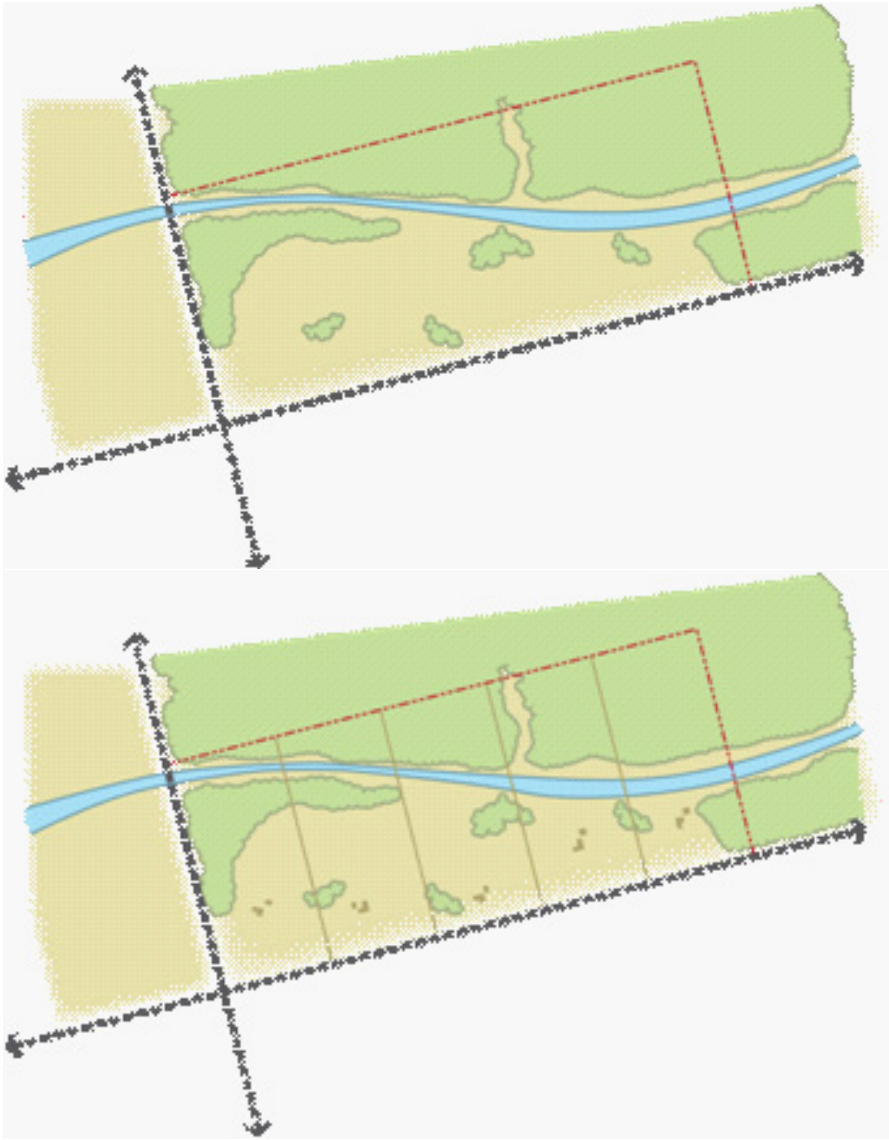

Figure I.34 An Illustration of Land Division in the Three-County Region

division, typically occurs in the three-county region (see Figure I.33).

This development does not offer the best solution for minimizing impacts to the site and the surrounding conditions. The Comprehensive Regional Plan recommends the three counties consider establishing a plan review process for the review of unplatted land divisions. Rather than maintaining a large parcel requirement, conservation benefits are given priority in this process, allowing smaller development parcels in exchange for placing the remainder of the parcel under protection.

For example, consider the same 150-acre tract and allow 1- or 2-acre parcels for each dwelling rather than five +/- 30-acre parcels (see Figure I.34). As a condition of approval, the land not assigned for residential uses may not be divided again but it could continue to be used for agricultural uses or could be rezoned for other uses in the future, if appropriate. This approach could be a required or voluntary process. Its utilization, however, would result in improved land conservation over the site as illustrated below.

