Introduction

Preparing to fish at Marquette Lagoon
at the Gary Clean Water Celebration.

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Overview

Situated along the southern shores of Lake Michigan, Northwest Indiana is home to many riches – a diverse economy with thriving business and industry that capitalizes on the region's connections to world markets and proximity to the city of Chicago; strategic transportation hubs and corridors that connect the Midwest to the Gulf of Mexico, Canada, the East Coast and Europe; strong full service communities; and a unique dune ecosystem with a variety of scenic areas. Within the region, distinct communities offer a range of lifestyle choices from lakefront cities to rural farming towns, and from suburban living to bustling centers of industry and commerce. Residents and businesses are drawn to this region because of these resources, but to ensure the region's continued livelihood and success, it must look forward. Through a planning approach that is rooted in the values of the region and its residents, Northwest Indiana is taking charge of its destiny to preserve these riches, to position itself for success and to enhance the quality of life for its more than 770,000 residents.

Like many industrial regions, Northwest Indiana lost population during the 1980s as it struggled with the heavy job losses in the steel industry and manufacturing sector. This period of decline was short-lived, however, and has since been offset with regional growth of more than 4% over each of the past two decades. In 2010, the region's population grew to 771,815, surpassing the previous peak population of 751,413 in 1980 by more than 20,000 people. This trend is expected to continue, with an additional 170,000 people anticipated by 2040.

While the region as a whole has gained population, Northwest Indiana's urban core communities have been hit hard with population losses. Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City have lost a combined 100,000 people over the past 30 years; Gary alone lost 70,000 people. These losses coincide with a shift in population centers from the once-thriving industrial urban core to the surrounding communities and the relatively undeveloped, unincorporated countryside. The most rapid growth in the region occurred in central and southern Lake County, where Crown Point, Lowell, St. John, Schererville and the new community of Winfield each has experienced significant gains in population ranging from increases of almost 18% to nearly 90%.

Changing population patterns have been accompanied by demographic shifts, with the region aging and becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Over the past 30 years, the proportion of the population that is white has decreased while the proportions of African-American, Asian and other races have increased. Furthermore, the region's population growth from 2000 to 2010 is entirely attributable to the growth in the Hispanic population, which experienced a 47.5% increase, compared to a 0.4% decline in non-Hispanics. Hispanics now account for 13.3% of the region's population and are on track to account for 25% to 30% of the population by the year 2040.

The population of Northwest Indiana also is growing older. While this is a national trend, the region is aging more quickly than both the state and the nation. In 1980, the region was relatively young: The national median age was 30, while Northwest Indiana counties' median age ranged from 27.2 to 29.9. By 2009, the situation was reversed: The national median was 36.8 years, while the NIRPC counties' median age ranged from 37.3 to 38.4.

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To be certain, Northwest Indiana is changing. These major shifts bring new challenges in meeting the needs of residents. In planning for 2040, the region must develop strategies to provide a high quality of life for the entire region while also making the most efficient use of its resources. Throughout the 2040 CRP, these strategies are discussed in terms of the region's land use and growth strategies, transportation infrastructure, environment, economic development and governance.

This is Northwest Indiana's first Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP). While the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) led development of the CRP, it is based on extensive public involvement and input obtained through numerous public workshops and meetings with local agencies and officials. Integrating land use and transportation planning with economic development, environmental and social equity considerations, the CRP provides a framework for how the region will grow through the year 2040 and is a tool to guide our actions and direct our resources to achieve our vision:

INVision Northwest Indiana

Stretching from the treasured shores of Lake Michigan to the historic banks of the Kankakee River and committed to an ethic of sustainability:

- ***A vibrant region –*** *Our economy is thriving; our people are well-educated; our growth is planned; and natural and rural areas are valued and protected.*
- ***A revitalized region –*** *Urban areas are renewed, and our environment is clean.*
- ***An accessible region –*** *Our people are connected to each other and to equal opportunities for working, playing, living and learning.*
- ***A united region –*** *Celebrating our diversity, we work together as a community across racial, ethnic, political and cultural lines for the good of the region.*

The CRP includes a variety of goals and objectives that also were developed through extensive public involvement early in the planning process. These goals and objectives are incorporated into each of the key elements of the planning program, building on the four themes outlined in the vision.

