



2013 Executive Board

David Uran

Chairman

Mayor of Crown Point

Brian Snedecor

Vice-Chairman

Mayor of Hobart

Blair Milo

Treasurer

Mayor of LaPorte

James G. Ton

Secretary

Chesterton Town Council

Roosevelt Allen, Jr.

Executive Board

Lake County Commission

Don Ensign

Executive Board

Hebron Town Council

Nancy Adams

Executive Board

Porter County Commission

Dave Decker

Executive Board

La Porte County Commission

Robert Schaefer

Executive Board

Long Beach Town Council

Anthony Copeland

Executive Board

Mayor of East Chicago

Ed Soliday

Executive Board

Indiana State Representative

Ty Warner

Executive Director

NIRPC

# 2013 Year in Review

The year 2013 saw significant events and accomplishments at the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), from our new Executive Director Ty Warner taking the reins to receiving the Daniel Burnham Award to the Illiana Expressway being added to the 2040 *Comprehensive Regional Plan* and the 2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program. The following is a chronological listing of events which took place this past year. It is by no means a comprehensive list, but it is intended to identify certain key activities, events and changes which occurred.

## January



**Dave Uran**  
**Mayor of Crown Point**  
**2013 NIRPC Chairman**

Crown Point Mayor Dave Uran received the gavel from Beverly Shores Town Council President Geof Benson as new NIRPC Chairman. Also appointed as NIRPC officers were Brian Snedecor, Mayor of Hobart, as Vice Chair, LaPorte Mayor Blair Milo as Treasurer, and Jim Ton of the Chesterton Town Council as Secretary.

The second year of the Norman E. Tufford Award was presented to four recipients, going to two commissioners and two former NIRPC staff. Chet Dobis, the former Governor's appointee to the NIRPC Commission, and Stan Dobosz, Griffith Town Council, both received awards for their commitment to NIRPC and northwestern Indiana. Hugh Rhein (posthumously) and Lauren Rhein, former NIRPC staff, both received awards for their outstanding efforts in advancing NIRPC over their long, respective careers.

The first few weeks of January were a time of transition between outgoing Executive Director John Swanson and incoming Executive Director Ty Warner. A "taste of the region" reception was held at NIRPC offices, with NIRPC Commissioners contributing foods highlighting the best of their communities.

January was a multimedia affair for NIRPC, with the newly-produced video on the 2040 *Comprehensive Regional Plan* making its debut, engagingly outlining the key themes of the Plan and showcasing the assets of northwestern Indiana. This 12-minute professionally-produced video was made available on the newly-launched NIRPC website and on YouTube, and has since been shown to audiences across the region.

## February

NIRPC again was well-represented at the National Conference of Regions in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC). Munster Clerk-Treasurer Dave Shafer presided as new NARC President, giving a national profile to NIRPC and serving regional councils across the country. Also in attendance were Commissioner Geof Benson, serving on the NARC Board of Directors, NIRPC Chairman Dave Uran, Vice Chairman Brian Snedecor, Treasurer Blair Milo, Commissioner Nancy Adams, and Executive Director Ty Warner. In conjunction with the conference, congressional visits were made to Congressman Pete Visclosky, Senator Joe Donnelly, Congresswoman Jackie Walorski, and staff of Senator Dan Coats. The delegation conveyed NIRPC's key legislative positions regarding support for the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and several transportation platforms, including: sustainable transportation funding in light of the shrinking Highway Trust Fund, maintaining current population designation thresholds for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), putting transit funding on a par with highway funding, and strengthening freight transportation.

Dave Shafer, Ty Warner and Steve Strains also participated in a MAP-21 Implementation Roundtable convened by NARC in Indianapolis to gain input on MAP-21 issues from the MPOs from a five-state area.

### March

A series of public meetings were held on the new draft Public Participation Plan, building from the 2007 Public Participation Plan and advancing NIRPC's commitment to public outreach and input through electronic media as well as public workshop involvement in order to fully engage the diverse population of northwestern Indiana.

Spreading the work and experience of northwestern Indiana, Ty Warner presented on a panel with Dennis Rittenmeyer of One Region, Arthur Pearson from the Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelly Foundation, and Joanna Trotter (then with the Metropolitan Planning Council) on "Rust Belt Resurgence," conveying the positive activity around Gary and northwestern Indiana, at the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference held in Kansas City.