The specific provisions of the approach would need to be determined by each county. In order to minimize the administrative burden of the process, it is suggested that the review of these divisions be considered at the staff level, subject to specific review criteria. By way of example, factors that might be considered in plan review include:

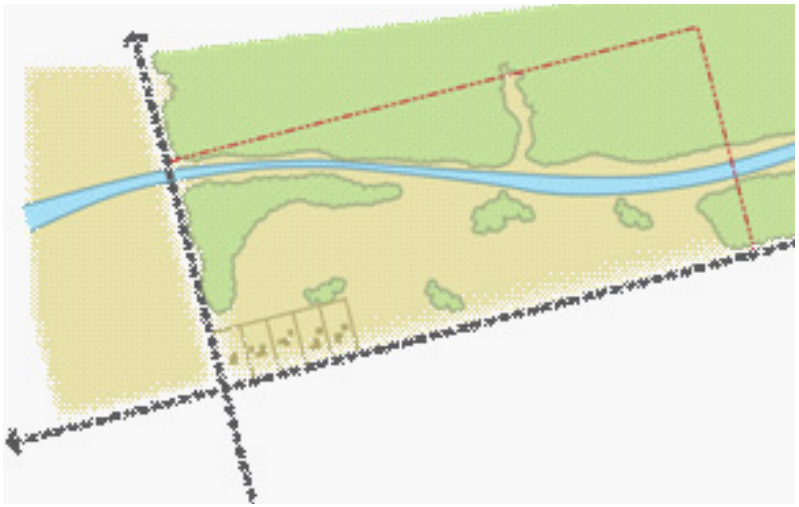

Figure I.35 Best Practices Example of Land Division

- Drainageways and floodplains
- Traffic and roadway conditions
- Driveway and access conditions
- Natural vegetation and slope
- Natural area and wildlife corridor connectivity
- Soil conditions
- Groundwater supply
- Availability of public services
- Clustering of dwellings

Corridor Studies – While nonfarm uses continue to intensify, so will the potential conflicts on the rural road system. Because roadway needs and issues vary across the region, focused corridor studies provide an excellent way of addressing more localized needs. Corridor studies and plans can help resolve right-of-way and roadway use conflict; standards for access, pavement widths and other needs can be addressed comprehensively; and agreement on the timing and participants in implementation can be resolved.

Home at Tryon Farm, a conservation community in Michigan City. Photo from planningwithpower.org.

Area Plans – Very frequently, area plans can be an effective means of managing issues associated with property owner and intergovernmental interests. Area plans address specific issues in specific locations that would benefit from intergovernmental cooperation. While area plans should be pursued any time they are needed, NIRPC specifically encourages area plans be prepared for the following locations:

- *The South Haven Area – This area is experiencing a significant amount of growth and development and there is a particular need to coordinate future utility services within the area.*
- *The Route 6 – Highway 49 Area – Located north of Valparaiso, this area is undergoing significant development, including development along primary travel corridors. An area plan could coordinate municipal and county land use and transportation programming for the area and lead to a more sustainable outcome.*

Developing Our Local Food Systems

Food, like water and shelter, is essential to sustaining us. Yet, we rarely take time to ask where our food comes from, how it gets to our tables, and whether we will be able to feed ourselves next month, next year, or in the context of this plan, in 2040. A comprehensive regional plan has to address the fundamental issue of food. Without accessible, affordable, high-quality food for everybody, it will be impossible to have healthy people, healthy towns, and a healthy region in 2040.

One objective of the Comprehensive Regional Plan is to foster the development of local food systems and a local food economy. A robust local food system will enhance our vision of a vibrant and accessible region with a thriving economy that renews urban and rural areas and supports the health of all people and places.

Shoppers at the Chesterton European Market. Photo by Beth Shrader.

