

Downtown Whiting. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.



# Chapter I: **Regional Growth & Conservation**

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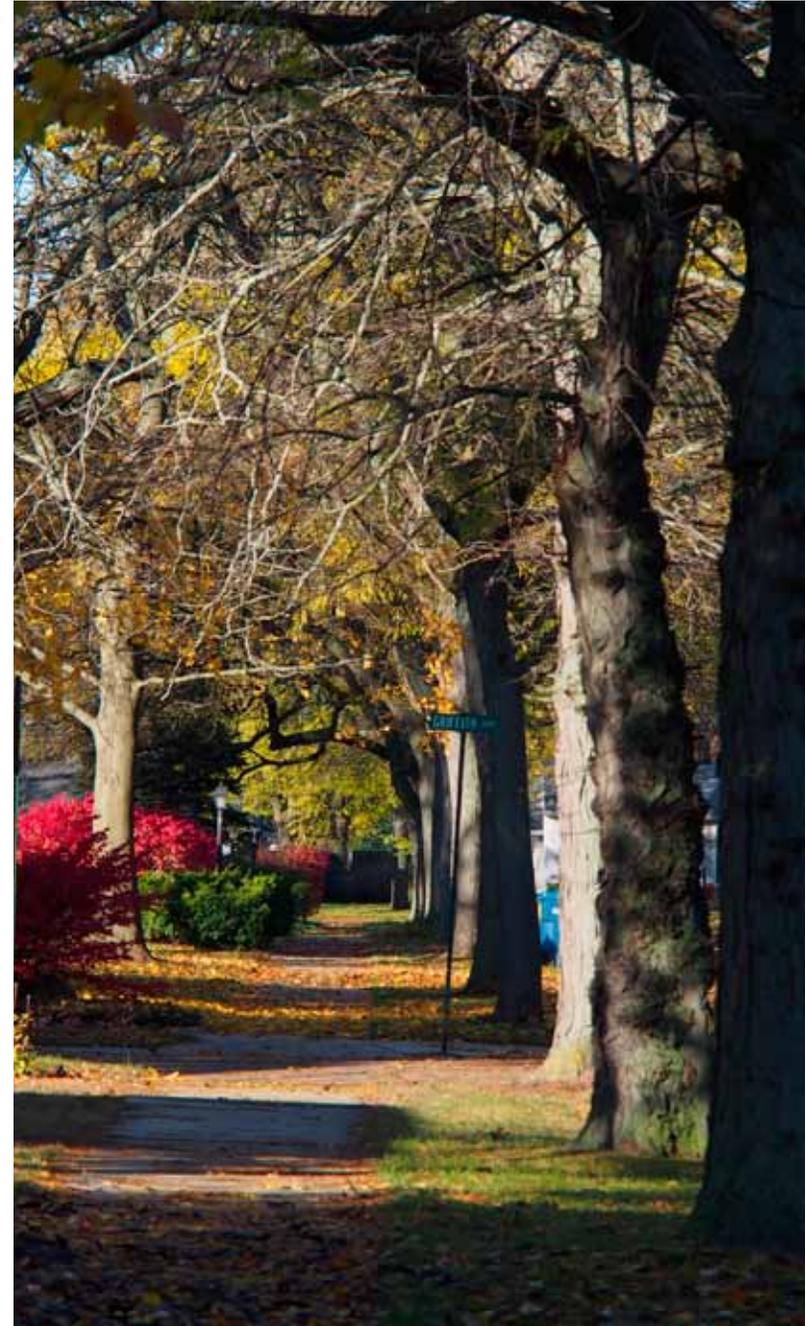
# Overview

This section of the *2040 Plan Companion Update* summarizes what has been changed or achieved since the adoption of the CRP in 2011, and where the region should continue or concentrate its efforts to achieve the 2040 Growth and Conservation Vision.

As explained in the CRP, the Growth and Conservation element serves to focus resources in a manner that enables the region to be economically competitive and successful. Concepts of urban growth, development, conservation, transit and directed infrastructure, when properly guided, create an investment framework that builds communities and strengthens regional economies. This section is covering three elements: the demographics and housing trends in 2013, growth patterns, and the local food system. In this update of the Growth and Conservation section, NIRPC focused on four priorities that are reflected in the CRP regional goals, including:

- **Livable Urban, Suburban, and Rural Centers**
- **Revitalized Urban Core Cities**
- **Managed Growth that Protects Farmland, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Important Ecosystems**
- **Linked Land Use and Transportation**

Following the plan's adoption, NIRPC focused its efforts in the implementation of the 2040 Plan through new projects, programs, funding priorities, and providing technical assistance by participating in a variety of local and regional initiatives. This chapter will highlight work completed or ongoing that is related to the four priorities as mentioned above.



Residential street in Griffith. Photo by Stephen Sostaric

# Demographics

This chapter starts with an overview of the changes in demographics and housing trends for Northwest Indiana over the last four years.

In the four years since the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* was adopted, the region has experienced small demographic shifts mostly in line with the projections in the 2040 Plan.

## Trends and Analysis

Since 2010, the region has lost 2,521 people, a minor change of -0.33%. This change, relative to the region's 769,295 people, does not indicate a major long-term trend of population loss.

## A Familiar Pattern (Shifts)

Population continued to grow in some of Northwest Indiana's suburban communities, but many of the communities which saw growth in recent decades also experienced population loss. Dyer, Schererville, Hobart, Munster, and Highland experienced small population loss since 2010. Population gains were instead further south in Lake County and in Porter County. Additionally, both unincorporated Lake and La Porte Counties saw population loss, while unincorporated Porter County gained population.

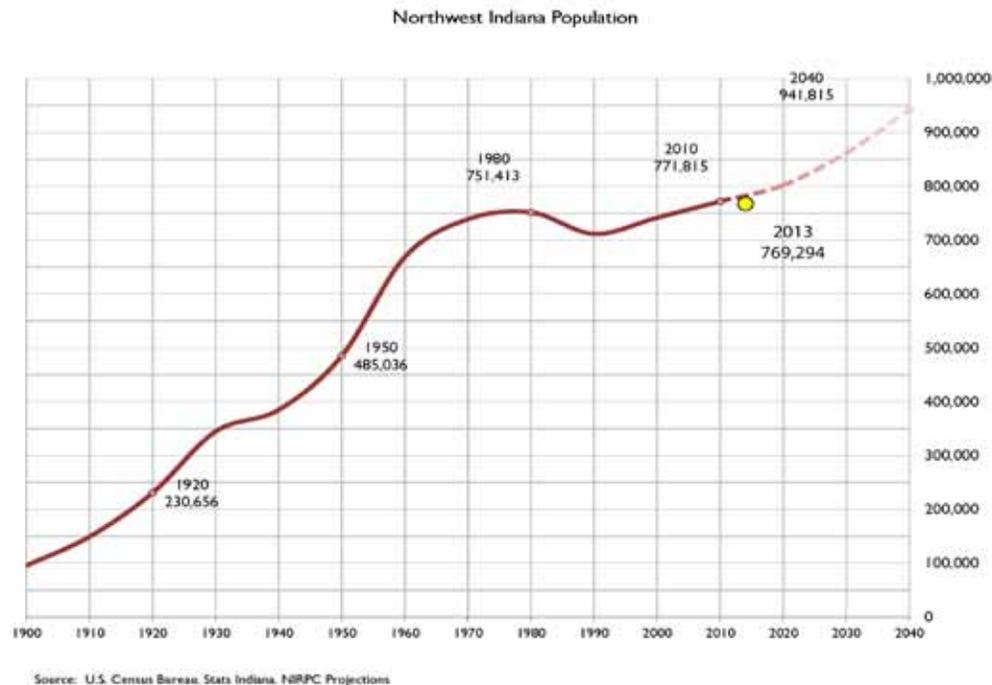


Figure I-1 NW Indiana Population Change Over Time

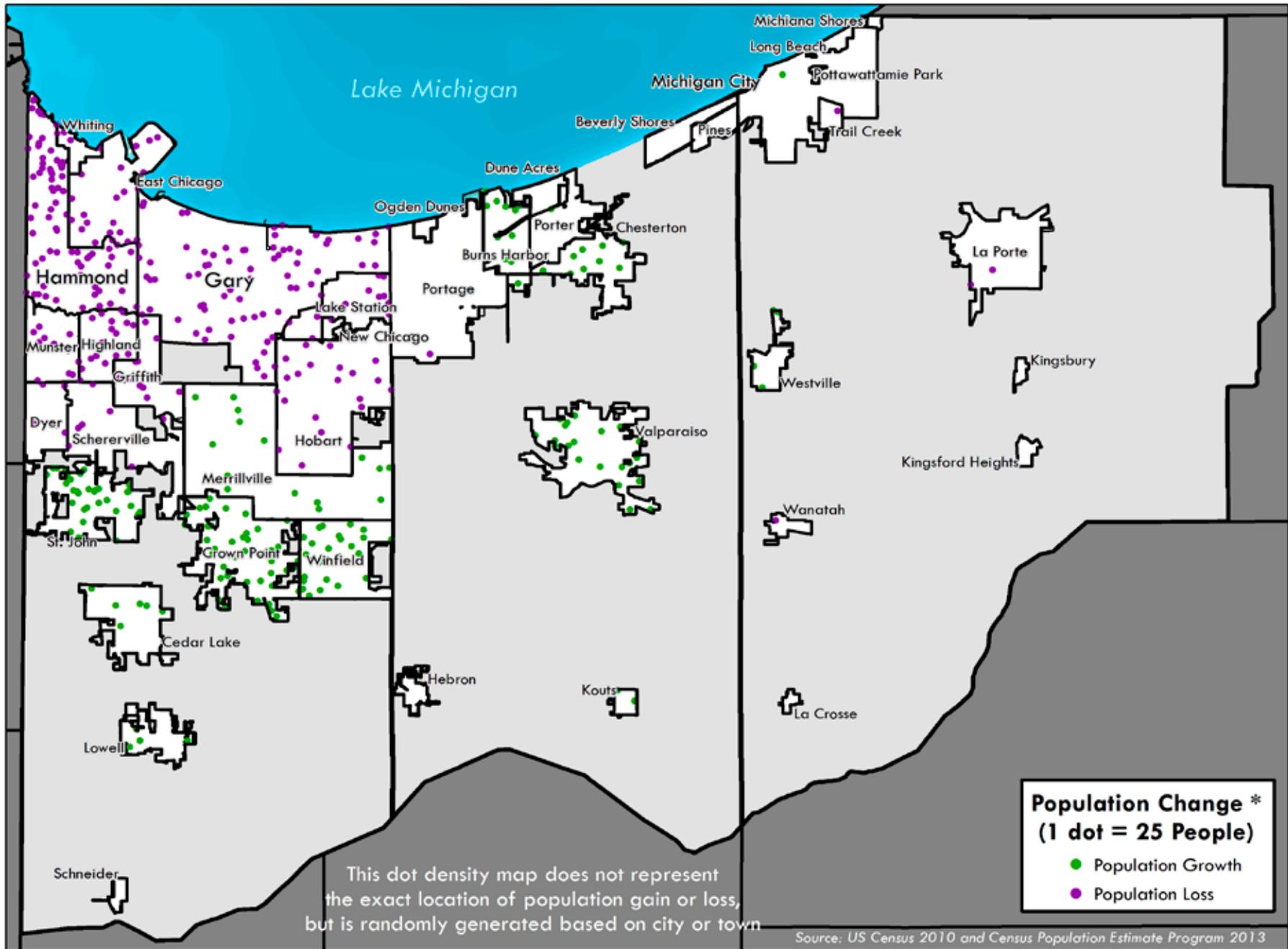


Figure I-2 Population Change since 2010

## Urban Core Communities

Since 2010, three of the four once-thriving industrial communities continued to lose population. Population losses in Hammond, Gary, and East Chicago were all around 2%. However, Michigan City experienced modest growth despite losing population for the last three decades.