Beverly Shores NICTD station. Photo by David Cory via Flickr.

Old Lake County Courthouse in Crown Point. Photo by J. Stephen Conn via Flickr.

The 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan

The 2040 CRP is different from previous Long Range Transportation Plans and other NIRPC planning programs. The 2040 CRP is a Vision Plan. The CRP was developed as a comprehensive, citizen-based regional vision that will guide the development of land use and transportation programming. As such, it is a policy program with strong coordination and implementation elements.

As an Indiana Metropolitan Planning Organization, NIRPC lacks the typical authorities granted to local governments for land use and development control. NIRPC relies on its strong relationships with local governments, agencies and stakeholders to effect CRP implementation. The reader will find the CRP does not recommend usurping local agency interests in land use management. Rather, the CRP deals largely with multijurisdictional needs and opportunities that no single agency can manage or effect on its own.
The means of enhancing the region's prosperity and quality of life, improving mobility, supporting communities and realizing environmental justice were among the key considerations during the CRP's development. Implementation will be complex, and NIRPC, in partnership with its constituencies, is poised to meet the challenge.

Through the planning process, NIRPC has been mindful of the federal government's Partnership for Sustainable Communities initiative , the critical nexus between land use and transportation, and the importance of supporting existing communities. The Livability Principles identified by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities include:

1. **Provide more transportation choices** - Develop safe, reliable and economical transportation choices in order to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote public health.
2. **Promote equitable, affordable housing** - Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.
3. **Enhance economic competitiveness** - Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers as well as expanded business access to markets.
4. **Support existing communities** - Target federal funding toward existing communities to increase community revitalization, the efficiency of public works investments, and safeguard rural landscapes.
5. **Coordinate policies and leverage investment** - Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth.
6. **Value communities and neighborhoods** - Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe and walkable neighborhoods – rural, urban or suburban.

Running down Mt. Baldy in the National Lakeshore. Photo by Andrew Maciejewski.

Growth and Revitalization Vision

While the CRP's vision, goals and objectives provide a critical policy framework for the CRP, the Growth and Revitalization Vision 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, outlined 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 forecasts, are discussed in more detail as part of the CRP's Growth and Conservation chapter. All 41 communities are characterized as either 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, are 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.
- **Commitment to Social Equity** - Articulated throughout the two-year planning process was the desire of the region's residents to ensure a fair-share approach to investing in the cities and towns. Revitalization and redevelopment of the urban core communities were repeatedly identified as a high priority, demanding the equitable distribution and utilization of the region's resources.
- **Growth and Infill** – The CRP recognizes that the continued and 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 elements. 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 natural and environmental 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.