NIRPC is currently conducting a Local Food Study for Northwestern Indiana.[1] As part of the study, a working group of local food advocates and stakeholders was created and has helped guide the development of this section of the CRP. The table below identifies several issues that the stakeholder group believes will need to be addressed in order to develop a strong local food system:

	Local Food System Issues
Producers	Too few non-commodity growers; Short growing season; Low profitability; Inadequate labor supply; Scale of existing system; Need to educate citizens.
Processors	Too few processors; Excessive/misguided regulations; Too few inspectors; Difficulty in scaling up from micro- to mid-sized operations.
Distributors	Too few distributors; Small-scale distributors squeezed out by mega-distributors.
Groceries/ Restaurants/ Institutions	Coordination with multiple growers of schedules/deliveries difficult and time-consuming; Unreliable deliveries from local sources.
Citizens	Lack of physical/economic access to local food, esp. in environmental justice communities; Lack education about local foods.
Waste Handlers	Need greater public participation in composting; Need a coordinated composting system.

The local food system is tied to many issues covered in the 2040 Plan because it is an integral part of rural and urban issues, accessibility, economics, land use, the environment and community. This section will pull out key local foods issues which tie into the plan's vision.

[1] The Local Food Study will expand upon this section of the plan and will offer strategies to build the local food system in our region. The study, funded by a grant from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, is due out in Oct. 2011.

Accessibility of Local Food

Even though our region boasts eight farmers' markets, three farms with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations,[2] and 91 seasonal U-pick locations, local food can be hard to obtain. Managers of farmers markets tell us that they cannot find enough local farmers to fill their stalls. Farmers say that they do not have the time or the labor to spend selling their produce at farmers' markets. Local distributors explain the difficulties in selling local foods to regional schools, which have contracts with corporate distributors to buy their food. Chefs say that arranging deliveries from multiple small growers can be problematic and time consuming. Produce managers at grocery stores explain that differences between large and small scale ordering and delivery processes makes sourcing local fruits and vegetables a challenge. Even food banks, which use relatively flexible food sourcing strategies such as gleaning, experience challenges in finding local foods.

As with any system that relies on moving goods and people, the success of our local food system will depend on creating efficient ways of getting local foods from our fields to our residents. This includes getting local produce to groceries, institutions, corner stores, restaurants, farmstands, farmers markets, and even directly to the home. Literature assessing gaps in local foods systems often point to appropriately scaled distribution networks as a key challenge.[3] These reports echo preliminary findings from the NWI Local Food Study surveys; that a well-tuned aggregation, processing and distribution network connecting our producers to our residents is a major missing link in our local food system. In addition, as fuel prices rise, a local food system that depends less on fossil fuels to produce and bring in foods from around the globe will help keep food accessible in our region— both physically and economically.

Transportation of local foods to places of distribution is only one piece of the puzzle. Getting our residents to the distribution centers is the other piece. This will be essential to ensuring that healthy local food is accessible throughout the region for everyone, from those who depend on public transit, to persons with disabilities, to the elderly, the young, and low-income populations. The map below shows that at present, our most populated areas have good access to groceries by car, but there is limited access for those who rely on public transit.

Accessibility to healthy foods, both physically and economically, will be an important factor in the health of our region. Statistics for diet-related illness in the region show that we have high obesity and diabetes rates, often above the rates of neighboring counties in Indiana, Michigan and Illinois. These pathologies are serious—the American Medical Associa-