### April



**NIRPC Staff and Commissioners receive the 2013 Daniel Burnham Award**

At the national conference of the American Planning Association (which happened to be held in Chicago in 2013), NIRPC received national distinction and honor as the recipient of the Daniel Burnham Award for its 2040 *Comprehensive Regional Plan*. This prestigious award recognizes comprehensive plans that serve as models of effective and innovative planning throughout the country. The award was presented at the annual award luncheon before a crowd of 5000, and was received by Chuck Oberlie, who guided the steering committee in the Plan's development; Nancy Adams, who subsequently chaired the implementation committee for the Plan; and Steve Strains, NIRPC Deputy Director/Director of Planning, who helped guide the planning staff in the effort for its completion. Near-

ly the entire staff team, past and present, who labored on the Plan's development were also in attendance for the award, as well as NIRPC's consultants that were integral to its creation, including Phil Hanegraaf and Ron Thomas. The award is now prominently displayed in NIRPC's offices and serves as a testament to how effectively the region came together to create a common vision for the future prosperity of northwestern Indiana.

At the same conference, Mitch Barloga, NIRPC's Active Transportation Planner, co-lead a mobile workshop into northwestern Indiana to showcase the region for professional planners from across the country.

Representative Ed Soliday became the Governor's Appointment to the NIRPC Executive Board, bringing with him his legislative and transportation acumen from the Indiana General Assembly as chairman of the House Roads and Transportation Committee, as well as chairman of the Joint Study Committee on Transportation Infrastructure Assessment and Solutions.

NIRPC's annual Cornucopia event took place at Woodland Park in Portage. The event highlights ongoing trail development in the NIRPC region and adjacent northeastern Illinois. Over 80 stakeholders took part, with a total of 20 municipalities who presented on 29 trail projects in various states of development. There were also reports from advocate organizations such as the NWI Paddling Association, South Shore Trails and Chicago's Active Transportation Alliance.

### May

NIRPC entered a 3 year, \$35,000 contract with the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) for the NWI Brownfield Coalition Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). The NWI Brownfield Coalition is a partnership of the RDA, NIRPC, and the Cities of Gary, Hammond, and East Chicago. The Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund grant will provide a nearly \$1 million financing tool from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the clean-up costs associated with redevelopment projects at brownfields in those three cities. NIRPC will be providing some technical project management expertise as well as RLF administration for this Coalition.

Future alternative transportation projects were funded following a call for projects for the 2013 Transportation Alternatives Program. These include the connection of the Erie-Lackawanna and Oak Savannah Trails at Oak Ridge Prairie in Griffith, filling in the two-mile gap on the Pennsy Greenway between Munster and Schererville, and connecting the Marquette Greenway from Hammond Marina to Calumet Park in Chicago

NIRPC was an active participant and Ty Warner a featured speaker at "Calumet Summit 2013: Connecting for Action," a two-day, bi-state gathering held at the Marquette Park Pavilion in Gary to strategize for awareness and protection of Calumet area natural resources. Congressman Pete Visclosky kicked off the event, which utilized keypad polling and small group discussion to arrive at a prioritized set of strategies for the Calumet region.

The Marquette Plan Update ("Phase III") began in earnest in partnership between NIRPC, the RDA, and Indiana Landmarks, through a grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Lake Michigan Coastal Program. Phase I was originally completed in 2005 and Phase II in 2007. This update will integrate the plans from those first two Phases, develop an online presence, build a Marquette Geodatabase, and create a new framework for cultural and historic landmarks as economic and development opportunities. A series of workshops were held throughout the region to obtain input on progress and barriers encountered since the initial phases of the Plan.

### June

Bill Brown retired after 30 years of service with NIRPC. Bill's service to NIRPC began with the Regional Airport System Plan and, by the time he retired, had primary responsibility for maintaining and running the regional transportation network model, which is used to analyze future development scenarios, air quality conformity, and congestion, leaving an important legacy for NIRPC's transportation planning function.

