

A presentation was made at the same meeting on the four alternative scenarios to be considered for the new 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. A set of eight public meetings were authorized for the next month in order to receive input on the different growth scenarios.

The Executive Board approved an agreement with GRANTS, Inc., which would provide assistance to local governments in identifying, applying for, and/or administering federal, state or foundation grants. A set of four different services can be provided to local communities in this regard, with varying costs associated with each.

The Executive Board acted favorably upon a resolution proposed by the Environmental Management Policy Committee, which promotes an improved understanding of the regional impacts of and recommends the undertaking of strategies for addressing climate change.

NIRPC received the "Outstanding Planning Project" award for the Marquette Greenway connector project from the Indiana MPO Council at its conference in Jefferson, Indiana.

The Environmental Management Policy and the Transportation Policy Committees also addressed the recent action by the Indiana office of the Federal Highway Administration to deem flex-fuel vehicles as an ineligible use of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds allocated by NIRPC. At the request of the two committees, the Executive Board voted to seek support from our Congressional delegation to have this decision reconsidered. CMAQ funds had previously been approved for such purposes in the two preceding grant cycles.

The City of Hobart sponsored a Towns and Smaller Cities Council meeting, which featured presentations by Mayor Brian Snedecor and a number of other local officials from the area. A preview of the next legislative session was provided by Rep. Chet Dobis.

October. NIRPC staff conducted eight different public meetings throughout the three county area in order to obtain input on the four alternative growth scenarios for the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. Strongest support was shown for the "Infill" and "Livable Centers" scenarios. A hybrid scenario was subsequently developed and recommended for approval by the Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee, which integrates key elements of those two alternatives, plus some features of the "Local Plans" option.

NIRPC hosted the annual public hearing regarding the accessibility of public transportation to people with disabilities.

NIRPC commissioners and staff participated in the October 27 kick-off event of the "Gary Region Investment Project" sponsored by the City of Gary, Times Media, and the Metropolitan Planning Council. After a series of presentations and facilitated table discussions, keypad polling was used to show preferences among a variety of proposed projects which are deemed to have major value for Gary and the northwest Indiana region.



Stakeholders discuss goods movement at the Dec. 15 Regional Freight Workshop.

At NIRPC's full Commission meeting on October 28, the Commission adopted the proposed "2040 Growth and Revitalization Vision" as the preferred scenario for the Comprehensive Regional Plan by a vote of 28 - 1 (See the enclosed article regarding this action and pending steps in the plan's development).

At the same meeting, the full Commission adopted the 2011 budget of \$3,931,199, a 2% reduction from the 2010 budget.

November. Two stakeholder meetings were held by JumpStart Community Partners in order to secure input on the development of a Regional Entrepreneurial Action Plan. The project was funded through a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and represented the first project to be funded under the new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

A series of working group meetings were held for purposes of developing the selection criteria to be used in evaluating projects for inclusion in the new Comprehensive Regional Plan. The criteria were based upon the preferred scenarios and the previously developed goals and objectives for the new plan.

A two-day project management training course was offered to NIRPC staff and some local government planners.

NIRPC submitted documentation to the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations regarding compliance with the two corrective actions from the 2009 Planning Certification Review.

The Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission notified NIRPC that it will be relocating from Portage to Munster at the end of this year.

December. After review by the Environmental Management Policy and Transportation Policy Committees, the proposed 2010 Ped and Pedal Plan was recommended for full Commission adoption. The plan sets forth a vision and action plan for a non-motorized transportation system for the region.

Mayor Chroback shared a letter which she received from INDOT, stating that bids would be let next month for the installation of cable safety barrier on I-65 in Lake County.

The Executive Board recommended historic by-way designation for Michigan Road.

Approximately 30 public and private stakeholders participated in a facilitated freight workshop at NIRPC on December 15. The group recommended a series of policies and projects for inclusion in the freight section of the new 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

NIRPC applied for and received approval of a Federal Transit Administration Planning grant to complete the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. It will increase public outreach and engagement before plan adoption and will help fund a "launch" event for the plan.