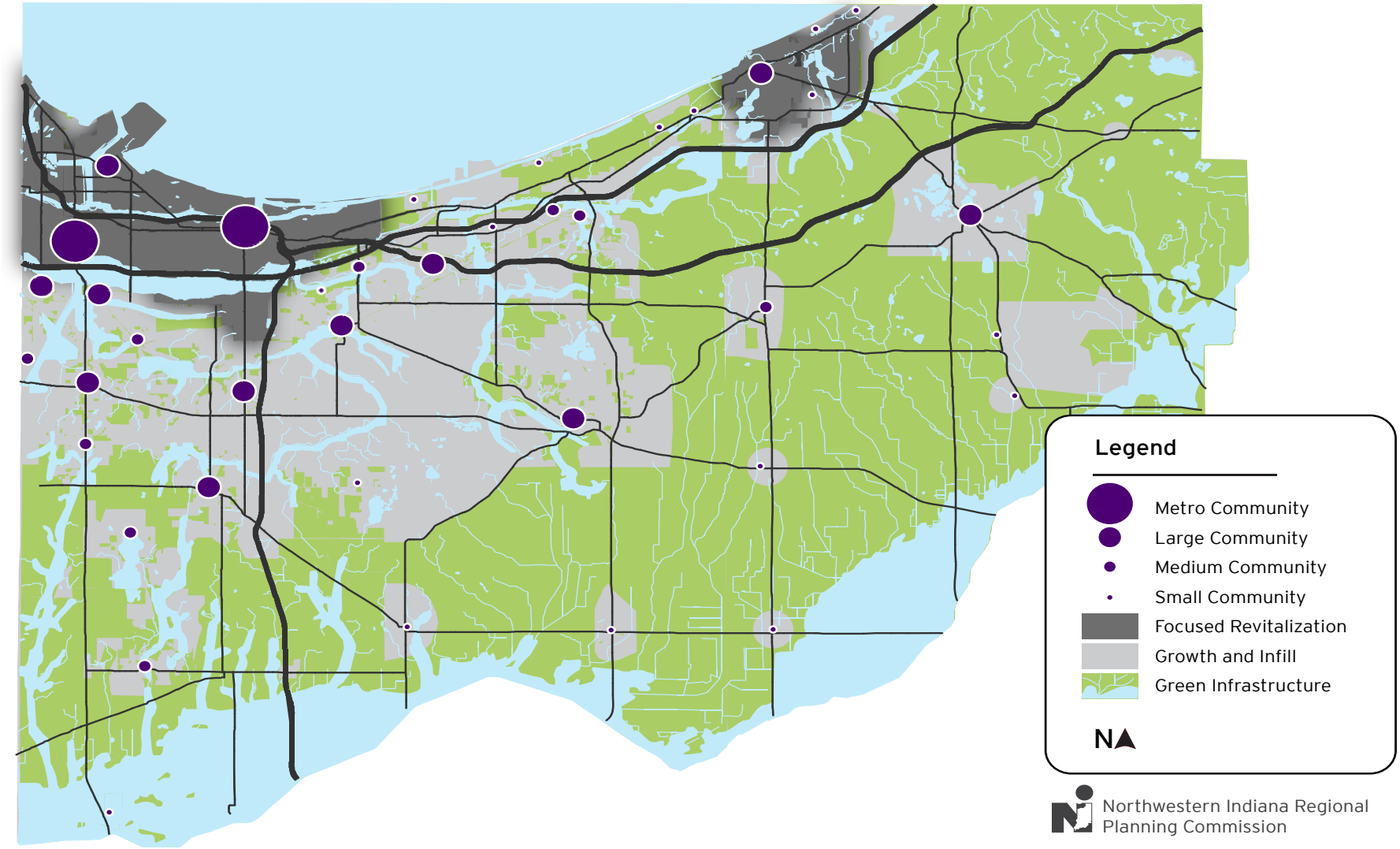
While several aspects of the CRP highlighted above provide important reference points for accomplishing the Growth and Revitalization Vision, this only can be achieved through implementation of all major recommendations of the CRP. Noteworthy to this effort is the adopted Marquette Plan, which has strong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

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, form the basis for key CRP assumptions, and must be supported as part of the 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 people and

Northwest Indiana
Growth and Revitalization Vision



Northwest Indiana Growth & Revitalization Vision.

a regional job growth total of approximately 80,000 by 2040. The preferred scenario retains this forecast. (See the Growth and Conservation chapter for more detailed information on the population forecast.)

- **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 the Livable Centers concept and commitment to social equity.
- **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, which identified a network of natural areas that included protected open space, conservation areas and agricultural lands. The CRP recommends a green infrastructure approach for the protection of water bodies, 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 overstepping and treading on the planning and development responsibilities of local interests.

Improving mobility and access to jobs for environmental justice populations was a key consideration in evaluating growth and investment options.