## Porter County

Growth in Porter County has continued in both the unincorporated and incorporated areas. Burns Harbor has grown the greatest at 18%. Most other communities in the county experienced slower growth, most likely due to the slow recovery of the economy following the recession years from 2007-2009. Additionally, Portage experienced no population growth, despite growing steadily in the last three decades.

## La Porte County

La Porte County experienced small population losses in most of its municipalities and unincorporated area, with the exception of Westville and Michigan City.

## Central and South Lake County

The trend of rapid growth in Lake County grew more complicated since 2010. Municipalities which had been growing before, or actually experienced small losses, while communities south of US 30 continued to grow, albeit at a much slower rate. Winfield grew at the highest rate (13.6%), followed by St. John (5.3%) and Crown Point (3.9%). Furthermore, population decreased in the unincorporated area by -2.8%.

## Our Increasing Diversity

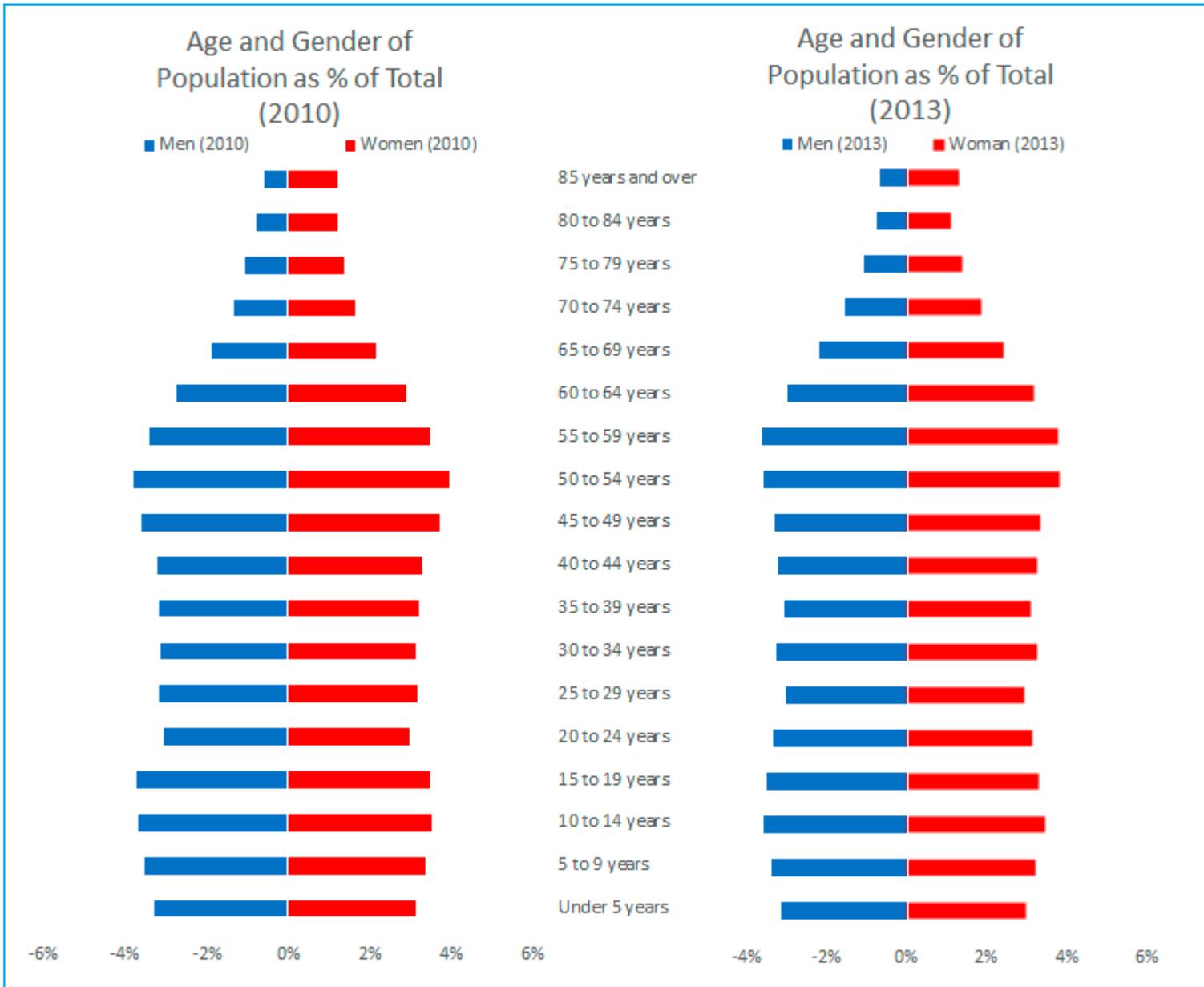
Northwest Indiana has seen little change in its racial diversity since the CRP was released in 2011, but the Hispanic population as a percentage of the region has continued to grow. In 2010 the Hispanic population was 13.3% of the population, and in 2013 it was 14.2%.

## Our Aging Population

Northwest Indiana continues to be older than the United States and Indiana as a whole. Today the median age of the NIRPC region stands at 38.6, compared to 37.9 in 2010. For comparison, the United States' median age changed from 37.2 to 37.6 today. (Refer to Figure I-3 for a detailed breakdown of age and gender populations for both 2010 and 2013.)



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



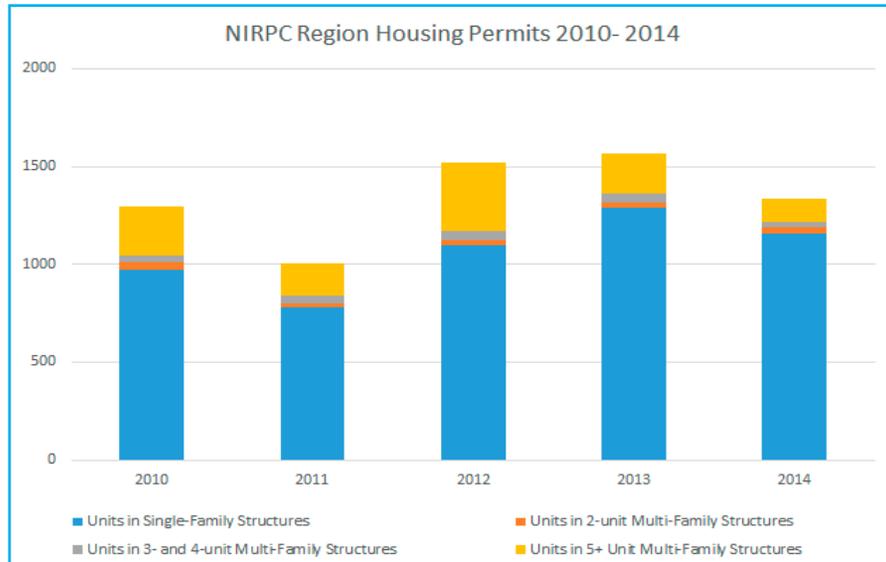
From US Census Population Estimates

Figure I-3 Age and Gender of NW Indiana Population 2010 & 2013

# Housing

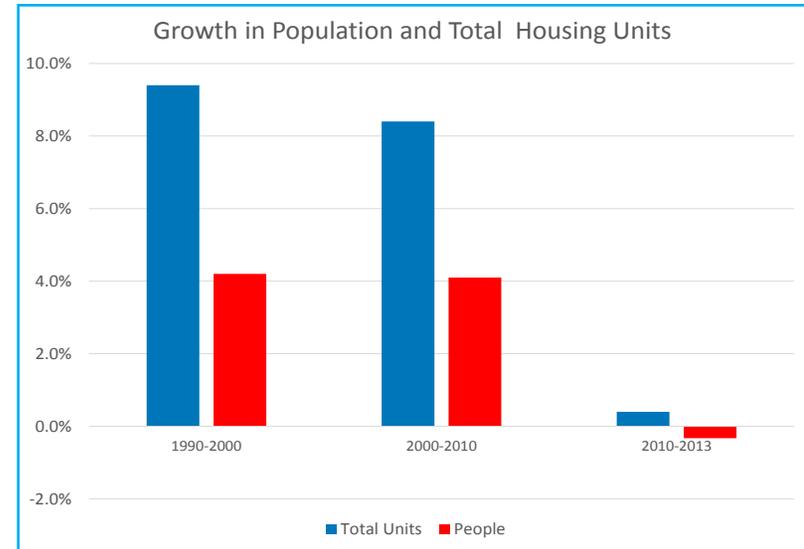
## Housing Supply

The region's housing supply continued to grow between 2010 and 2014, despite population loss. While the total population decreased by 0.3%, housing units grew by 0.4%. Additionally, the majority of new housing continues to be single family units. For every two people the region lost in the last three years, one housing unit was added. Housing continues to be overbuilt in a region with considerable housing vacancies. Figure I-4 provides an overview of the housing growth, with Figure I-5 comparing this to population growth in the region.



\*2014 Numbers are corrected. Data is from the State of the Cities Data System (SOCDS) Building Permits Database

Figure I-4 Northwest Indiana (Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties) Housing Permits



From US Census 2013 Population Estimates

Figure I-5 Growth in NW Indiana Population and Housing Units

## Residential Vacancies

Certain areas in the urban core communities of Hammond, Gary, East Chicago and Michigan City continue to experience considerable residential vacancies. In a two year period, some areas of Gary and East Chicago experienced vacancies exceeding 30%. Additionally, 53% of the region's vacancies have been vacant for more than 3 years. These vacancies continue to occur in areas that have lost significant population, indicating a continued serious challenge to regional improvement in housing.



