

Developing Land Use Strategies for Northwest Indiana:

Coastal Connections 2006 Land Use Roundtable

Northwest Indiana is a region of 1,520 square miles comprising a diversity of land uses ranging from the environmentally, unique Indiana Dunes to one of the nation's largest concentrations of heavy industry.



Courtesy of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

The U.S. Bureau of Census estimates that 761,581 people resided in the northwest Indiana region of Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties in 2005. The Census Bureau figures show that the region experienced a 3.2 percent growth in population from 2000-2005, with a 17.5 percent growth in residential building permits in unincorporated areas.

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture calculated that the percentage of agricultural land in the region declined by 13 percent to 53 percent; a loss of nearly 70,000 acres from 1982-2002.

Together, these statistics demonstrate land use development patterns away from established municipal infrastructure and services and into rural farm areas. Regional growth trends indicate a need to look at policy alternatives to guide future growth in the region and to preserve the region's natural and cultural treasures.

Developing Land Use Strategies for Northwest Indiana

In fall of 2005, the Great Lakes Commission began discussions with state and regional stakeholders in northwest Indiana to plan a land-use roundtable as part of the Commission's land-use roundtable series. The roundtable series builds on previous Commission work that identifies 32 strategies for balanced growth for Linking Brownfields Redevelopment and Greenfields Protection for Sustainable Development



(www.glc.org/bridges/finalreport.pdf). The roundtable series enables the Commission staff to engage individual member states and key stakeholders to promote the recommended strategies through the design and conduct of a land-use policy roundtable. Each roundtable builds upon past accomplishments as well as current initiatives within the state. See www.glc.org/landuse.

The purpose of the Indiana roundtable was to foster greater coordination and advancement of efforts toward implementing sustainable land use practices and a regional vision in northwest Indiana among state, regional and local decisionmakers.

The Indiana Roundtable Steering Committee – comprised of state agency representatives, academic institutions, NGO's, local governments, regional planning agencies and opinion leaders – determined that focusing on a subset of these strategies identified by the Commission would best serve northwest Indiana. Building consensus around ways to implement selected policies was established as a key objective.

The subset of strategies selected by the Steering Committee is described in Table 1.

A group of graduate students enrolled in the Indiana University Northwest's Public and Environmental Affairs and Political Science program conducted research on the current status of Indiana state programs and policies within respect to the 6 strategic actions.

Their research includes information on:

- What had been and is being done to address the particular strategy in Indiana
- Best practices in other states
- Proposed methods to implement each of the strategies

Their research was pulled together into policy summaries that were reviewed and discussed at the roundtable.

Coastal Connections 2006 Land Use Roundtable

On April 27, 2006, a land use policy roundtable convened on the campus of Indiana University Northwest in Gary, Ind.



Mayor Morris describes the Newporte Landing redevelopment project in the city of LaPorte

More than 60 decisionmakers and regional stakeholders attended. Morning sessions were designed to familiarized attendees with greenfield protection and brownfield redevelopment issues in northwest Indiana. Using electronic voting technology, the audience evaluated their own knowledge of these issues. After the self-evaluation exercise, overview presentations on greenfield protection, brownfield redevelopment and the linkages between the two were offered. The presentations highlighted economic, community and ecological benefits of brownfield redevelopment and greenfield redevelopment. Next, case studies in northwest Indiana that demonstrated these benefits were discussed. Finally, the 6 strategies and their progress to date in northwest Indiana were presented.

During the afternoon breakout sessions, attendees had the opportunity to discuss the variety of implementation options for each of the 6 strategies. The breakout groups were charge with prioritizing implementation options for selected strategies. The first group discussed plans, ordinances and inventories (Strategies A-C). The second group focused on state funding and coordination (Strategies D and E). The last group addressed sustainable infill and brownfield

Table I: Six Strategies

A. Development of Local Comprehensive Plans

Encourage the development of local comprehensive plans and provide funding to support their development. Such funding should be contingent on plans that reflect state/provincial planning goals or that include designated areas for growth and also for protection; promote urban revitalization, greenfields protection and transit and/or pedestrian-oriented development patterns that enhance neighborhoods and reduce public infrastructure and service costs and discourage sprawl; and are prepared through local interjurisdictional agreements or in cooperation with other municipalities.