Making It Work: Growth and Revitalization Principles

The rationale behind the development of the Growth and Revitalization Vision and, by extension, the growth of Northwest Indiana through 2040, is based on the following principles:

Support urban reinvestment: Reinvestment in our historic urban centers is a key principle guiding the CRP. We understand that the metropolitan region is a fundamental economic unit of the contemporary world and that a region is only as strong as its constituent parts. Strengthening the urban core will lift the entire region and preserve the cultural and historic assets of Northwest Indiana. Stakeholders identified the need to revitalize these essential core communities to achieve regional prosperity by 2040.

Reinvestment is a strategic and conservative approach. Our urban core, like many around the country, has experienced significant disinvestment and decline due to economic and population shifts. However, much of the urban fabric and infrastructure remains. These places still maintain the basic building blocks of livability: walkable street networks, local and regional infrastructure, employment and multimodal transportation access. Maintaining and improving these assets capitalizes on previous investments and minimizes the need to invest in new infrastructure.

Ensure environmental justice/social equity: A key principle driving the development of the Growth and Revitalization Vision was the need to be cognizant of the Plan's impact on low-income and minority populations. The investments made as a result of the CRP will impact different communities in varying ways, but benefits and adverse consequences should be fairly distributed across all communities, including areas with high concentrations of low-income and minority populations. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 12898 mandate that federal agencies incorporate environmental justice considerations and analysis in their policies,

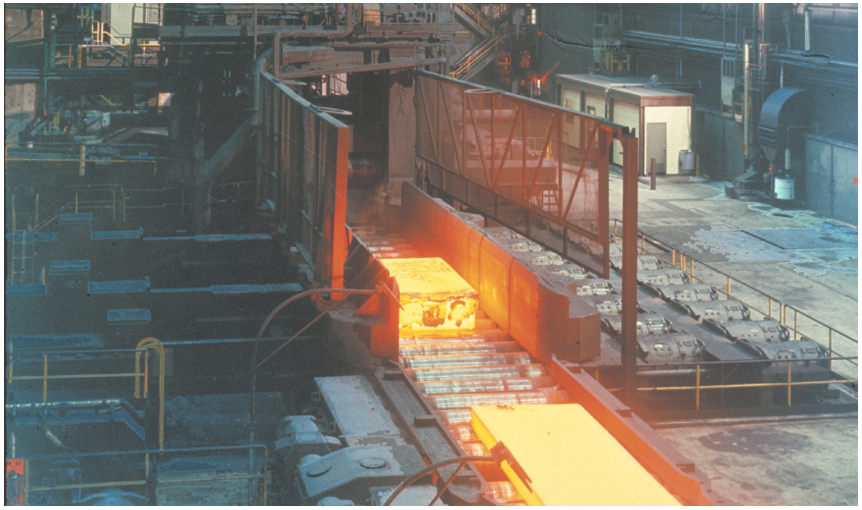
programs and activities. Improving mobility and access to jobs for EJ populations was a key consideration in evaluating growth and investment options.

Protect natural resources and minimize impact to environmental features and watersheds: A key principle driving the development of the CRP was the need to protect farmland, areas of natural beauty and critical environmental resource areas. Northwest Indiana contains both significant environmental assets and productive, prime farmland. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, for example, stretches across Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties, comprises over a third of the Lake Michigan shoreline and still is acquiring tracts of property. Not only does protection of these open space areas yield important economic and quality-of-life benefits, but it also conserves the green infrastructure that supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources and contributes to the health and resiliency of the region. Increasingly, green infrastructure – including wetlands, forests and prairies – is valued for its role in reducing storm runoff and flooding.

Preservation of these lands in the Kankakee River basin also is important. Much of the Kankakee River basin contains unconfined aquifers that are highly susceptible to surface contamination, which make them unsuitable for intense development. In addition, the 2008 Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, an eight-state agreement, restricts diversions of Great Lakes water from the Great Lakes watershed. Development in the Kankakee watershed must rely upon other surface water or wells.