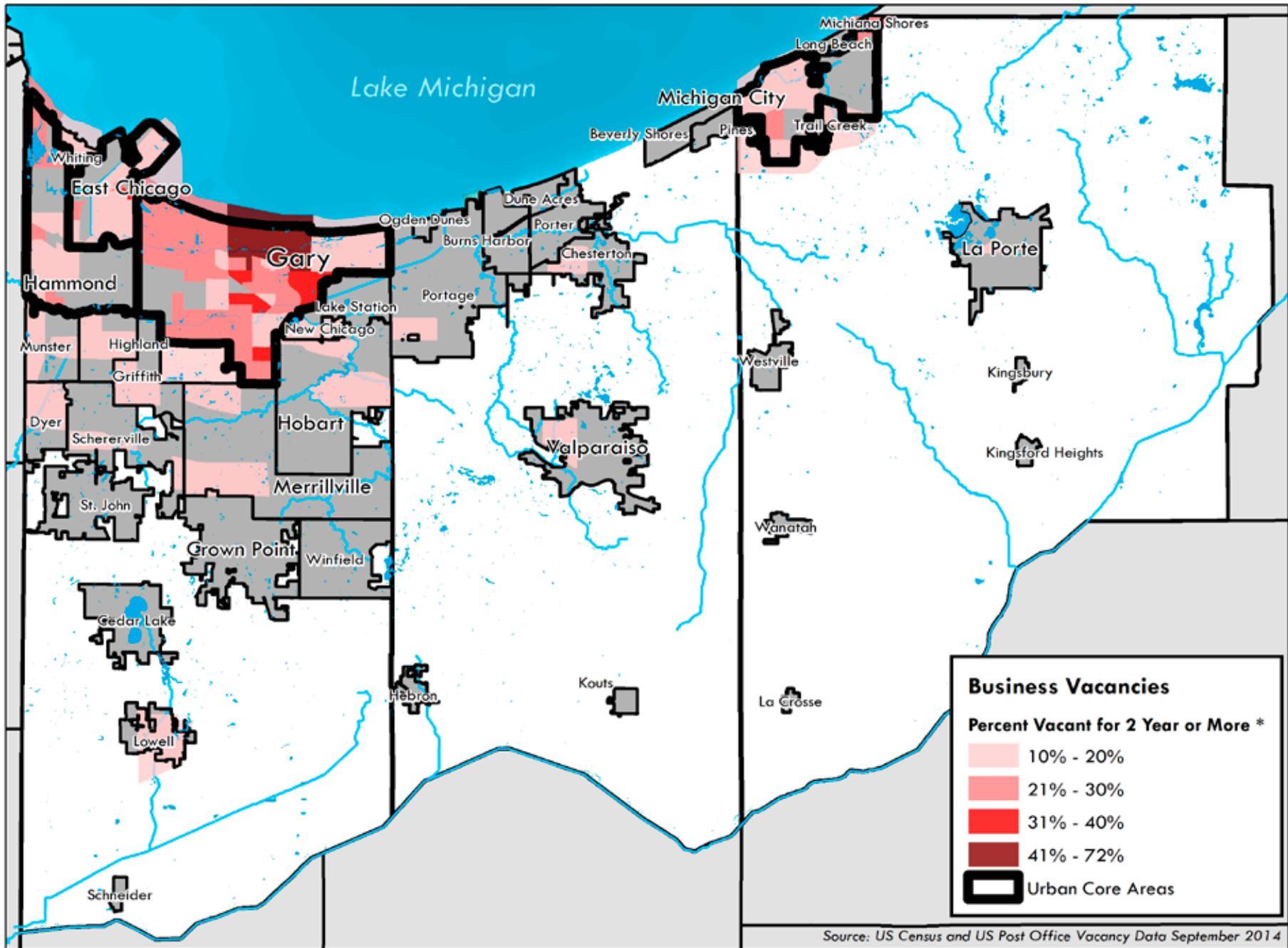


Figure I-7 Business Vacancies

# Growth & Conservation Priorities

## Livable Urban, Suburban & Rural Centers

The vision of the 2040 CRP is a vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united Northwest Indiana. The key strategy to accomplish this vision is an ambitious growth and revitalization framework that focuses new growth and development in “Livable Centers” within existing communities. Revitalizing and renewing the region’s centers with livable urban, suburban and rural areas represents the tool for protecting and preserving our unique land uses.

### Implementation Items (2011-2015):

#### *NIRPC Creating Livable Communities (CLC) Initiative*

Beginning with NIRPC’s 2040 CRP, a strong focus was placed on the concept of concentrated growth within the region’s identified “Livable Centers” as a means of revitalizing Northwest Indiana’s urban areas. By leveraging its existing infrastructure and promoting a modal shift towards public transportation, walking, and biking, developing Livable Centers is reversing the trend of suburban sprawl and protecting the region’s many natural assets and ecosystems. In 2012, NIRPC introduced the Creating Livable Communities (CLC) initiative to implement the 2040 Plan and to promote transportation investment and redevelopment in places where people already live and work to create a better range of working, housing and travel choices.

During the past decade, urban core communities like Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, and Michigan City have had a high vacancy rate of buildings and continue to lose population and jobs (Figure 1-6). The CLC Initiative recognizes the urgent need to counter this trend and spark reinvestment and revitalization in these and other urban areas. It allows the region to preserve its environmental assets and use dollars more efficiently to create livable, pedestrian-friendly communities that offer a high quality of life for all residents. It en-

courages the compact mixing of uses, diversifies the mix of housing types and affordability levels near job centers and transit routes and facilitates the remediation and redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized land, including brownfields and grayfields. It also promotes community green infrastructure and access to public open space, the preservation of historic and cultural resources, and the integration of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) into transportation planning projects.

CSS represents a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach that involves all stakeholders in providing a transportation facility that fits its setting. It is an approach that leads to preserving and enhancing scenic, aesthetic, historic, community and environmental resources, while improving or maintaining safety, mobility and infrastructure conditions.



Michigan City Uptown Arts District. NIRPC Photo.

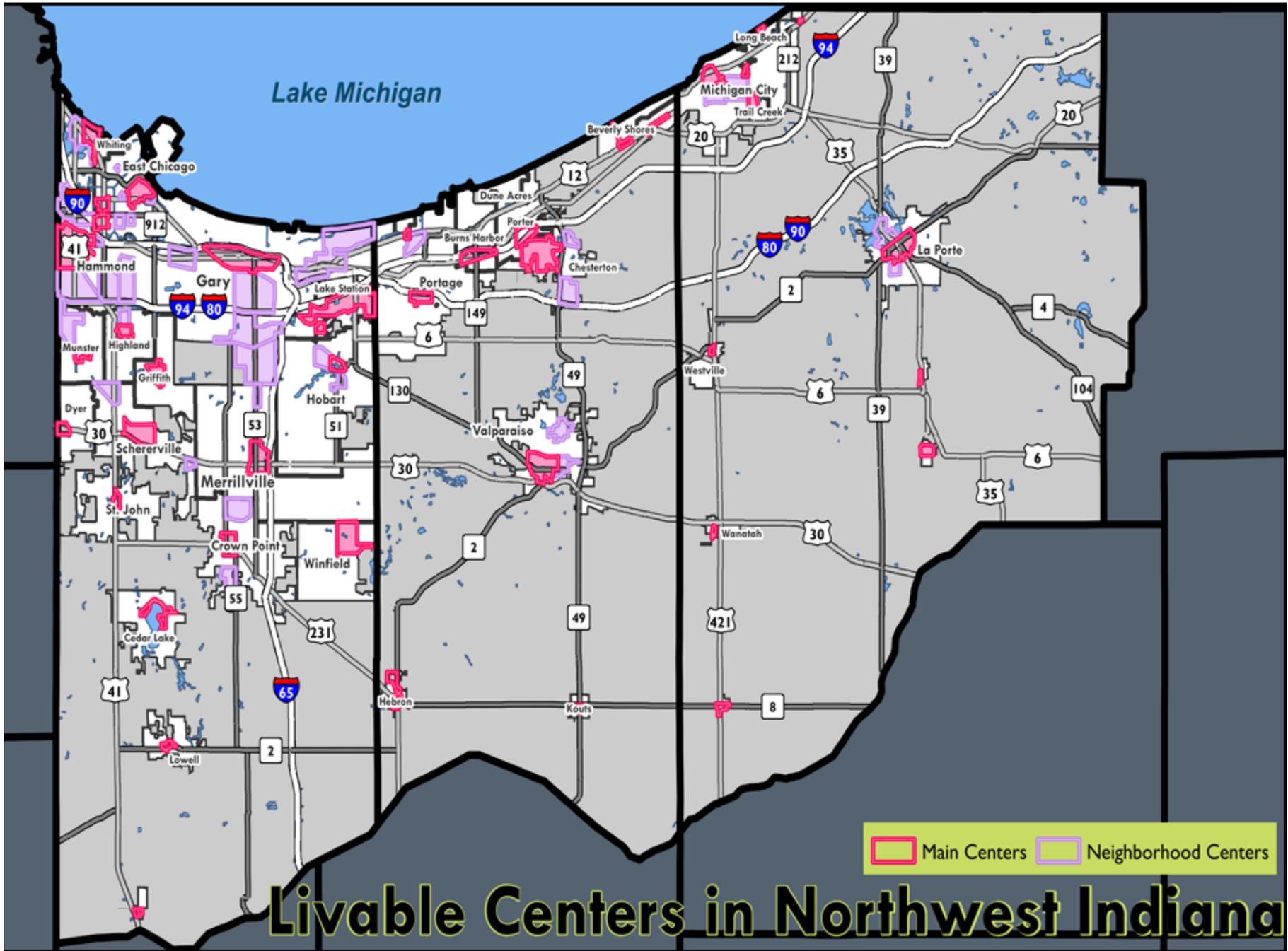


Figure I-8 Livable Centers Map

NIRPC led local governments and planners to define the boundaries of the livable centers in their communities based on the place-making principals of the Livable Centers program. NIRPC staff analyzed these centers for 41 municipalities in the region using innovative Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques. This method utilized the agency’s customized “livability parameters”, which were based on data such as block length, street grid, residential density, employment density, transit, land use, and zoning codes. The various analytical tools and engagement strategies that were utilized for this program can readily be adapted to other regional and local planning efforts. All data and analyses were documented in the Creating Livable Communities report. The report serves to educate



and guide the region’s cities and towns on how and where they can feasibly achieve this development within their own communities. With the recommendations of the CLC report, Northwest Indiana communities have the opportunity to build and revive the region’s livable centers as a means of promoting population and employment growth.

Additionally, to help drive the implementation of the policies and projects highlighted in the report, NIRPC has established a new funding program called Creating Livable Communities (CLC) to ensure that transportation investments will be linked to the vitality of Northwestern Indiana’s communities. Establishing the CLC funding program also increases the opportunities for community planning, particularly those that are limited with funding resources, to initiate and implement plans within their identified livable centers.

With the use of United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Surface Transportation Program (STP) dollars and after

considerable consultation with the funding stakeholders, a sustainable funding source was established in 2013 for local governments to finance projects that advance livability in Northwest Indiana. The ultimate goal of this program is to link land use and transportation, and encourage in-fill development, mixed use development, transit-oriented development, complete streets policies, accessibility to jobs, housing and open space, strong street network connectivity, and multi-modal transportation options.

