

the regional view

the newsletter of the northwestern indiana regional planning commission

Spring 2012 Issue

Benson Chosen as New NIRPC Chair

By: John Swanson

At the January 19, 2012 full membership meeting of the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Beverly Shores Council President Geof Benson was elected as the NIRPC Chair for the next year. Benson is the first Beverly Shores official to serve in this capacity. Since being appointed to the Commission in 2008, he has served as Chair of the Environmental Management Policy Committee and as a member of NIRPC's Executive Board and the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee. In February of this year, Benson was also chosen to fill a vacant seat as the District VI member of the Executive Board of the National Association of Regional Councils.

The other officers elected at the January meeting were:

- Vice Chair David Uran, Mayor, City of Crown Point;
- Treasurer Brian Snedecor, Mayor, City of Hobart
- Secretary Blair Milo, Mayor, City of La Porte

The remaining Executive Board positions will be filled by: Nancy Adams, Porter County Commissioner; Roosevelt Allen, Lake County Commission Chair; Ken Layton, LaPorte County Commission




*2012 NIRPC Chairman Geof Benson,
Beverly Shores Town Council*

Chair; Tom McDermott, Jr., Mayor, City of Hammond; Bob Schaefer, Town of Long Beach Council President; and Jim Ton, Chesterton Town Council. State Representative Chet Dobis of Merrillville will continue to serve on the Executive Board as the appointment of the Governor of Indiana.

After his election to office, Benson stated: "I am honored and thrilled to have the opportunity to serve the region as NIRPC's Chair this year. I would like to thank the past chairs and previous commissioners for being role models and mentors for me and my

town council for reappointing me to the NIRPC commission. We have an exciting year ahead of us at NIRPC

with the implementation of the 2040 plan, the Economic Development District Board and a Marquette Plan revision. I look forward to working with the great NIRPC staff and all the commissioners, including our first-ever President-elect to the National Association of Regional Councils, Munster's Clerk-Treasurer, David Shafer." 

John Swanson is NIRPC's Executive Director. He can be reached by email at jswanson@nirpc.org, or by phone at 219-763-6060, ext. 101.

2012 NIRPC Executive Board

Chairman.....**Geof Benson**
Beverly Shores Town Council

Vice-Chairman.....**David Uran**
Mayor of Crown Point

Treasurer.....**Brian Snedecor**
Mayor of Hobart

Secretary.....**Blair Milo**
Mayor of La Porte

Executive Board.....**Roosevelt Allen, Jr.**
Lake County Commission

Executive Board.....**Thomas M. McDermott, Jr.**
Mayor of Hammond

Executive Board.....**Nancy Adams**
Porter County Commission

Executive Board.....**Jim Ton**
Chesterton Town Council

Executive Board.....**Ken Layton**
LaPorte County Commission

Executive Board.....**Robert Schaefer**
Long Beach Town Council

Executive Board.....**Chester Dobis**
Indiana State Representative

Executive Director.....**John Swanson**
NIRPC

Requests for alternate formats, please contact Stephen Sostaric at NIRPC at (219) 763-6060 extension 155 or at ssostaric@nirpc.org. Individuals with hearing impairments may contact us through the Indiana Relay 711 service by calling 711 or (800) 743-3333.


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Local Food Study Wraps Up, Work Far From Over

By: *Kevin Garcia*

In November, 2010, over 40 stakeholders tied to the local food system in Northwest Indiana gathered at NIRPC to kick off the Northwest Indiana Local Food Study (NILFS). Farmers, food distributors, chefs, waste management reps, local food activists, government officials, and others participated in discussions and breakout sessions that laid the foundation for NILFS and identified issues to be addressed in the study.

Funded through a grant from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, NILFS has recently wrapped up after nearly a year and a half of study. On April 19th, NILFS will be presented to the Full Commission for final approval. The study is an existing conditions report on Northwest Indiana's food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste/reuse system – collectively called the “local food system”. NILFS also identifies and discusses key issues pertaining to the food system, for example the lack of access to healthy foods in some communities, and our region's shrinking amount of prime farmland. The draft study is available on the NIRPC website; the final version will be posted upon approval.

Despite the study wrapping up, there is still much to be done. NILFS provides a baseline for understanding the current food system and its challenges. As such, it will be a useful tool for developing strategic goals and objectives to address those challenges. In addition, successful implementation of the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) will require NIRPC to do more work to promote and develop our local food system. NIRPC plans to use both NILFS and the CRP as guides for our future work in this area. 

If you have any questions or comments about NILFS, please contact the study's project manager, Kevin Garcia, at 219-763-6060 ext. 125 or kgarcia@nirpc.org.

NIRPC Welcomes New Commissioners

Sixteen New Commissioners Join the NIRPC Board


By: John Swanson

As a result of retirements, municipal elections and new assignments, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) has taken on 16 new commissioners since the first of the year. “This is the largest turnover in members we have experienced since becoming a council of governments in 2003,” commented NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson. “We normally conduct a new commissioner orientation program in January following an election, but this time it will be necessary to do a second such session in April,” he added.