Field visits by representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) were held in June toward the process of recertifying the transportation planning process in northwestern Indiana, with NIRPC

the officially-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the region. Representatives from INDOT, Gary Public Transportation Corporation (GPTC), the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD), NIRPC's sub-grantee transit operators, and over a dozen NIRPC staff took part in the field visits and interviews. Other planning stakeholders and members of the public participated in public meetings held to voice their comments.

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) held their annual meeting in Philadelphia, attended by Commissioners Dave Shafer, Geof Benson, and Jim Ton and Executive Director Ty Warner. The delegation from northwestern Indiana heard multiple presentations on Federal programs, current national trends, and best regional practices and peer initiatives for engaging regional work. The annual conference affords an opportunity to compare notes and build relationships among regional councils across the country; NIRPC continued to be served by Commissioners Shafer's and Benson's representation on the NARC national Board of Directors and Executive Director Warner's representation on the NARC Executive Directors Council.

Following the adoption of its first Social Media Policy, NIRPC supplemented its initial forays into Facebook communication with a Twitter account, broadcasting up-to-date information about NIRPC events and news. NIRPC continues to advance its social media involvement, recognizing that this medium continues to become a more primary means by which residents interact with the agency and its activities.

### July

For the ninth consecutive year, the annual audit of NIRPC's accounting and financial management system resulted in no findings, comments or disallowed costs.

The Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) was completed for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012, which is the first one since 2003. It was prepared by Angie Hayes and her staff, and represents many hours of compilation and preparation. The CAFR replaces the standard State Board of Account's audit report, and has additional financial and background information about NIRPC, providing an overview of the agency and conveying NIRPC's

commitment to openness and transparency in its operations.

NIRPC staff continues to be an active resource to the Gary Northside Redevelopment Project, with the active involvement of the Environmental Protection Agency (EDA) as an outgrowth of the Federal Sustainable Communities Partnership.

### August

The NIRPC Commission approved moving forward with a continued building lease for its Portage location. NIRPC has been in its present location for 20 years with the current lease expiring on December 31, 2013. A joint Request for Proposals with the Northwest Indiana Forum was released earlier in 2013 to solicit proposals for a new lease and possible new location. Much time and effort by the Finance and Personnel Committee was spent to ensure the best location as the decision moved ahead toward the negotiation of a lease agreement.

Public Open Houses were held for the 2014-2017 Transportation Improvement Program, Comprehensive Regional Plan Amendment, and Air Quality Conformity Determination. The TIP was approved in August, with Amendments for Transit and INDOT projects in September.

NIRPC received a 5 year, \$455,550 Section 319 Watershed Planning and Implementation Grant for Portage Burns Waterway. The Watershed Planning and Implementation Grant will allow NIRPC to analyze water quality information in the Deep River and Portage Burns Waterway system and work with stakeholders and local governments to establish priorities for improving water quality where it is poor and preserving those areas that are healthy. In addition, implementation dollars will be available to municipalities and land owners from the grant to cost-share installation of best management practices on the ground in the priority areas.

### September

Scott Weber was hired to replace Bill Brown as NIRPC's Transportation Engineer. Hailing from the University of Pennsylvania, Scott brings expertise in travel demand modeling and has hit the ground running, diving headlong into analyses for the Illiana Expressway and I-65 expansion

projects.

### October



***Holding the banner at the Illinois/Indiana State Line at the Golden Spoke Ceremony, officially unveiling the Penny Greenway's bi-state connection.***

October saw a Golden Spoke moment for the bi-state region as leaders and advocates from northwest Indiana and the neighboring Chicago Southland came together on the state line between Munster and Lansing to officially open the Penny-Greenway. This long-awaited link marked the first bi-state trail connection between Indiana and Illinois. In 2014 Munster plans to finish their portion of the Penny from Fisher Street to Calumet Avenue.

In the Town of Porter a landmark project was completed between the Dune Park South Shore station and the entrance to the Indiana Dunes State Park. Visitors by commuter rail now have a direct access to the front door of the State Park and access to the Indiana Dunes. This mile-long segment is also part of the Dunes-Kankakee Trail network, which is developing through central Porter County.

### November

The largest trail segment completed in northwestern Indiana during 2013 was over two miles on the west side of Wolf Lake in Hammond, completing what is nearly a five-mile loop route around the Indiana side of the lake. Remaining is the opening of a 1000-foot bridge which is slated to open in early spring. In all, approximately five miles of new off-road paved trails were opened to the public in 2013.