Northwest Indiana’s Livable Centers (Figure I-8) vary widely in scale, use, mix and purpose within each community today, but all represent areas of regional significance. There are 73 total Livable Centers and neighborhood centers in the region.

In February of 2014, NIRPC awarded CLC grants to seven different communities in the region to help finance a diverse array of projects:

- **Gary:** Urban Revitalization Planning in the Downtown, Emerson, and Horace Mann neighborhoods
- **Crown Point:** North Street Corridor & Guidelines Plan
- **East Chicago:** Transit-Oriented Development in the Roxana, Calumet, and South Side neighborhoods
- **Winfield:** Downtown Master Plan
- **Porter:** Downtown Sidewalk & Streetscape Design Planning
- **Chesterton:** Calumet Connection-Dunes Kankakee Trail Project to downtown Chesterton
- **Highland:** Downtown Highland-Kennedy Avenue Corridor Plan

## Revitalized Urban Core Cities

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 for long-term regional, social and economic stability. Revitalizing the urban core cities of Hammond, Gary, East Chicago, and Michigan City is a challenge. However, working together as partners can nurture the development of livable, mixed-use downtowns, promote adaptive reuse, infill development and the remediation and reuse of underutilized properties, particularly brownfields. In 2012 NIRPC formed an Urban Core Subcommittee of the Pathway to 2040 Implementation Committee. NIRPC staff, in consul-

tation with the subcommittee, has identified the following objectives for the group:

1. Articulate the priorities of the urban core for the purpose of integrating them into existing programs, e.g. NIRPC transportation funding programs, Marquette Advisory Committee (Lake Michigan Marina and Shoreline Development Commission) activities, and plan for Economic Development District funding.
2. Enable partnerships: Provide a meeting place where grants can be identified and discussed and where partnerships can form.
3. Knowledge and information exchange.

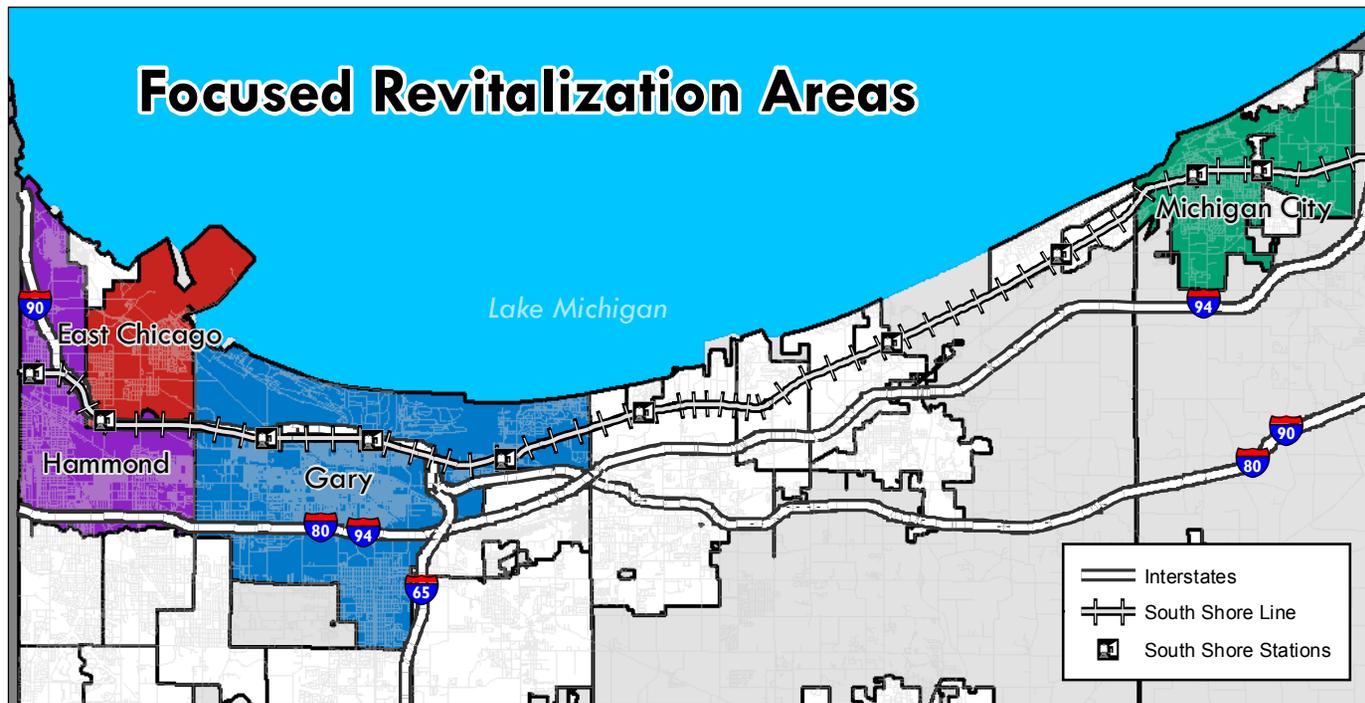


Figure I-9 Focused Revitalization Areas

The urban core cities share a number of characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of Northwest Indiana communities. Each of these characteristics is not exclusive to any one of the cities and not present to the same degree. Taken as a whole, though, they set the urban core apart. The most prominent urban core characteristics include:

- Higher than average vacancy rates
- Continued population losses
- Concentrations of low-income and minority populations
- Significant industrial land
- Brownfields
- Lake Michigan shoreline and access
- Significant existing infrastructure
- Traditional urban design
- Major employment centers
- Major regional institutions

NIRPC staff worked closely with the staff of the four urban core communities to identify priorities and implementation action items. These priorities were assigned to the following active programs areas:

1. Placemaking & Revitalization
  - Livable Centers
  - Marquette Plan Update
2. Transit-Oriented Development
  - TOD Mapping for Transit Operators
3. Brownfield Redevelopment
  - Environmental Boot Camp\*
  - Regional Brownfields Coalition\*\*
  - Regional Brownfields Data Inventory
4. Infrastructure Planning
  - Regional At-Grade Crossing Study
  - Regional Port Study
  - Airport Studies
5. Cargo-Oriented Development
  - Regional Intermodal & Logistics Study
  - Rail VISION Working Group
6. Green Infrastructure/Environmental Planning
  - East Chicago Green Infrastructure Initiative

\* NIRPC designed a Boot Camp to address the various steps needed to remain in compliance with environmental rules and regulations, proactively to protect the four urban core communities from environmental risk, and obtain technical and financial assistance from state and federal agencies. Boot Camp provided an intensive overview of the many laws, rules, and regulations that local communities must follow. It also included resources to assist and support communities to both meet these requirements and to take the next step into restoration, retrofit, and sustainability. It provided real-life examples of projects or sites with environmental issues to be identified and addressed.

\*\* The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA), Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), and the Cities of East Chicago, Gary, and Hammond, Indiana have formed a coalition (the Coalition), which applied for a FY 2014 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Assessment Grant. The Coalition requested a total grant award of \$600,000 – which includes \$400,000 in Hazardous Substance Assessment Grant funds and \$200,000 in Petroleum Assessment Grant funds. The grant was awarded to the Coalition.

### *Cultural & Historic Inventory Mapping Project*

One of the strategies that promotes the preservation of historic and cultural resources is infill and adaptive reuse, which is listed as an objective for the revitalization of the region's urban core and the development of livable centers.

In 2012, NIRPC conducted a mapping project to create a geographic information system (GIS) inventory of historic landmark buildings (Figure I-10) in the three counties and update the County Inventory of Historic Structure Interim Reports. The goal of this project also, in addition to the above strategies, is to identify public and private historical sites that are required for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to protect during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.



Downtown Crown Point. Photo by J. Stephen Conn via Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0 License.

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

Since NIRPC is responsible for the planning and programming of federal surface transportation funds, the 2040 CRP is the policy plan that guides this process. As part of the *Update Companion*, NIRPC updated 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.

### *Gary Northside Redevelopment Project*

A project born from a collaboration between USDOT, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), United States Housing and Urban Development (US HUD), the City of Gary, and other regional partners focused on urban revitalization, sustainable development, and quality of life improvements in the City of Gary. The program focuses specifically on improvements in the Aetna/Miller Beach, Emerson, and Horace Mann neighborhoods of the city. NIRPC is providing technical assistance for the project that includes:

- Planning for a transit-oriented development around the Miller commuter rail station
- Establishment of a light industrial district and new commercial services along the US 12 & 20 corridor, that come accompanied with green infrastructure development and new development guidelines
- Guidance in channeling brownfield remediation funding for redevelopment projects in the project study area
- Guidance on the development of a neighborhood revitalization plan for the Emerson and Horace Mann neighborhoods under the Creating Livable Communities grant
- Support in programming Hardest Hit funding for targeted demolition
- Coordination with other federal agencies, as part of the City of Gary's SC2 (Strong Cities Strong Communities designation)

