

Economy & Place Committee
February 11, 2026
Meeting Minutes

Chairman George Topoll began the Economy & Place Committee meeting at 10:02 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance and introductions.

Voting members: George Topoll, John Matwyshyn, Lois Whittaker, Andy Vasquez, and Joe Wszolek.

Guests attending: Doug Ross, Michelle Murday Pariso, Gerry White, Quinn Proudler, Kate McGill, Greg Falkowski, A.J. Bytnar, and David Phelps.

NIRPC staff: Eman Ibrahim, Denarie Kane, Tom Vander Woude, and Meredith Stilwell.

Chairman Topoll noted one correction for a misspelling. On motion by John Matwyshyn, seconded by Joe Wszolek, October 8, 2025, minutes were approved with the correction of the misspelling.

Presentation: Gerry White – Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) Site Certification Program

Gerry White provided an overview of the OCRA Indiana Site Certified Program, which identifies, evaluates, and certifies sites that are ready for economic development. The program helps build a statewide portfolio of high-quality, investment-ready sites and reduces risk by completing due diligence upfront to uncover and address potential site issues. Certified sites are actively promoted to site selectors and businesses considering expansion or relocation, demonstrating community readiness and commitment to economic development.

White explained that the program benefits communities by lowering barriers for developers, accelerating site development, and improving competitiveness in attracting jobs and capital. Additional advantages include enhanced credibility for certified sites, reduced developer risk, and greater potential to attract new investment.

The program includes three certification tiers, each representing a different level of due diligence and site readiness. Communities may select the tier that best aligns with their site characteristics and strategic objectives. White also outlined the application process and post-certification steps.

All contact information and resource links referenced during the presentation are included in the PowerPoint, which will be posted on NIRPC's website.

CEDS Update: Denarie Kane, NIRPC EDD Coordinator

Economic Development District Coordinator Denarie Kane reported that the update to the CEDS awaits review by EDA. She said there is work ongoing associated with business identification for the quantum technology related cluster (refer to CEDS Goal 1). Annie Cruz-Porter at Purdue's Center for Regional Development (PCRD) has been involved in these virtual meetings along with others who can help with NAICS code understanding and business identification. PCRD has been working on the identification of new industry clusters for EDA. Ms. Kane said she will be meeting with LEDOs to also help identify local businesses that can be suppliers to this cluster or benefit from the proximity to quantum technology efforts or needs.

Ms. Kane reminded the committee of the inclusion in the CEDS to "continue to work on the mitigation and remediation of brownfield sites" (refer to CEDS Goal 3). She requested that AJ Bytnar, Director of Economic Development for the Regional Development Authority inform the committee further about a recent grant submission. Mr. Bytnar stated that the RDA had submitted an EPA grant request under the Coalition Assessment category to advance coordinated brownfields assessment,

planning, and redevelopment readiness in Lake and Porter counties. NIRPC is part of this Coalition as is the town of Porter, the town of Pines, and the city of Lake Station.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update: Tom Vander Woude, NIRPC Director of Transportation
NIRPC must update NWI 2050+ by April 2028. This update is planned as a limited update, not a full rewrite. It maintains a 2050 horizon year, the existing goals, vision, and chapter structure. The planning process will include updating all performance measures and data, conducting public engagement, providing stakeholder outreach on implementation progress, updating socioeconomic forecasts, updating the financial plan, and completing the air quality conformity analysis. The focus of the update will be to evaluate progress since NWI 2050+, identify actionable implementation strategies, and prepare a fiscally constrained project list.

Land Use & Housing Update: Eman Ibrahim, NIRPC Planning Manager

Eman Ibrahim provided an update on Land Use & Housing, including the status of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in Northwest Indiana communities and the location of the housing affordability snapshot for 29 communities on the NIRPC website.

Eman also presented on the corridor urbanism concept, which was adopted in the NWI 2050+ to help revitalize urban corridors. The discussion covered the principles and characteristics of corridor urbanism. A case study of Monon Blvd. in Carmel, Indiana, at Midtown Plaza, demonstrated the optimal application of the corridor urbanism concept. She also presented Hohman Avenue in Hammond as an example of corridor urbanism. Hohman Avenue has three Monon Corridor train stations and is about 0.25 mile from the upcoming downtown train station in Hammond. The City of Hammond reconstructed Hohman Ave between Sibley and Douglas streets, realigned Rimbach Street, relocated the rotunda at Rimbach Plaza, and improved parking, walkability, and landscaping. Another candidate corridor for corridor urbanism is Broadway in Gary, Merrillville, Crown Point, and Kennedy in Hammond.

Other Business

Tom Vander Woude spoke briefly on the Bridges and Safety Infrastructure for Community Success (BASICS) Act, which is new piece of transportation legislation introduced and supported by the Local Officials in Transportation (LOT) Coalition which is comprised of the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), the National Association of Development Organization (NADO), the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National League of Cities (NLC), and the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM).

This legislation primarily addresses transportation funding and amends the existing apportionment section of the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA). Some of the changes this act would make are shifting funding from the National Highway Performance Program to the more flexible Surface Transportation Program Block Grant Program, increasing the metropolitan planning funds available to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and establishing dedicated funding for aging bridges in need of repair. The legislation would also require that at least 25% of a state's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds be suballocated to regional planning organizations for local projects and would ensure that HSIP-funded state projects are selected in consultation with local MPOs.

Additional provisions would adjust MPO planning funds from an 80/20 federal-local match to a 100% federal share and create a voluntary pathway for MPOs to receive planning funds directly from the U.S. Department of Transportation—streamlining processes for organizations such as NIRPC.

A resolution of support for the BASICS Act is being drafted and will be presented at the February 19, 2026, Commission meeting.

Hearing no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m. The next Economy & Place Committee meeting is scheduled for April 6, 2026, at the NIRPC offices.