NIRPC was awarded a 3 year, \$90,000 Department of Energy Solar Readiness



Grant in Partnership with the National Association of Regional Councils. This Solar Readiness Grant will provide technical support and training to municipalities on best practices in ordinances, zoning, inspection, permitting, and other processes to reduce the soft-cost of commercial and residential investments in solar energy. Encouraging solar installations in old and new buildings has been shown to be a great mechanism for attracting economic investments and green jobs in other regions of the country ~ many in areas such as Kansas City and New Jersey that aren't much sunnier than NIRPC's region.

**December**

NIRPC Planning staff completed its 50+ page report examining the impact of the proposed Illiana Expressway against key goals in its *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*, including a series of recommendations should the project move forward to ensure greater consistency with the regional vision. After a series of public open houses and a public comment period, in which a record number of comments were received, the full NIRPC Commission voted 76-20 under a weighted vote to include the project in the *2040 Plan* and subsequently to add it into the Transportation Improvement Program. The state Departments of Transportation from both Indiana and Indiana now carry the project on through the completion of the Tier Two Environmental Impact Statement and will seek private investors in order to advance the project.

The NIRPC Legislative Committee proposed resolutions, subsequently adopted by the full NIRPC Commission, in support of continued funding for the Regional Development Authority (RDA) and supporting commuter rail in northwestern Indiana including a West Lake extension. A further resolution created a task force to review the board composition of the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD).

The NIRPC Commission also adopted its FY 2014 annual budget of \$3,225,065 in operating costs, a 4.2% reduction in funding from the previous year.

NIRPC entered into an agreement with the newly formed Calumet Conservation

Partnership, developing capacity-building support for bi-state habitat and biodiversity conservation efforts in the ecologically critical Calumet region. \$50,000 in foundation grants from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation and the ArceLorMittal Foundation are being provided for participation in this innovative, bi-state partnership.

While 2013 saw some revenue losses in NIRPC's Municipal Separate Storm Sewer



***The Illiana Expressway public comment meeting at NIRPC on November 13***

Systems (MS4) Education and Outreach services as municipalities developed their own capacity, these were offset by the receipt of the grants listed above over the past year, given directly to NIRPC or in cooperation with partners. Stakeholders and local governments continue to express expectations that NIRPC will provide regional leadership on environmental issues. While consistent with our enabling legislation, this function of NIRPC remains unsupported by local funds. As a result, the Environmental Department supports itself through grant writing and contract services to continue to meet the region's aspirations for the agency.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) released their joint Federal Planning Certification Review Report certifying the metropolitan area transportation planning process in Northwestern Indiana. While NIRPC received one expected corrective action in the area of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), NIRPC was commended as a model for other MPOs in the areas of scenario planning and the integration of land use and transportation in its award-winning 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan; its collaborate planning efforts in constructing regional trails and

the integration of bicycle and pedestrian elements into roadway projects; its Environmental Justice methodology comparing accessibility and travel times to determine benefits and burdens on protected populations; and its commitment to improving the current status of ADA compliance in the region. The Report also listed a number of recommendations to make the transportation planning process even better in northwestern Indiana. NIRPC will continue to work closely with FHWA and FTA in the coming year to satisfy the correction and further advance the planning process. ITS strategies have much to offer the region in helping to make the region safer and enhance the efficiency of travel.

Scoring a major advancement in realizing the implementation goals of the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*, NIRPC launched the Creating Livable Communities program, providing \$400,000 in funding over the next two years to support community-based transportation/land use projects that bring vitality to downtown areas, neighborhoods, transit station areas, commercial cores, and transit corridors, funding both development and redevelopment projects. The program is open to local governments, transportation agencies, and community-based nonprofit organizations. (Non-governmental organizations must partner with a local governmental agency.) The essence of the program is to concentrate future growth within a defined perimeter around central locations which are defined within each community in coordination with that community's goals. It can help to bolster the sense of community among residents, increasing mobility options and reducing mobility costs and helping to make the most efficient use of limited public resources for investment in transportation and development initiatives.

Finally, as NIRPC entered the New Year, it received news that its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2012 qualifies for a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association. According to the GFOA, this is the "highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management."