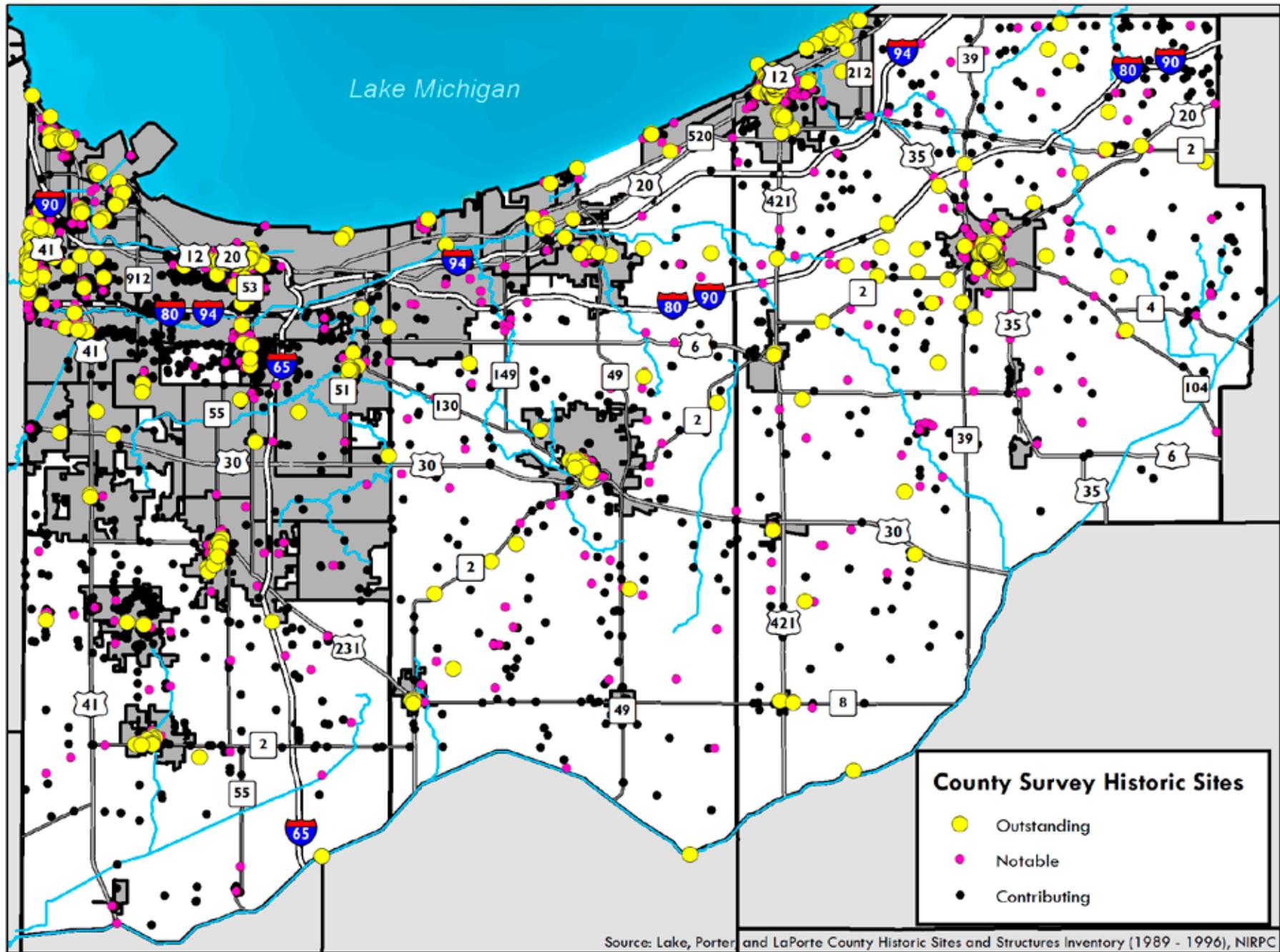


Figure I-10 County Survey Historic Sites

## Roxana Transit Oriented Development Project in East Chicago

The Roxana Area project encompasses the South Side and Roxanna neighborhoods, along with the South Shore train station and surrounding commercial district. NIRPC is part of the steering committee to provide technical assistance and oversee the CLC grant for the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) project. The Roxanna area includes the East Chicago South Shore train station, which is one of the busiest stations on the line. This project will leverage this asset, along with opportunities identified through stakeholders. This project area was established because:

- The South Shore train station has the potential to become an anchor for economic development through a mix of retail, housing and office space
- Complete green streets strategies are considered to create a safe multi-modal (cars, bikes, pedestrians), aesthetically pleasing environment, and bring environmental benefits to the community through improved storm water management, etc.
- Improved connectivity will help residents to access regional transportation networks
- The project area provides a number of opportunities to construct a portion of a larger regional trail network and to provide recreational and community building opportunities that support healthy and active lifestyles



East Chicago NICTD Station. NIRPC Photo.

## Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy in Michigan City

In October 2014, the Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy (LMGIS) was approved by the Michigan City Common Council. The LMGIS is the culmination of several plans targeted toward revitalizing the city's north side. The LMGIS takes the city from the planning and studying stages and commences the action and implementation stages. Primary targets are the lakefront, Washington Park and the surrounding areas such as the U.S. Highway 12 corridor and the downtown.

The LMGIS is a strong and compelling vision for the future of Michigan City's urban core. It includes plans for bringing investors and developers to the area as well as the implementation of branding, the addition of year-round attractions and reverting downtown streets to two-way to allow better transportation connectivity and movement. Components of the strategy include refining the Michigan City brand, bringing more attractions to the city, installing simple connections throughout the city and creating a memorable appearance of the city.

The LMGIS provides a solid and achievable means to implementing NIRPC's plans and programs, such as the *Marquette Plan* and *Creating Livable Communities* in Michigan City. The LMGIS provides specific recommendations for a series of coordinated and incremental public and private sector improvements, operational improvements and public policies that when systematically completed will help unlock the tremendous potential of the study area. The goal is to make Michigan City "Indiana's Great Lakefront Destination Community."

The LMGIS provides recommendations to ensure that by 2020 local residents and visitors will:

- Support a cluster of year-round activities and destinations for the whole family
- Easily access and navigate the area

Figure I.11 Lake Michigan Gateway Plan - Framework Plan



North Franklin Street looking south towards library



Interstate 421 @ I-94 Bridge Proposed Design

- Experience an extraordinarily attractive environment
- See increased private sector investment; produce more jobs and more tax revenue

The LMGIS describes how the alignment of market, brand and place will position Michigan City to achieve its ambitious goal. The LMGIS also includes prioritized step-by-step implementation actions for each of the recommendations into specific, prioritized projects and actions that are organized as Capital Improvements, Land Improvements and Development, Operational Improvements, and Public Policy projects.



Michigan City Lighthouse. Photo by Stephen Sostaric

### *Marquette Plan Update 2015*

The *Marquette Plan Update* serves to integrate the vision and strategies of the two earlier phases by establishing more consistency amongst the plan's priorities and policy frameworks across the entire region. This update will celebrate successes achieved since the *Marquette Plan's* inception in 2005, identify challenges towards implementation, explore new opportunities, and review shifts in the economic development, environmental conservation, and neighborhood development goals across different subareas of Northwest Indiana's lakefront.

The *Marquette Plan Update* builds on the vision and principles of the original phased plans. It continues to emphasize the importance of Lake Michigan as the greatest natural asset of our region, and the need to increase public access to its shoreline. The plan prioritizes improving the physical, social, and economic connections throughout Northwest Indiana's lakefront communities, expanding and improving the region's off-road trail and transportation infrastructure, and protecting the long term health of our environment and natural resources. The new update includes recommendations regarding the cultural and historic resources within the *Marquette Plan* study area. These resources are valuable assets that support the heritage of the region's coastline, the identity of individual communities, regional sustainability, and the economic potential of the tourism industry.

# Neighborhood Reinvestment & Redevelopment Projects

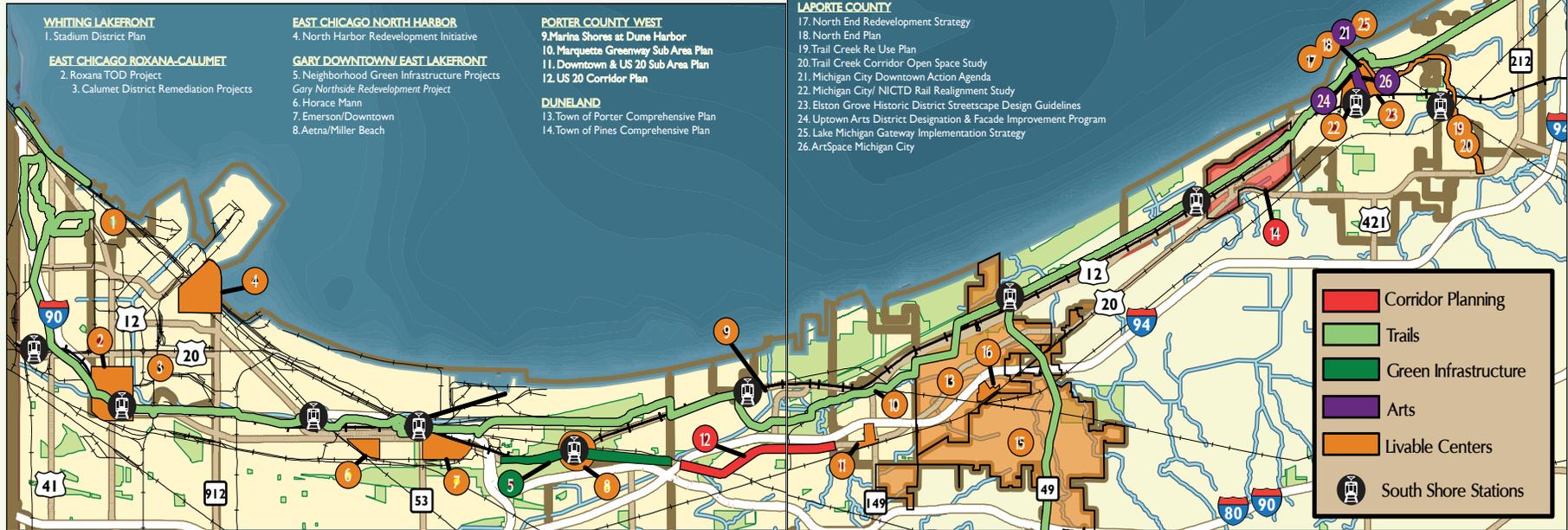


Figure I-12 Marquette Plan Policy Frameworks Excerpt

## Managed Growth that Protects Farmland, Environmentally Sensitive Areas & Important Ecosystems

The 2040 Plan embraces constrained, planned growth and encourages sustainable development within existing communities whose population centers will be livable and vibrant. Infrastructure will be constrained, as the 2040 Plan Vision calls for balanced, sustainable growth throughout the region. This growth is focused through application of the Livable Centers concept and protecting the identified network of natural areas that includes protected open space, conservation areas and agricultural lands. The 2040 Plan 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.

The Green Infrastructure approach is explained in more detail within the Environmental Section. The 2040 Plan implementation strategies are focused on the conservation of land uses that lead to infill growth strategies succeeding within the region's core communities and livable centers.

### Implementation Items (2011-2015):

NIRPC focused its implementation efforts to manage growth by encouraging the concentration of development around existing infrastructure and the redevelopment of infill sites within the established Livable Centers and through the allocation of the transportation improvements funds. Livable Centers promote compact development and smart growth through techniques such as mixed use, high density of population and housing, transit-oriented development, and traditional neighborhood development and conservation design.

In the 2040 Plan, NIRPC performed analysis from 1992 to 2006 on the extent of the region's growth and urbanization areas. In this Plan Update, NIRPC continued to analyze population and land use changes across the region. With the availability of the 2010 land cover data and the 2013 population data, NIRPC performed analyses to trace development trends within the region.

### Development Patterns

Within the three-county region, development trends, particularly for residential uses, are continuing somewhat to shift away from the more historically urban portions of the region. As shown in Table I-1, the total population of the region has slightly decreased by 0.3% from 2010 to 2013. These population losses were largely in Lake and La Porte Counties, which is offset by population gains in Porter County. The unincorporated areas population slightly decreased between 2010 and 2013, also 0.3%. In unincorporated Porter County, there was an increase of about 1,091 people (2%) that represents about 49% of the total population increase in Porter County (2,214). However, in Lake and La Porte counties, the rate changed to -3.0% in Lake and about -5.0% in La Porte.