B. Consistency between Zoning Ordinances and Comprehensive Plans

Require that zoning ordinances be consistent with comprehensive plans.

C. Inventory of Indiana Wildlife Habitat, Farmland, Cultural and Historic Resources

As part of comprehensive plans or as an independent effort, jurisdictions in urban fringe and rural areas should incorporate into their comprehensive plans, inventory information regarding: wildlife habitat (including acreage and capacity to support viable plant and animal populations), prime farmland acreage, and cultural and historic resources. This information can be used develop mitigation/protection measures in advance of development proposals.

D. Link Brownfields Funding with Planning

Tie state funding for brownfields cleanup and redevelopment to land-use planning by encouraging consistency with up-to-date comprehensive plans as a condition for brownfields funding, particularly in metropolitan and other urbanized areas.

E. Interagency Coordination for State-Funded Projects

Strengthen coordination among state agencies for state-funded projects that will directly result in changes in land use and establish a process for multi-agency evaluation of such projects that: a) ensures that such projects support state planning goals and/or the mutual goals of greenfields protection and brownfields redevelopment/urban revitalization and b) requires the consideration of alternatives where the project is inconsistent with local land-use plans.

F. Sustainable Infill and Brownfield Redevelopment

Through financial incentives (such as expedited permitting), and other appropriate means, promote the sustainable redevelopment of underutilized sites in urban areas, including small-scale infill sites and brownfields.



Roundtable attendees in plenary

redevelopment (Strategy F). The implementation options discussed are presented in Table 2. Those that were selected as highest priority are highlighted in blue font.

Land Use Policy Priorities for Northwest Indiana

After breakout, the groups convened in plenary where all attendees evaluated the top 3 implementation option of each breakout group (9 in total) based on three criteria: achievability, importance and cost-effectiveness. An electronic voting system was used for this, allowing votes to be tabulated and the results to be viewed instantaneously.



Attendees view results of the voting exercise

Despite expectations of a wider prioritization range, the results of the voting exercises indicate that for roundtable participants, all 9 implementation options are important, achievable and relatively cost effective. Figure 1 on the proceeding page shows the average responses for all implementation options clustered in the upper right hand corner of the chart.

Table 2: Implementation Options

A. Development of Local Comprehensive Plans

- A1. State funding for planning.
- A2. State smart growth task force.
- A3. Legislation to require concurrency.
- A4. Statewide funding for technical assistance.

B. Consistency between Zoning Ordinances and Comprehensive Plans

- B1. State incentives for zoning consistency with plans.
- B2. Develop model ordinances.
- B3. Enact legislation requiring zoning consistency with plans.

C. Inventory of Indiana Wildlife Habitat, Farmland, Cultural and Historic Resources

- C1. DNR clearinghouse for natural, cultural and historic features data.
- C2. Interagency coordination of data.
- C3. Natural, cultural and historic features state funding requirement.

D. Link Brownfield Funding with Planning

- D1. Link local funding to updated local plans
- D2. Make local planning consistency a state funding eligibility criterion.
- D3. NIRPC strategic planning for economic development.

E. Interagency Coordination for State-Funded Projects

- E1. Coordinative body for state-funded projects.
- E2. Build capacity to coordinate coastal projects.
- E3. Reinvigorate the Interagency Brownfields Task Force.

F. Sustainable Infill and Brownfield Redevelopment

- F1. Include sustainability consideration in site assessment.
- F2. State brownfield grant and loan programs.
- F3. Sustainable Indiana Fund.
- F4. Expedited permits.
- F5. Tools and data for project planning.
- F6. Productive partnerships.
- F7. Private-sector financial incentives.
- F8. Tax Increment Financing.
- F9. Storm water fee systems with rebates.
- F10. Property tax incentives.
- F11. Participative planning processes.