In response to requests from the offices of Senator Lugar and Representative Visclosky, the Federal Highway Administration indicated that it would consider partial federal funding support for flex-fuel vehicles under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program. A meeting will be set for early next year to establish guidelines for the use of such grant funds.

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NIRPC

2010 Year in Review

One of the primary responsibilities of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) is to look out at least 20 years in the future and to both anticipate the needs of our area and create a vision for what our region should be.

Indeed, our most significant current work activity is to develop the first-ever comprehensive regional plan for our jurisdiction made up of Lake, Porter and La Porte. Using unprecedented public participation and a set of sophisticated planning tools, we are now entering into the final phases of developing the plan and will present it to NIRPC's full commission for consideration during spring of 2011.

While acknowledging that our work is future-oriented, it is also important that we take stock of what we have accomplished. The following is a chronological summary of the activities of this past year.

January. At the first quarterly commission meeting of the year, a new slate of Executive Board members was elected (see sidebar). Mayor Kathy Chroback of the City of La Porte became the new chair, with Mayor Tom McDermott of Hammond assuming the vice-chair position. Councilman Geof Benson of Beverly Shores was elected treasurer, and Mayor Dave Uran of Crown Point was chosen as the new secretary. The outgoing chair, Mayor Jon Costas of Valparaiso, was commended for his outstanding leadership during his term.



Kathy Chroback
Mayor of LaPorte
2010 NIRPC Chair

Former Commissioner Cliff Fleming of Burns Harbor was recognized for the accomplishments of NIRPC's Economic Development Committee during 2009, which resulted in the formation of the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NWIEDD) late in 2009.

A new Local Government Assistance Advisory Committee was established for purposes of developing and overseeing NIRPC's local government services program and assisting in the identification of and application for funding opportunities to support the region's communities. Mayor Joe Stahura of Whiting subsequently was appointed as the chair of this new initiative.

The commission also opted to support H.B. 1059 introduced by Rep. Shelli VanDenburgh, which

would direct counties throughout the state to issue provisional property tax bills and remit payments to local governments in a timely manner. Commissioners and staff participated in a Northwest Indiana Legislative Reception in Indianapolis sponsored by the Northwest Indiana Forum, which provided an opportunity to communicate with area legislators on H.B. 1059 and other key issues pending before the Indiana General Assembly. The legislation subsequently passed and was signed into law.

February. ANIRPC delegation went to Washington, D.C. to attend the National Conference on Regions sponsored by the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) and to meet with the Congressional delegation to promote a legislative agenda for the region.

The delegation was comprised of Chair Kathy Chroback, Vice-Chair Tom McDermott, Treasurer Geof Benson, Secretary Dave Uran, NARC representative Dave Shafer, and Executive Director John Swanson. The delegation met with Representatives Pete Visclosky and Joe Donnelly and urged their support for a number of legislative initiatives, including the Jobs for America bill, the transportation reauthorization, and funding for a segment of the Marquette Greenway trail.

The NIRPC Executive Board received a briefing

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by Roger Sims of the Indiana High Speed Rail Association on the grant applications submitted by the State of Indiana for federal funding. The board was also advised that the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission appointed Mr. Dan Repay as its new executive director and that he would be serving as a full-time member of the NIRPC staff.

The final lettings and fund obligations under the federal Economic Stimulus (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or ARRA) occurred in February through April of 2010. In total, about \$61.3 million was expended on 149 highway and transit projects. This included \$20.2 million on 66 NIRPC-selected highway projects, \$21.9 million on 53 NIRPC-selected transit projects, \$4.1 million on five (5) INDOT-selected local highway projects, and \$15.1 million on 25 state projects on INDOT routes. Construction of all but four of the ARRA-funded highway projects occurred during the spring and summer months of 2010. Staff took steps to prepare for a second round of Stimulus funding for transportation projects. However, Federal funding was not forthcoming.