Aerial view of La Porte. Photo by Stephen Sostaric

Counties	Total 2013	2013 % of region	Total 2010	2010 % of region	Total Pop Change 2010-2013	Total Pop Change %	Unincorp 2013	Unincorp 2013 %	Unincorp 2010	Unincorp 2010%	Unincorp Pop change 2010-2013	Unincorp change %
Lake	491,456	63.9%	496,005	64.3%	(4,549)	-0.9%	42,566	8.7%	43,755	8.8%	(1,189)	-3%
Porter	166,557	21.7%	164,343	21.3%	2,214	1.3%	69,578	41.8%	68,487	41.7%	1,091	2%
LaPorte	111,281	14.5%	111,467	14.4%	(186)	-0.2%	44,840	40.3%	47,385	42.5%	(2,545)	-5%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>769,294</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>771,815</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>(2,521)</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>156,984</b>	<b>20.4%</b>	<b>159,627</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>(2,643)</b>	<b>-2%</b>

Table I-1 Northwest Indiana Population Change 2010-2013 (Source: U.S. Census Population Estimate)



Development trends are reflected in the patterns of the region’s land use. Between 2010 and 2013, an additional 4 square miles (2,608 acres) of unincorporated land was developed. The additional 4 square miles of developed unincorporated land accounted for 25% of the region’s 17 square miles (11,060 acres) of additional development between 2006 and 2010.

What implications do these trends have for the region? In comparison to the 2040 analysis, the unincorporated developed land has increased over the last 15 years by 125% versus the new analysis (2006-2010) which only shows the unincorporated areas development 25% of the total new development. About 76% of the new development occurred within the incorporated areas. Figure I-13 details each municipality and the unincorporated area’s land development per acre from 2006-2010. As shown in the chart, the vast majority of development is absorbed by unincorporated Porter County, St. John, unincorporated Lake County, Crown Point, Merrillville, Portage, Hobart, Gary, and Valparaiso, which all represent 72% of the additional development. As shown in Figure I-13 the urban core communities Hammond, Gary, East Chicago, and Michigan City contributed about 11% (1,204 acres) of the total development. Although the residential and commercial vacancy rates remain high in these communities, new growth has emerged due to revitalization or re-development.

### Land Developed in Acres from 2006-2010 By Municipality

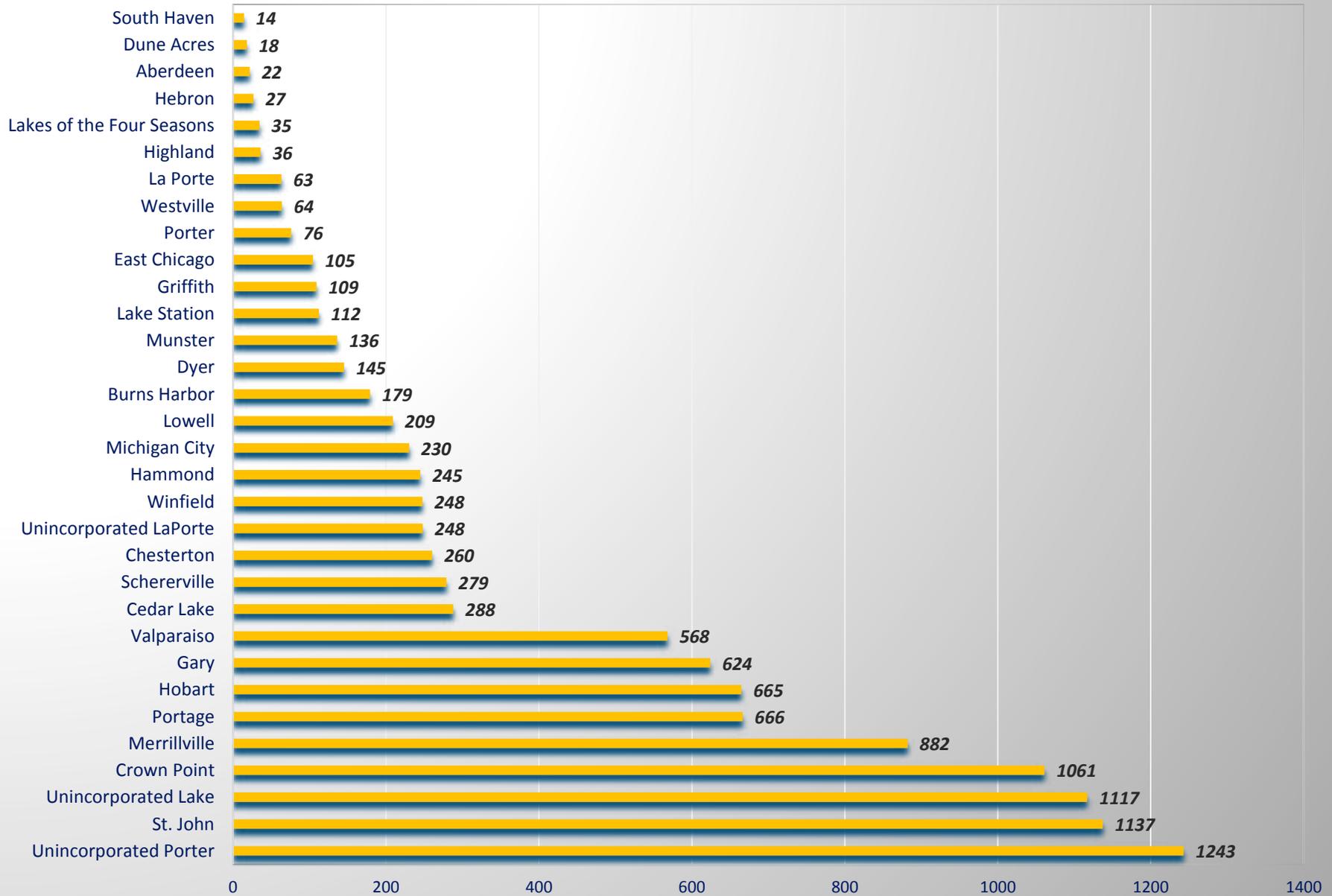


Figure I-13 Land Development 2006-2010

### Land Use Changes by County 2006-2010

The charts on this page display the net change of every land use category between 2006 and 2010. The charts and analysis were developed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center in January of 2015. In Lake County the maximum gain was low intensity development with a net change of 4,896 acres. This number represents about 67% of the total new development in the county. The maximum loss was in agriculture land with a net change of -3,660 acres. Porter County trends are similar to those of Lake County. The maximum gain is in the low intensity development with a net change of 2,182 acres, which represents about 71% of the total new development within the county. The maximum loss is in agriculture land with a net change of -1,440 acres. La Porte County land use changes are different from Lake and Porter trends. The maximum gain was in agricultural land with a net change from 2006-2010 of 114 acres. However, the county significantly lost 582 acres of forested land. The maximum loss in La Porte County was in forested land with a net change of -576 acres.

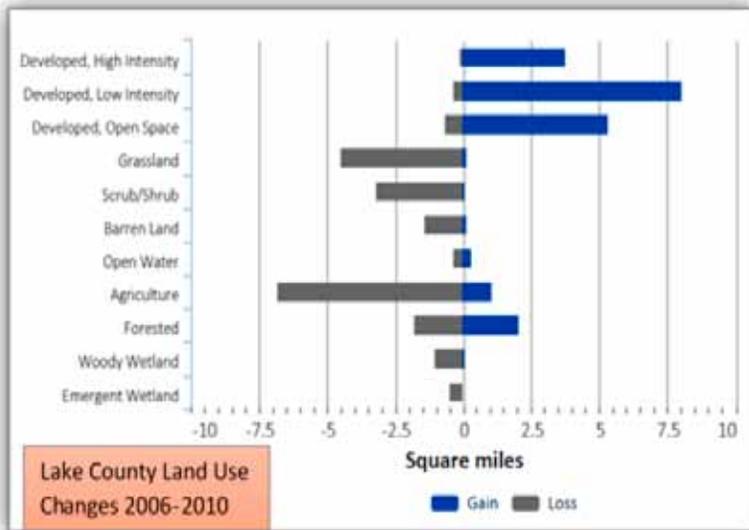


Figure I-14 Lake County Land Use Changes

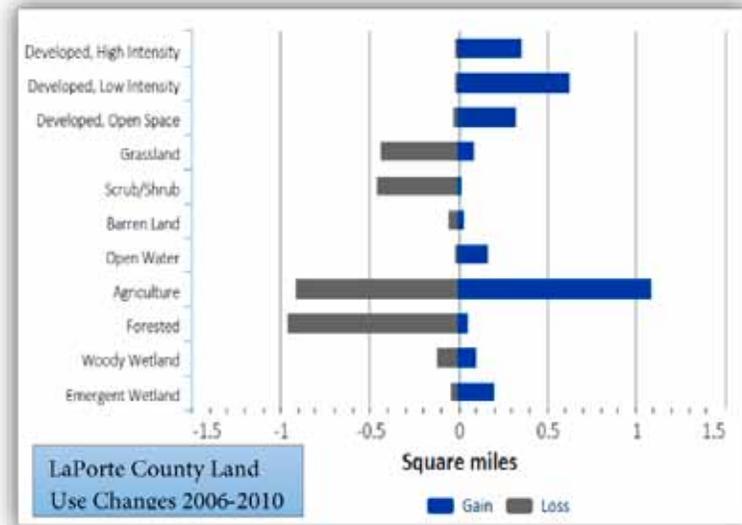


Figure I-15 LaPorte County Land Use Changes

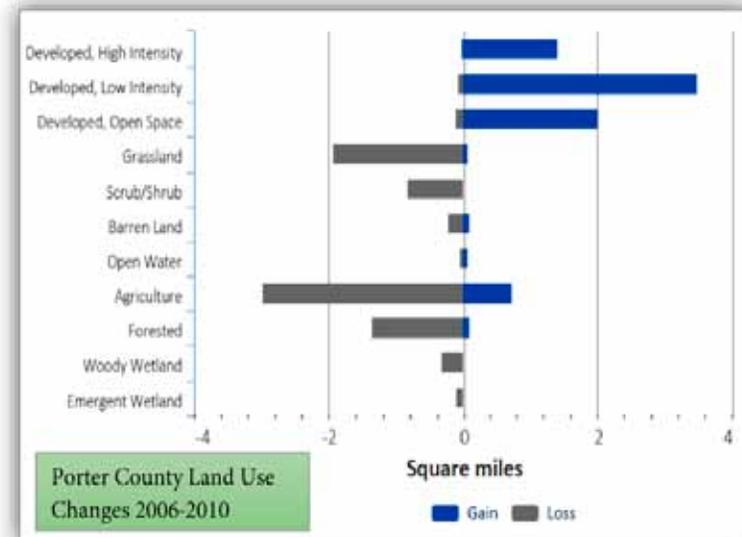


Figure I-16 Porter County Land Use Changes

### Conversion of Agricultural & Open Space

Table I-2 reveals that from 2010 to 2013, the amount of developed land used for residential, commercial and industrial uses increased by 6% (11,060 acres), while agriculture and open space areas decreased by 0.6% (3,166 acres) and 4% (7,894 acres), respectively. In Figure 1-17, degradation of natural areas and agricultural land is concerning, but not as significant in comparison to the decline which occurred between 1992-2006. However, this degradation has impacts not only on the quality of life, but also affects regional finances resulting in higher taxes for taxpayers to support more infrastructure.