Integrate transportation and land use: Transportation and land use are inextricably linked. The provision of highways, transit routes and other transportation elements provides access to land and influences its development pattern, while the arrangement and types of land uses affect travel patterns and the need for transportation facilities. Studies conclude that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are strongly related to the accessibility of destinations, and that walking rates are related to the diversity of land uses, intersection densities and the number of destinations within walking distance.

A key consideration in developing the 2040 CRP is the proactive coordination of transportation and land use planning. Improving the integration of transportation and land use yields multiple benefits. Improving the balance of jobs and housing within a community can limit the length and number of automobile trips, reducing vehicle miles and vehicle hours traveled and improving regional air quality. Focusing density within walking distance of transit stops and stations and providing pedestrian facilities will increase transit ridership and support a safe and efficient multimodal transportation system. Ultimately, better planning will benefit the pocketbooks of Northwest Indiana residents by reducing their combined housing and transportation costs.



Inside Bethlehem Steel. Photo courtesy EPA via web.

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The CRP Planning Process

The development of the CRP is the culmination of 18 major public meetings along with many more committee and focus group meetings in Northwest Indiana that began in 2008 and included a range of plan-making activities. A brief overview of the major steps of the planning process is provided below. For more detailed information on the planning process, please refer to the 2040 CRP newsletters and the meeting reports, available at www.nirpc.org.

Vision and Goals Development

A regional forum on the future of Northwest Indiana was convened by NIRPC in December 2008. Attended by nearly 500 Northwest Indiana residents, the forum laid the groundwork for CRP's INVision Northwest Indiana statement and set an agenda for many of the issues to be addressed by the CRP. The forum was the first of its kind for Northwest Indiana and created a new awareness of the value of dialogue and collaboration among residents.

Through the months of May and June 2009, NIRPC led five workshops across the region for residents and stakeholders to participate in developing draft goals for the CRP. Rather than starting with a predetermined set of goals, the workshops were organized to cumulatively build on resident-driven ideas. The CRP goals and their related objectives were synthesized by the CRP Steering Committee and were put into their final form during the summer of 2009.

Subregional Cluster Workshops

Four subregional cluster workshops were held in September of 2009. The workshops offered an opportunity for residents to begin to focus on where future development, redevelopment and conservation should occur in the region. Nearly 140 participants attended the four subregional cluster workshops. Attendees were given the opportunity to state their preferences for the location of new growth and development, transportation system improvements, protected natural and environmental features and a range of other factors. The workshops provided NIRPC with a foundation of needs and opportunities to be considered in development of the CRP. Key themes synthesized as a result of the process included:

- A clear call for transit
- Regeneration of the urban core
- Preservation of agricultural and natural resources
- The need for collaborative governance
- Economic competiveness – moving business, labor and education in the same direction
- Sustainable natural and environmental resources
- Priorities and equity – the role of NIRPC and its partners in implementation

Burning Ivanhoe prairie. Photo courtesy EPA via web.

Regional Scenarios Development

Beginning in 2010, NIRPC used a scenario-planning process approach to arrive at the Growth and Revitalization Vision described above. Informed by the goals and the results of the subregional cluster workshops, alternative futures were developed and compared with one another to determine performance in meeting regional objectives. The purpose of scenario planning is to educate and inform the public regarding regional land use, development, conservation and transportation outcomes and consequences. This gives residents the knowledge to make informed choices about alternative means for achieving the region's goals. The process used Community VizTM decision support software. (See the Preliminary Scenarios Methodology report for more detailed information on the scenario development methodology.)

The scenario planning technique allowed NIRPC to blend different policy directives, which had been identified through public and stakeholder outreach meetings, with regional demographic, land use and transportation data to create a series of discrete, measurable alternatives. In these different alternatives, the principal variable was the physical location of people and jobs: Population and job growth was directed to certain parts of the region to show that the impacts of growth, in terms of the natural environment, congestion and other factors, can vary depending on where it occurs. NIRPC developed four scenarios, each based on a different set of assumptions about the future that reflected existing policies and/or the vision and goals expressed by residents during extensive public workshops.