NIRPC was awarded an ARRA Watershed Planning Grant in the amount of \$150,330 by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management. This funding will be used to hire staff to re-invigorate NIRPC's watershed planning program by building upon the existing regional watershed framework and re-establishing the working relationships with watershed partners. The funding will also ensure that water quality and stormwater issues can be fully integrated into the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

March. The Executive Board received an overview of the proposed Comprehensive Development Strategy (CEDS) released by the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District (NWIEDD) for review. Once adopted, the new CEDS would allow for future infrastructure and other grant funding for the region from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

The board also received and expressed its support for a report from the Cline Avenue Coalition to the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) on the replacement of the Cline Avenue Bridge in East Chicago. Director John Swanson presented an overview

of the proposed Illiana Expressway at two hearings of the Indiana House Roads and Transportation Committee in Indianapolis and Crown Point. The hearings were intended to secure input on a bill authorizing the use of public – private partnership legislation to finance the Illiana.

At its annual conference in Indianapolis, the Indiana Planning Association awarded NIRPC top honors for the community initiative and project marketing categories for the Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana and the Marquette Greenway Connector Trail proposal respectively

After a distinguished 39-year career with NIRPC, Lauren Rhein retired from NIRPC on March 31. Lauren had been responsible for the agency's Census, population and economic data and forecasting work during her tenure and was frequently acknowledged for her extraordinary assistance to area communities.

The Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee endorsed the goals and objectives for the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

April. The decennial Census was conducted on April 1, with widespread support from the region's local governments and community groups to obtain as complete a population count as possible.

NIRPC held two environmental justice workshops in the City of Gary on April 16 – 17. The sessions were conducted by a Federal Highway Administration official, who described the federal environmental justice requirements and how Metropolitan Planning Organizations such as NIRPC should analyze the benefits and burdens of their planning and programming activities, while assuring the active involvement of environmental justice communities with concentrations of minority or low income populations.

Commissioner Chuck Oberlie, Mayor of Michigan City and Chair of the Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee, reported on the draft goals and objectives prepared by the committee for the 2040 plan currently under development. The next steps in the plan-making process leading up to Commission adoption in 2011 were presented to the full Commission membership.

The Commission adopted a new Vision and Strategic Directions for NIRPC for the period 2010 – 2013 based upon the recommendations of a special committee chaired by Councilman Bob Schaefer of Long Beach. The new Vision and Strategic Directions will guide the agency's work plan and organizational development over the four-year time period and supersedes the previous version.

At the urging of NIRPC Vice-Chair and Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott, the Executive Board voted unanimously to write to INDOT to request the installation of cable barrier fencing on the median of I-65 between U.S. 231 and the Kankakee River in Lake County to prevent future cross-over accidents, which frequently involve loss of life and/or serious injuries.

Approximately 70 people attended the meeting of the Towns and Smaller Cities Council in Rolling Prairie to learn about potential sewer service in the area and grant funding available from the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs.

At its April meeting, the NWIEDD unanimously adopted the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region, which establishes the eligibility for future grant funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Through funding made available from the ARRA Watershed Planning Grant, Joe Exl joined the NIRPC staff as Sr. Water Resources Planner.

May. Following months of deliberation by a working group, the Transportation Policy Committee, and the Executive Board, the board voted unanimously to adopt a "Complete Streets" policy and guidelines to assure that roadways will accommodate safe and efficient access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Project sponsors using NIRPC-attributable funds will be asked to provide documentation in their funding request to indicate the inclusion of "Complete Streets" facilities. NIRPC became the third Indiana Metropolitan Planning Organization to adopt such a policy. At the same May meeting, the Executive Board passed a resolution of support for the State Historic By-way Designation for Old

Lincoln Highway and endorsed American Discover Trail legislation.

Director Swanson reported that the Northwest Indiana Community Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS-4) Partnership coordinated by NIRPC recently received a certificate of recognition from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, along with the Lake County Surveyor's Office, Lakes of the Four Seasons, Lowell, Crown Point and Chesterton.