County	Developed	Ag Lost for Development	Open Space Lost for Development
Lake	7362	-2087	-5275
Porter	3077	-900	-2177
LaPorte	621	-179	-422
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11060</b>	<b>-3166</b>	<b>-7894</b>

Table I-2 Loss of Agricultural & Open Space for Development 2010-2013

Figure I-18 shows that most of the additional development occurred within the incorporated areas (75%). The unincorporated development was established near municipalities but most is concentrated around Valparaiso, Crown Point and St. John.

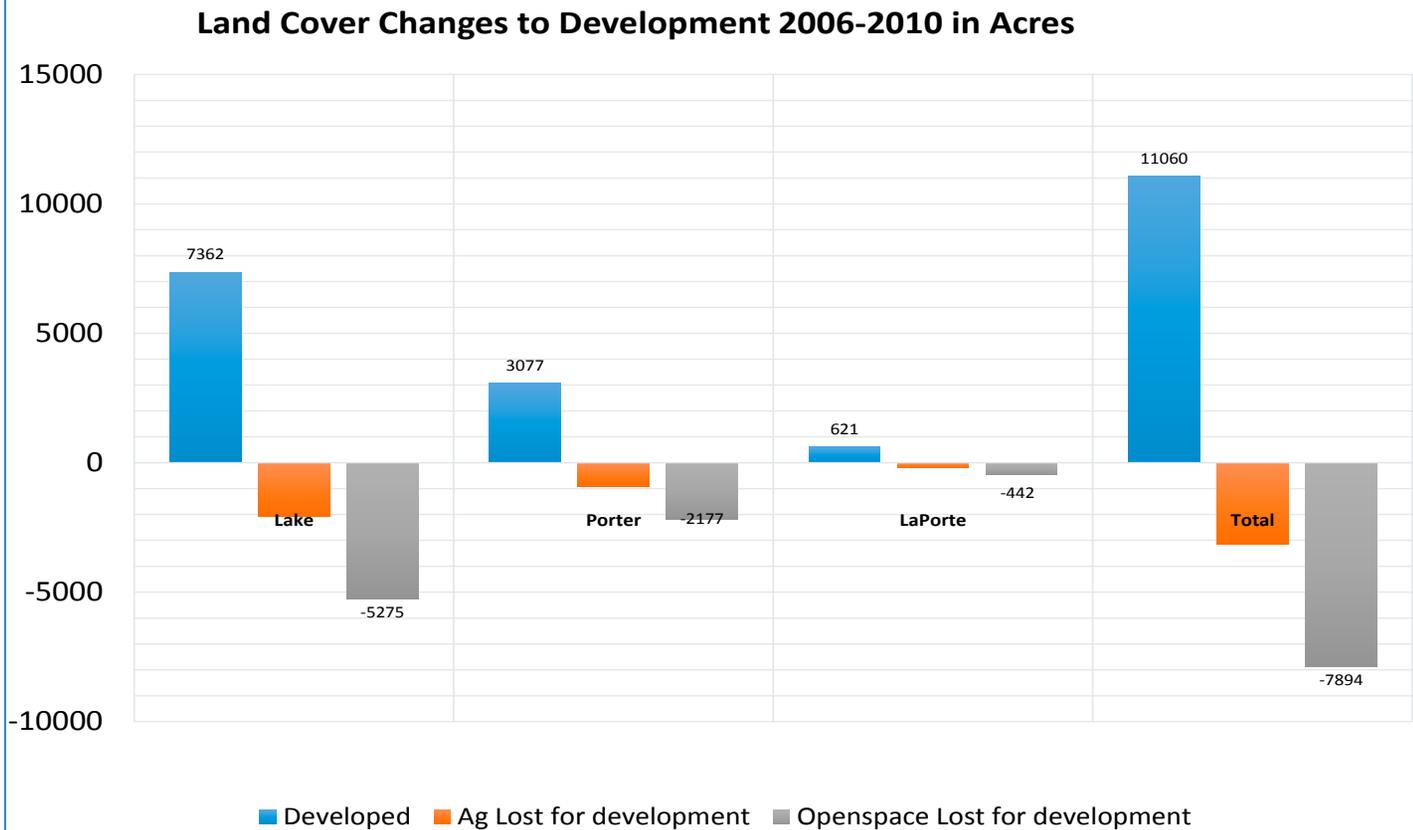


Figure I-17 Northwest Indiana Land Cover Changes Development from 2006-2010 by County in Acres



## Summary of Land Use Changes

NIRPC's analysis of existing development patterns and land use trends present the following:

- Between 2010 and 2013, the unincorporated areas population decreased slightly by 0.3%.
- Between 2006 and 2010, an additional 4 square miles (2,608 acres) of unincorporated land was developed, which represents 25% of the total new development. About 76% of the additional development occurred within the incorporated areas. In comparison to the 2040 Plan analysis between 1992 and 2006, an additional 68 square miles of unincorporated land was developed. That represents a 125% increase in unincorporated development in fifteen years (on average an additional 22 square miles every five years) 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 additional development between 1992 and 2006.
- Land development is continuing to occur at a rate inconsistent to population growth. Although the total population between 2010 and 2013 slightly decreased by 0.3%, land development increased by 6%. This development pattern has implications for quality of life and the sustainability of the region (as shown in the map Figure I-18), including the region's loss of agricultural lands and open space for development. Instead, the region should make the most of reuse and infill opportunities throughout the existing urbanized areas.

Continued efforts at revitalizing and renewing the region's centers and planning for growth with livable urban, suburban and rural centers will help break this cycle of inconsistent land development. It will also aid in protecting and preserving the rural and natural areas of the region.



New homes in Chesterton. NIRPC Photo

## Link Land Use & Transportation

In a region such as Northwest Indiana, where significant physical constraints to ever-expanding developed 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. NIRPC established projects to improve land use and transportation connectivity. NIRPC staff also is playing a role in regional projects that have been conducted between 2012 and 2015 by providing technical assistance, serving on steering committees, or by participating as a stakeholder. In these ways NIRPC can help guide and monitor implementation of the CRP. These projects include:

- Transit Oriented Development (TOD) projects
- Corridor Studies
- Creating Livable Communities (CLC)

### Implementation (2011-2015): NIRPC Projects

#### *Creating Livable Communities (CLC) for TOD*

NIRPC developed a number of tools for the CLC (as mentioned earlier) which are now being made available to local governments as a means of improving their planning capabilities. CLC projects are identified in two emphasis areas:

1. Livable Centers Map (Figure I-8)
2. Transit Area Map (within the urbanized area)

The Transit Area Map (Figure I-19) includes areas within a half mile of a transit stop or station. The goal of this map is to support more transit oriented development projects around transit stops and sta-

tions and to encourage more transit use in the region. Projects identified in this emphasis area must meet the minimum requirements of the Livable Centers goals to receive CLC funding.

#### *NIRPC Regional Corridors Study (RCS)*

The main purpose of the RCS is to accomplish the 2040 Plan regional goals and objectives that aim to improve connectivity and access to employment, major interstate highways, metro centers, and highly dense residential areas. It will also improve mobility across the region and reduce congestion and travel time

The focus of the study is to fill a gap between regionally significant highways and limited access local arterials. Currently there are 14 interchanges within almost 45 miles on interstate 80/94. Only 6 of them are regionally connected, through major arterials, to US 30 the major east-west connector in the region.

The study is explained in more detail within the Congestion Management element as part of the Transportation section.



A NICTD train departs East Chicago. Photo by Stephen Sostaric.

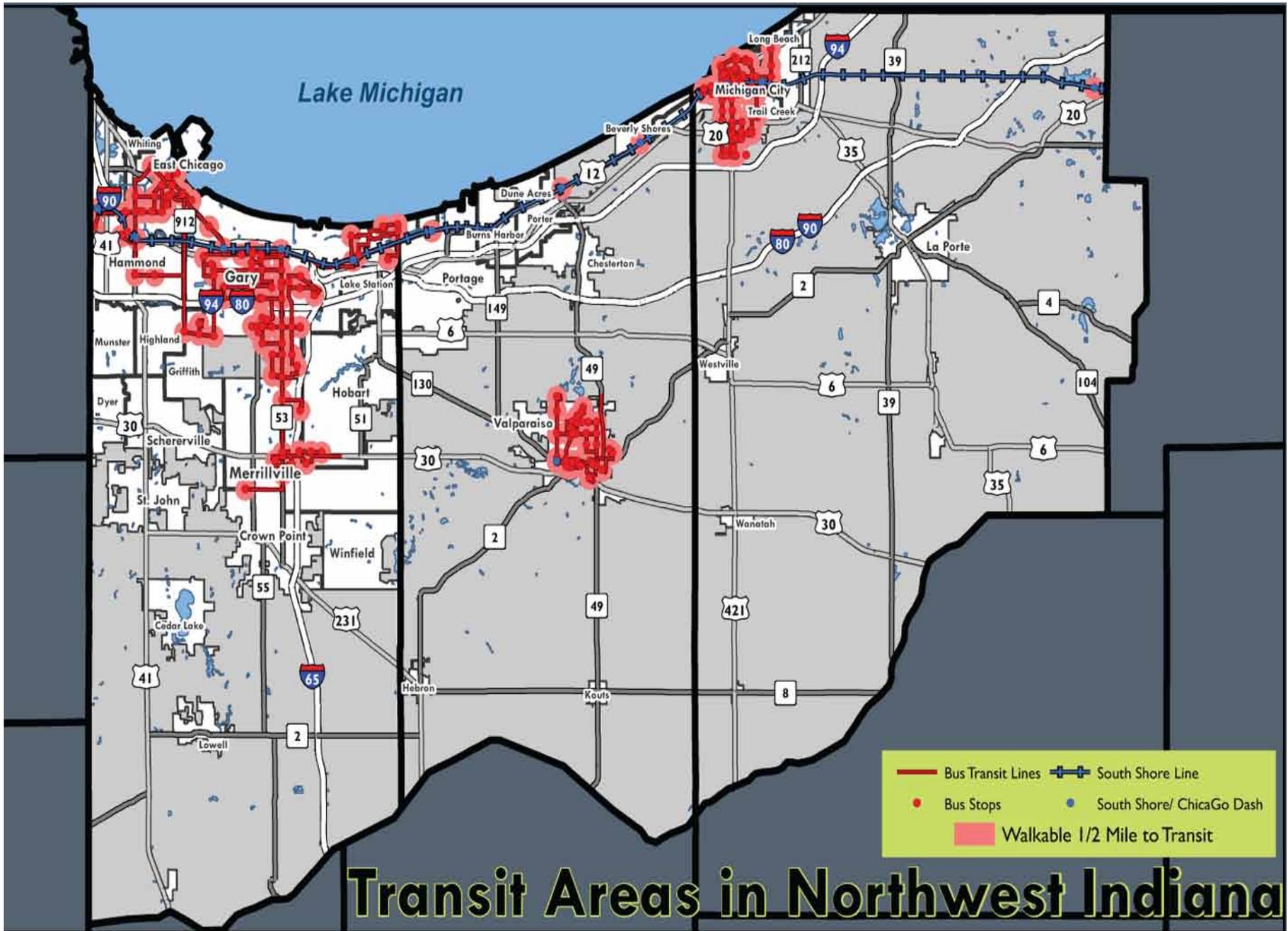


Figure I-19 Northwest Indiana Transit Area within Half a Mile of a Transit Stop

## Implementation Items (2011-2015): Regional Studies

### US 421/South Franklin Street South Gateway Corridor Plan

In late 2014, Michigan City embarked on a plan to revitalize the South Gateway Corridor due to a combination of visual clutter, underutilized properties, a lack of a cohesive design and land use theme, and a gateway. The ultimate goal of the project is to revitalize the US Highway 421/South Franklin Street “South Gateway” corridor and to provide an enhanced entrance to the City. The study area includes the area of Highway 421/Franklin Street stretching from Coolspring Avenue to the Interstate 94 interchange between Ohio Street and Woodland Avenue. During a 10-month study, a team composed of local and national experts will collect data and compose a comprehensive plan of action for the city. The plan also aims to increase economic redevelopment in this area while also improving aesthetics and vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The key goals identified for the plan are to improve traffic flow, create a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environment, give the corridor a unique identity, enhance landscaping and streetscaping amenities, improve overall safety, and diversify the area with retail, office and residential uses.