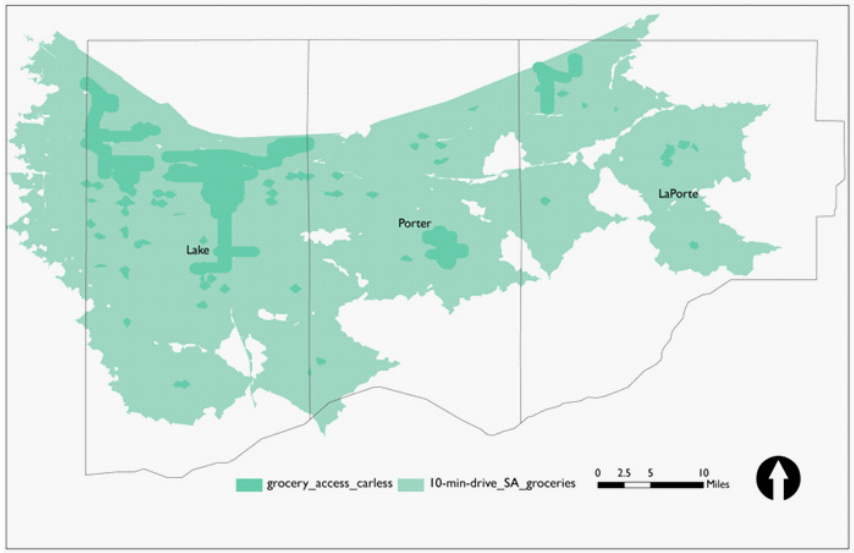

Figure I.36. Accessibility to groceries in the region is fairly good for drivers, but limited for those who do not drive.

[2] Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system where farmers sell "shares" to customers. Each "share" entitles the customer to a basket of seasonal produce from the farm throughout the growing season. CSAs help the farmer by providing income early in the season, and they help customers by providing fresh, in season produce at regular – often weekly – intervals. Perhaps the greatest benefit is that CSAs provide a direct connection between the people growing food and the people enjoying it.

[3] Martinez, Steve, et. al. Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues, ERR 97, U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, May 2010.

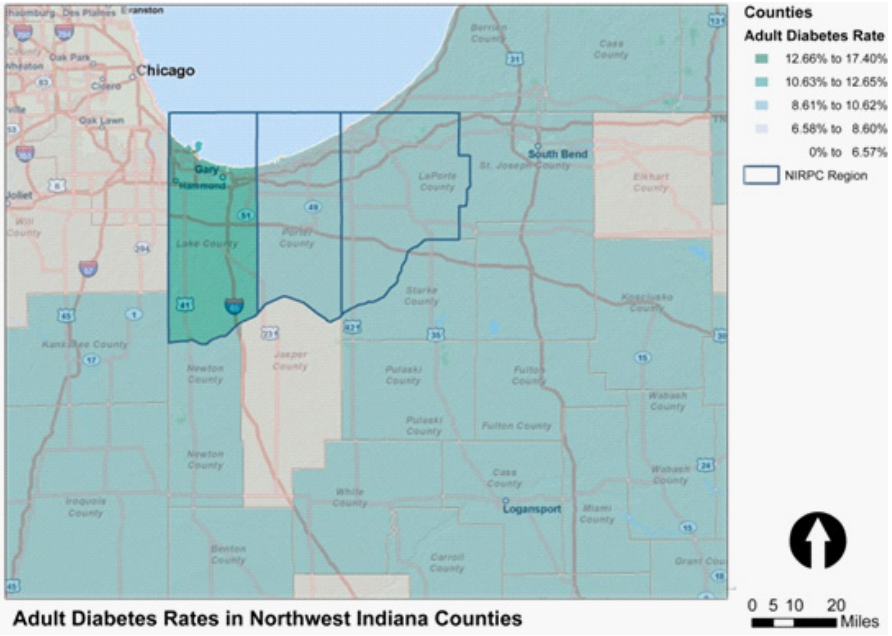

Figure I.37 Adult Diabetes Rates in the Region and vicinity.

tion (AMA) reports that obesity kills more Americans every year than does cancers, AIDS, and all accidents combined.[4] The AMA and U.S. Department of Agriculture both state that Americans can maintain a healthy weight and avoid type II diabetes if they eat a diet which emphasizes fruits, vegetables and whole grains,[5] all of which are grown locally. However, without access to these healthy foods, we cannot expect the positive health effects that come from eating them. By strengthening our local food system, we can make these foods a part of daily life in the region. NIRPC's Local Food Study seeks in part to understand how local food can be made more accessible to all residents in the region, whether through groceries, farmers markets, restaurants, institutions, community gardens, or from their own backyard.