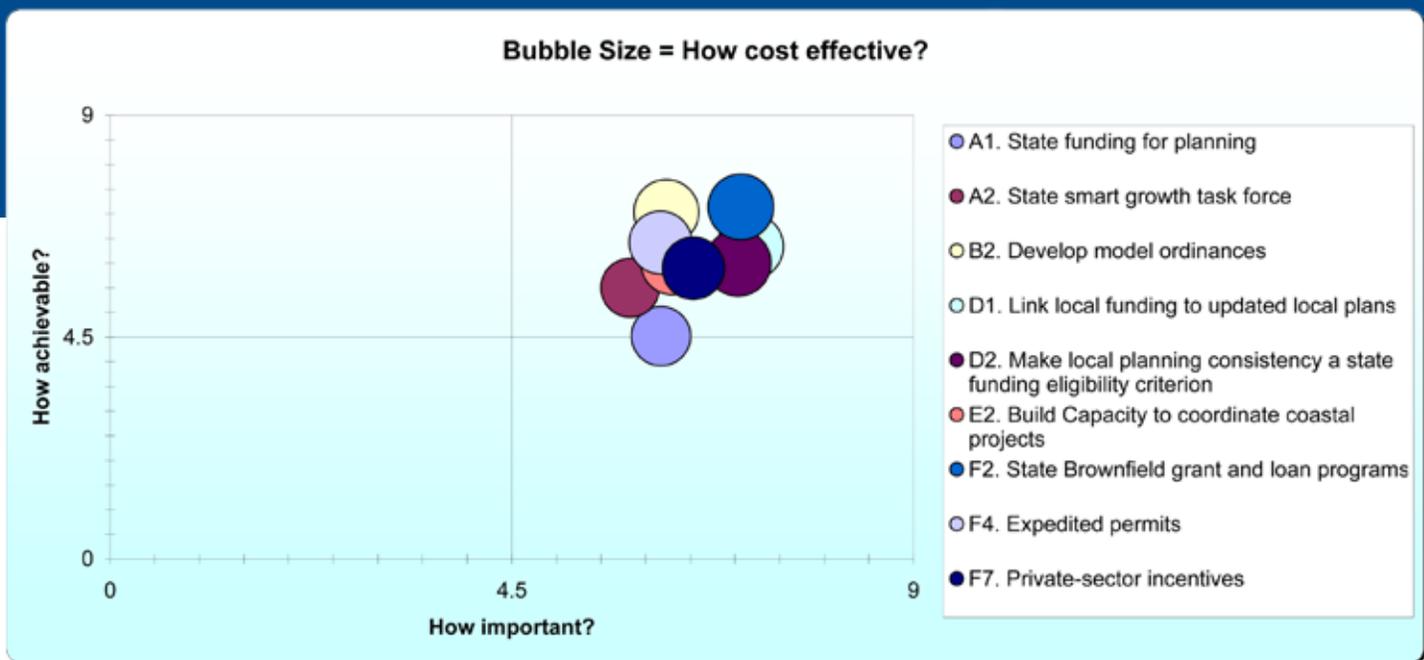


Figure 1: Voting Results

The discussion of the voting results focused on those implementation options that were most important, and how to make them more achievable since the majority of the participants thought that achievability was a key criteria. Obstacles to implementation and how to overcome those obstacles were further discussed.

The three implementation options that were voted to be most important are:

F2. State brownfield grant and loan program incentives for sustainable redevelopment – State agencies should fine-tune state brownfield grant and low interest loan programs to create stronger incentives for committing to the sustainable redevelopment of sites (Related to Strategy E – see Table 1).

D1. Link local funding to updated local plans – Local development authorities should develop local funding sources for brownfields and make the funding eligible for communities, or regions that have an updated (less than 5 years old) comprehensive or strategic growth plan in place (Related to Strategy D).

D2. Make local planning consistency a state funding eligibility criterion - Through state agency rule, policy or guidance change, make consistency with local comprehensive plans an eligibility criterion for state grants, loans and other brownfields redevelopment incentives (Related to Strategy D).

An obstacle to implementation options D1 and D2 is the extreme fragmentation of local government. There seemed to be general consensus that local governments working with the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission will help to overcome this extreme fragmentation. Other suggestions were made for promoting sustainable land use and advancing implementation of the deleted strategies, which are presented in a detailed summary available online at www.glc.org/landuse/inroundtable.

Making a Difference

Participants rated their intent to use information gained in the roundtable. An impressive 80 percent of the participants plan to incorporate the implementation options discussed at the roundtable to their work.

Taking the Next Steps

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) will be working with its state, regional and local partners to put these implementation options into action through conferences and other various information and outreach campaigns.

Acknowledgments

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For More Information

For more information on the Coastal Connections 2006 Land Use Roundtable event, please contact the Great Lakes Commission or visit www.glc.org/landuse/inroundtable



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