- **Trends** – This scenario envisioned a future where current regional development patterns continue unchanged. The scenario served as a baseline, illustrating recent documented trends. In general, the scenario illustrated a continuing movement of people out of established urban and suburban centers and into rural areas and the suburban periphery. Development tended to be low density with a separation of uses and a low level of transportation connectivity.
- **Local Plans** - This scenario envisioned a future where the regional growth and distribution of population and employment was consistent with the full build-out of local municipal and county land use plans. Historic trends and zoning codes were substituted in areas for which there is no updated plan. This scenario depicted a 2040 in which every city, town and county generally has grown in the manner directed by current plans, absent of any additional regulation (including current local regulations that may restrict growth). The purpose of this scenario was to create a broad understanding of how the development, conservation and transportation outcomes of current municipal and county plans might fit together on a regional level. It reflected the cumulative impact of current plan policy in Northwest Indiana.
- **Livable Centers** - This scenario envisioned a future where the majority of population and employment growth was concentrated within the Northwest Indiana's 41 cities and towns – more so than it has

Fishing on an ice shelf at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Photo courtesy NPS collection.

been in the past – with less development in unincorporated areas than previously experienced. This scenario intensified growth within "livable center" locations, which are mixed-use (civic, commercial, residential, etc.) activity centers in each municipality that are served by existing utility infrastructure and the roadway network and have the potential to be well-served by public transportation. This pattern was largely based upon the work completed at the five subregional cluster workshops.

- **Urban Core Regeneration/Infill** - This scenario envisioned a future where a significantly higher percentage of population and employment growth occurred in the historic core communities of Gary, Hammond, East Chicago and Michigan City. This scenario represents a stark reversal of current trends. Instead of expanding outward into rural areas, emphasis was placed on infill development and sustainable redevelopment of the historic core communities, where there is multimodal transportation connectivity, existing infrastructure and vacant land. In general, development tended to be higher density and mixed use.

The Preferred Direction – A Synthesis of Ideas

Throughout the months of September and October 2010, NIRPC held a series of eight outreach meetings in locations around the region to seek public feedback on the scenarios and select the "preferred scenario" for Northwest Indiana. At each meeting, an explanation of the four scenarios was presented, followed by discussion. At each meeting, consensus was reached on a preferred scenario. Participants then were asked to identify projects, strategies and policies in order to implement their selected scenario.

No single scenario received full endorsement by the public or NIRPC committees. Instead, elements from different scenarios were recommended for use, and a hybrid scenario emerged. It included a combination of the Livable Centers and the Urban Core Regeneration/Infill scenarios, blended with elements of the Local Plans Scenario. Ultimately, these choices fundamentally formed the Growth and Revitalization Vision.

Franklin Street in downtown Valparaiso. Photo via web.

Gyte Building from Founders Plaza at Purdue Calumet. Photo via web.

Elements of the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan

The 2040 CRP represents NIRPC's official policy guide for directing planning and intergovernmental collaboration in Northwest Indiana. It does not substitute for other technical and mandated plans and programs developed by NIRPC in association with constituent agencies and stakeholders. Rather, the CRP serves as a general guide to all those programs providing continuity in agency mission, services and implementation. The key elements of the 2040 CRP are as follows:

1. Growth & Conservation Pattern
2. Transportation
3. Environment & Green Infrastructure
4. Human & Economic Resources
5. Stewardship & Governance
6. Implementation

As noted earlier, the CRP establishes NIRPC's direction and pathway to achieving Northwest Indiana's 2040 Vision and Goals. As the program relies heavily on voluntary collaboration and cooperation among its regional constituency, success of the program will be borne by the region as a whole. This in and of itself was a major theme in CRP development. NIRPC bears overall stewardship for the program, and given the success of collaborative ventures in the past, NIRPC looks forward to a successful relationship with our partners in the pursuit of the 2040 CRP program.

Sliding down Mt. Baldy. Photo by Tom Gill.