[4] http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/public-health/promoting-healthy-lifestyles/obesity.shtml
[5] USDA. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.

Objectives that address accessibility of local food:

- *Enhance connectivity between housing, jobs, services, and educational facilities*—One of the most essential services with which to connect our region is food. A strong local food system will ensure access to high-quality food as an essential component of thriving communities.
- *Integrate local, regional and national transportation systems to facilitate movement of people and freight between modes*—A key component of a thriving local food systems are efficient modes of transportation from farm to plate. We will need to guide transportation decisions in ways that keep our local food transportation needs in mind, from moving freight to getting every resident access to a local food outlet in the most efficient and sustainable way possible.

Local Food & Land Use

The CRP targets managed growth in a way that protects farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and important ecosystems. With more than 50% of our land devoted to agriculture, farmland is the single greatest source of open space in the region. As we take our prime farmland out of production, we lose this open space, and furthermore, are stripped, little by little, of our capacity to feed ourselves.

As we expanded outward, developing formerly agricultural lands, we leave behind vast areas of vacant land in the urban core. Many of these vacant areas could be put to agricultural use. We see urban agriculture at a small scale through the development community gardens. The potential for scaling up these gardens and creating a network of urban farms may be one of the best opportunities to link low-income communities to the fresh, local fruits and vegetables their neighborhood stores lack.

Objectives that address land use and local food:

- *Preserve prime agricultural land and rural landscapes*—The region has steadily been losing prime agricultural land and ru-

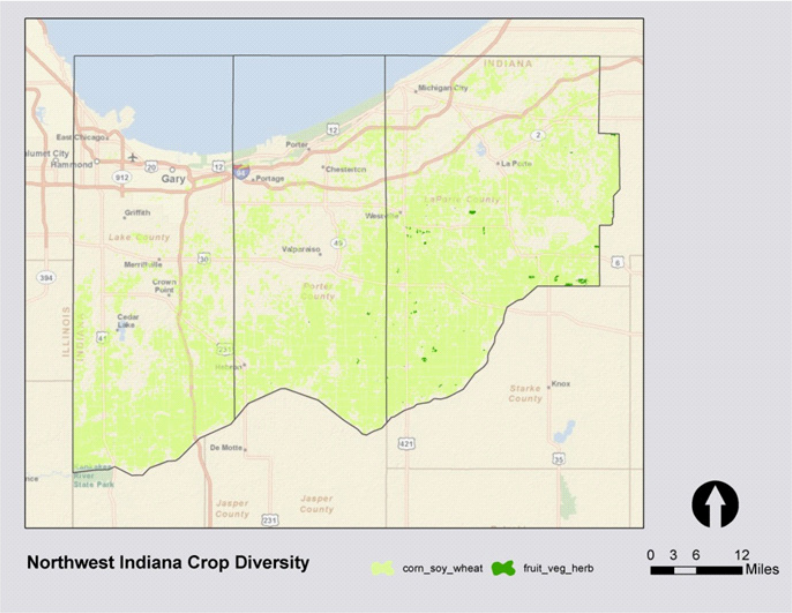

Figure I.38 Acreage devoted to fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs is dwarfed by acreage in corn, soy and wheat.

Value-added regional foods at a farmers market. Photo by Beth Shrader.

ral landscapes to commercial and residential land uses for decades. Growth and development of the local food system could provide the opportunity for agricultural land to become more economically productive, and may help resist economic pressure to convert land to non-farm uses.

- *Encourage redevelopment of infill sites within established centers; encourage the compact mixing of uses; redevelop urban core areas; Promote compact development and smart growth through techniques such as transit-oriented development, traditional neighborhood development and conservation design; foster the development of livable, mixed use downtowns; and enhance community design and aesthetics*—Urban agriculture may be utilized as a transitional or long-term redevelopment strategy for infill sites within established centers. Contrary to conventional planning models, small scale agriculture should be considered as a viable land use in compact mixed areas. Edible landscapes and urban agriculture practices can dovetail seamlessly into smart growth, transit-oriented development, conservation, and traditional design strategies, which can enhance the functional and aesthetic qualities of a community. Furthermore, a major component of a livable, mixed use downtown is access to high quality foods. A thriving local food system which provides access of high quality local foods to mixed use downtown areas can foster the development of these areas.
- *Promote community green infrastructure and access to public open space*—A local food system promoting community gardens is a potentially high-value variety of community green infrastructure which can encourage use of public open spaces.