#### Porter County: Willowcreek Extension

The purpose of this study is:

- To create a new economic development corridor to provide north-south access on the west side of Porter County.
- To connect 100S to Willowcreek Road providing direct access via 249 to the Indiana Toll Road and I-94.
- To provide an alternative to traffic from south Porter County to north Porter County relieving some congestion on I-65.

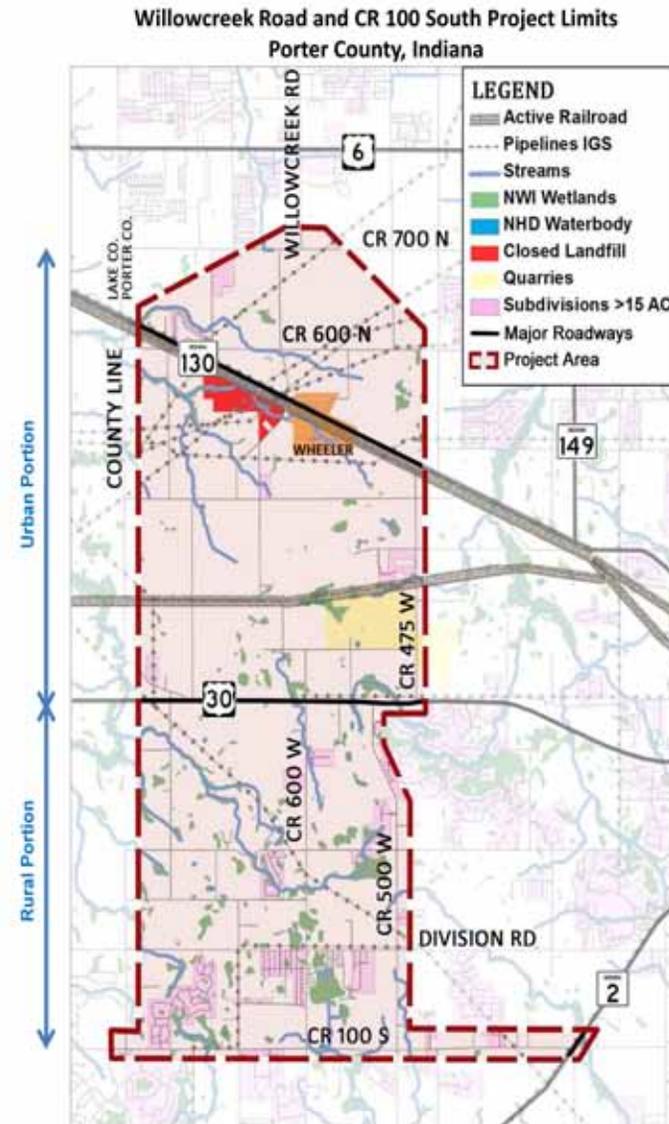


Figure I-20 Willowcreek Road Extension



## Livable Broadway (Gary Public Transportation Corporation)

The purpose of the Livable Broadway Plan is to assess opportunities for promoting livability within the corridor by enhancing economic development, environment, and land uses that will lead to improved bus service within and between Gary, Merrillville, and Crown Point. The critical objectives of the plan are to:

- Assess the current state of transit on Broadway Avenue
- Improve connectivity
- Determine modal conflicts and accessibility issues
- Develop growth scenarios
- Assess opportunities for alternative modes and related infrastructure
- Recommend transit improvements
- Recommend infrastructure improvements that emphasize sustainability

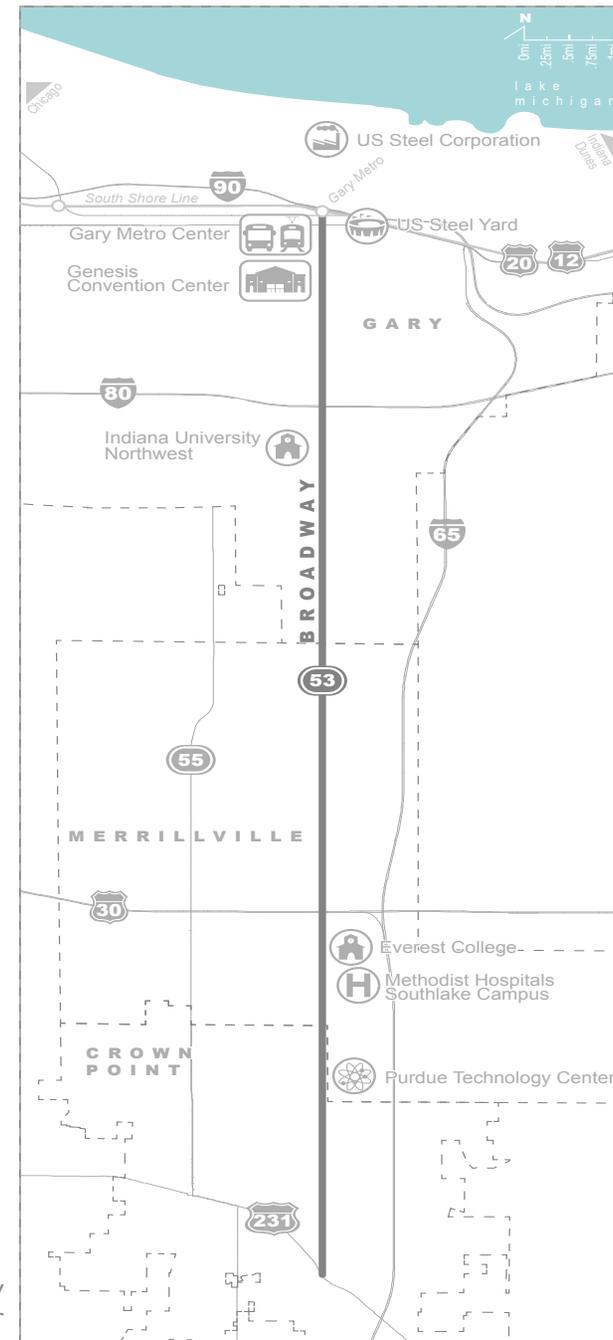


Figure I-23 Livable Broadway Planning Corridor

# Local Foods

In March of 2012, NIRPC completed the Northwest Indiana Local Food Study. The Study looked in depth at the components of the local food system and established a baseline to understand existing conditions and explain the key issues and challenges the system faces. The Study recommended two actions:

1. Transition the Food Study Advisory Committee (Food SAC) into a more permanent Action Committee to act as a policy and project driven group to advance the local food movement.
2. Develop an action agenda for developing our local food system with clear goals, objectives, and indicators based on information contained in the Study.

NIRPC, through its planning efforts and work with partners, will continue to address major food system issues as it relates to the following:

- Transportation and food access
- Rural development and farmland preservation
- Urban agriculture and revitalizing core communities
- Environmental impacts of agriculture
- Local ordinances and the food system

The Study listed potential actions or projects to advance the local food system:

- Regional food summits
- Food hub feasibility study
- Food access study
- Health food financing initiatives

## Regional Food Summit

To advance the recommendations of establishing connections in the local food system, NIRPC collaborated with Valparaiso University Law School and Purdue University Extension to host a Regional Food Summit in April 2015. The purpose of the Summit was to convene and establish relationships between farmers, producers, buyers and consumers, to highlight local success stories and to provide possibilities to work together, create jobs and expand the economy.

## Northwest Indiana Food Council

A task force was convened during the summer of 2015 to lay the foundation for the Food Council, prompted by the tremendous response at the Regional Food Summit. The Northwest Indiana Food Council was created in fall of 2015 to oversee the policies, issues and overall structure of the Food system. The NWI Food Council is a multi-stakeholder alliance that builds a just, sustainable, and thriving locally-oriented food system for all in Northwest Indiana through networking, education, advocacy, and projects.



Pumpkins at County Line Orchard in Hobart. Photo by Stephen Sostaric

## Food Hub Feasibility Study

Indiana State Department of Agriculture is preparing a Feasibility Study for Food Hubs in Indiana. A food hub is a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers in order to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand. The purpose is to assess the needs of growers and consumers regarding the potential for regional food hubs operating as part of a statewide network to facilitate the marketing and access to specialty crops.

## The New Indiana Grown Program

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) is revamping the current Indiana Grown program to meet the needs of Hoosier consumers. In 2015, the new Indiana Grown program aims to significantly enhance Indiana's strong agricultural presence by promoting locally grown foods, local employment opportunities, and economic growth, while at the same time building sustainable communities.

## Green Sense Farms

Opened in 2014, and located in Portage's AmeriPLEX Business Park, Green Sense Farms is the country's largest indoor, commercial, vertical year-round farm, and provides produce to local supermarkets and restaurants. This is a local urban farm that grows pesticide/herbicide free and GMO-free vegetables all year long that guarantees fresh herbs, leafy greens, and lettuces every day, unaffected by rain, heat or dark of night. The vertical growing system allows the farm to grow more produce in a short time using a footprint that is one tenth of the space of a traditional farm. Locating to grow vegetables near population centers cuts down on the miles food is transported, reducing air emissions and traffic, and conserving fuel - all a major factor in choosing to locate in a central location near highway hubs. The footprint is 30,000 square feet and can grow fresh produce that can be distributed within 100 miles to 20 million people. With the use of indoor sustainable farming technology and LED grow lights, Green Sense Farms can achieve higher crop yields, conserving water and electricity.