The Northwest Indiana Community MS-4 Partnership conducted an illicit discharge workshop for MS-4 members and other interested parties.

June. Commissioner Dave Shafer, Clerk-Treasurer of the Town of Munster, was re-elected to the Region VI seat of the Executive Board of the National Association of Regional Councils at the group's annual conference in Cleveland. Dave represents the regional councils serving Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

At the same conference, NARC presented its "Outstanding Achievement Award" to NIRPC for the December 2008 Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana. NIRPC also received a runner-up award for the Marquette Greenway Connector Trail Plan.

NIRPC received delivery of hundred of gas cans, which were distributed during the year at various locations, continuing NIRPC's successful gas can exchange program.

The NIRPC Executive Board adopted the 2011 – 2012 Unified Planning Work Program, which provides for a number of new planning initiatives and local services, including work in the areas of Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plans, environmental mitigation, and environmental justice. Included in the two-year program is the completion of the Comprehensive Regional Plan.

July. A freight study for northwest Indiana was completed by Cambridge Systematics, Inc. and presented at the full

Commission meeting. The report provides data on freight activity in the region by mode of transportation and identifies issues and opportunities regarding freight mobility. A follow-up project will engage freight stakeholders in the identification of freight policies and projects for the new 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

NIRPC met with watershed coordinators and stakeholders in Northwest Indiana and adjacent counties to gather input on updating the 2005 Watershed Framework. As a result of this meeting the update will present information at a watershed scale, rather than by sub-basin as it is currently, making it a more



NIRPC received the 2010 Outstanding Achievement award from the National Association of Regional Councils for the Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana at the annual conference in Cleveland. Accepting the award (left to right) were NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson, NARC President Jim Townsend, LaPorte Mayor and NIRPC Chair Kathy Chrobak, Transportation Planner Gabrielle Biciunas and Griffith Councilman and NIRPC Transportation Policy Committee Chair Stan Dobosz.

user-friendly resource for those interested in developing watershed plans for their areas.

Treasurer Geof Benson reported that the State Board of Accounts audit for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2009 had been completed. The agency's financial condition remained strong, and, for the sixth consecutive audit, there were no audit findings issued.

The Town of Hebron hosted the Towns and Smaller Cities Council meeting, and the new comprehensive plan for the Town of Hebron was presented by NIRPC Commissioner and Hebron Council President Don Ensign. Reports were also presented on the rural development programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the proposed grant assistance activities agreement between GRANTS, Inc. and NIRPC.

An application for a \$50,000 federal planning grant for the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District was filed. The Northwest Indiana Forum and NIRPC agreed to split the "local match" for the grant and provide support activities for the new district.

August. At the invitation of Cong. Joe Donnelly, Chair Kathy Chrobak, Commissioners Geof Benson, Chuck Oberlie and Steve Mockler and Director John Swanson attended a briefing in South Bend on federal transportation legislation by Cong. James Oberstar, the chair of the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation of Chicago awarded NIRPC a \$25,000 grant for purposes of undertaking a food system planning initiative in northwest Indiana, which would be integrated into the new 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan. NIRPC interns Beth Shrader and Colin Highlands had a lead role in the installation of rain gardens, native landscaping, and interpretative signage on the NIRPC campus in Portage, with funding provided by a grant from the Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program. The work complemented the City of Portage's unveiling earlier in the summer of the Northside Business Park in which the NIRPC building is located. The business park makes extensive use of native landscaping, green infrastructure and on-site stormwater management practices.

Partnering with a variety of stakeholders in the Plum Creek-Little Calumet River watershed, NIRPC's Environmental Department submitted a Federal Clean Water Act Section 319 grant application to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management seeking funds to develop a watershed management plan. Award announcements are expected around July 2011.

September. Chairman Dan Dernulc of the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission briefed the Executive Board on the status of the flood control project on the river, the protection barriers for which were expected to be completed by the end of 2010.