Local Food & the Environment

The growth of the local food system has potential to protect and enhance the environmental assets of Northwest Indiana. Part of the momentum behind the local foods movement stems from a desire to know the provenance and quality of the food we eat. As such, local food can be a tool to advocate for the health of the soil and water resources of our region.

Objectives that address local food and our environment:

- *Promote growth that protects and enhances the environmental assets of Northwest Indiana*—Part of the momentum behind the local foods movement stems from a desire to know more about the food we eat—who grew it or who made it, how it was grown or processed, and the effects these acts have on our environment. Therefore, the growth of a local food system which demands sustainable farming practices holds potential to protect and enhance these environmental assets of Northwest Indiana.
- *Promote the acquisition and protection of greenspace*—A strong local food system that promotes urban agriculture can introduce pockets of greenspace throughout the urban fabric. Furthermore, in existing agricultural areas, if more land is dedicated to higher value agricultural products, growers may be able to better resist development pressures and protect greenspace.
- *Maximize the number of brownfields returned to productive use; promote adaptive reuse, infill development and the remediation and reuse of underutilized properties, particularly brownfields; and facilitate the remediation and redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized land including brownfields and greyfields*—A local food system employing urban agriculture is a redevelopment strategy for abandoned and underutilized land, which can avoid high start-up capital requirements and provide a high value amenity for existing communities. Brownfields and greyfields are prime locations for redevelopment using urban agriculture methods that do not depend on existing soils, such as raised beds and hydroponics.
- *Complete, improve, and implement watershed management plans*—Agricultural best practices will be a key component in effective watershed management plans. Sustainable producers for the local market will have greater incentive than commodity crop growers to adhere to or surpass standards for protecting the quality of our watershed because its health directly impacts the quality of the food on which it depends to grow. For educated food buyers, the connections between the health of the land, water, and the food produced from them are clear.
- *Promote stormwater best management practices including the development of green infrastructure and the reduction of impervious surfaces*—A local food system that employs urban agriculture will aid in the reduction of impervious surfaces by utilizing rain where it falls instead of channeling it directly to our streams, lakes or treatment plants.
- *Facilitate a regional solid waste and landfill strategy*—A well-tuned local food system will integrate agricultural and post-consumer food wastes into useful products, such as building materials or compost, in order to capture a larger percentage of the local food value chain within the region. Closed-loop practices like this are sustainable on multiple levels—economically, socially, and environmentally.

Region farm. Photo from web.

Local Food & Communities

A local food system depends on building a regional community of growers, processors, distributors, eaters, and waste managers. While additional infrastructure is certainly necessary for a robust local food system, great strides may be made simply with communication and cooperation among stakeholders and increased education to the public.

Objectives which address local food and communities:

- *Provide critical information to the public to enable meaningful public participation*—Public education is a key component in a strong local food system. Coordinated efforts among organizations who promote local food will be essential to build the greatest public support for the growing movement.
- *Educate leaders about best practices in urban and regional planning and public policy*—A strong local food system will ensure that government leaders and policy makers understand and employ best practices in zoning to promote urban agriculture in appropriate municipalities.
- *Promote the preservation of historic and cultural resources*—Northwest Indiana has rich agricultural and food traditions which deserve increased attention and preservation. Rural communities and the farmland on which they historically depended are undervalued cultural resources under threat due to development pressures. A strong local food system will help preserve these historic and cultural resources by reinvesting in our rural regions.

Applesauce demonstration at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore's Duneland Heritage Days. Photo by Rebekah Pavlovic via Flickr.