The new appointments to NIRPC are as follows:


- City of Gary
Karen Freeman-Wilson, Mayor
- City of La Porte
Blair Milo, Mayor
- City of Michigan City
Richard Murphy, Councilman
- City of Portage
James Snyder, Mayor
- La Porte County Council
Matt Bernacchi, Chair
- Town of Burns Harbor
Jeff Freeze, Councilman
- Town of Highland
Brian Novak, Councilman
- Town of Kingsbury
Mark Ritter, Councilman

- Town of Lowell
Donald Parker, Councilman
- Town of Michiana Shores
Patrick Margraf, Clerk-Treasurer
- Town of Ogden Dunes
Tom Clouser, Councilman
- Town of Pines
George Adey, Councilman
- Town of Porter
Greg Stinson, Council President
- Town of Trail Creek
John Bayler, Councilman
- Town of Wanatah
Diane Noll, Clerk-Treasurer
- Town of Winfield
James Simmons, Councilman

At the December meeting, NIRPC Chair and Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott, Jr. thanked the commissioners who were leaving the Commission for their many years of service to the agency and the region, including Mayor Kathy Chroback of LaPorte, Mayor Chuck Oberlie of Michigan City, Mayor Olga Velazquez of Portage, Highland Clerk-Treasurer Michael Griffin, Michiana Shores Clerk-Treasurer Steve Millick, Ogden Dunes Councilman Eric Kurtz, Porter Councilwoman Michele Bollinger, Trail Creek Councilman Ron Lombard, and Wanatah Clerk-Treasurer Steve Mockler. 

John Swanson is NIRPC's Executive Director. He can be reached by email at jswanson@nirpc.org, or by phone at 219-763-6060, ext. 101.

What does it take to be a member of the NIRPC Board of Commissioners?


Membership on the NIRPC Board of Commissioners is specified in state law. Each County Board of Commissioners, County Council and County Surveyor, and the 41 municipalities has an appointment to the Board. The Governor also appoints a representative to NIRPC. Every appointment must be an elected official. 

Public Participation Plan Being Updated

By: La’Kisha Girder

NIRPC is in the process of updating its Public Participation Plan (PPP), which describes how NIRPC will engage residents and stakeholders of Northwest Indiana. The PPP is federally mandated to be updated every five years by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The last plan was written in 2007, and the new version will include updated techniques such as Face book, Twitter and the possibility of holding webinars for the public in the future. Unlike most transportation plans which require a 30 day public comment period, the PPP requires 45 days for public comment. Before this happens, a Public Participation Task Force, comprised of stakeholders and citizens from Lake, La Porte and Porter Counties, will meet between April and June 2012 to go over the current mission statement, goals, and objectives and update the plan for this year. This group will also offer additional recommendations for NIRPC to use for future outreach to the general public.

The timeline for the current plan is as follows:

January-April 2012	Meet with various NIRPC Committees about updating the PPP
April- June 2012	Hold four meetings with the Public Participation Task Force to revise select chapters of the PPP
June 2012	Post Initial Draft of the PPP 2012 on NIRPC’s website for the 45 day comment period
July 2012	Present Plan to the NIRPC Full Commission for Approval 

La’Kisha Girder is a Regional Projects Planner at NIRPC. Email: lgirder@nirpc.org; Phone: 219-763-6060, ext. 114.

Hot Days and Hot Air

By: Kathy Luther

It’s that time of year when our thoughts turn to hot summer days, bright sunshine, and weekends full of fun and sun. It is also the time of year to turn our thoughts to Air Quality Action Days and ozone pollution. Northwest Indiana has had celebratory success in improving our air quality in recent years. The mandatory and voluntary emission control investments made by our major industries, municipalities, filling stations, dry cleaners, and other businesses have paid off well. The time we have spent taking action and having our cars tested has added up to cleaner air!


Yet, we must remain vigilant. Emission reduction is like weight loss. You have to keep up the good work to maintain your success! And, some days are harder than others. That is why we have Air Quality Action Days!

Air Quality Action Days are those few days a year that weather conditions are exactly right for sunlight and chemicals in the air to make ozone, or for fine particulates to fill the air. Every extra little bit we can do on these days helps both our neighbors with breathing problems and helps Northwest Indiana hold the line on air pollution.

Indiana Department of Environmental Management data tells us that the days are most likely to occur in June, with July and August close behind. Now is the time to brush off your AQ Action Plan. What are some things individuals, communities and business can do?

- Subscribe to Air Quality Action Alerts at <http://www.illinois.enviroflash.info/>
- Spread the word
- Reduce Engine Idling...stay out of the drive thru for a day
- Avoid filling up gas tanks until dark
- Reschedule mowing to another day
- Encourage carpooling, public transit, or biking
- Combine errands into one trip.

Find these tips and more on NIRPC’s website at <http://www.nirpc.org/environment/images/OZONEACTIONDAY.gif>

And check out the Partners for Clean Air website at: <http://www.in.gov/idem/4130.htm> 

Kathy Luther is NIRPC’s Director of Environmental Programs. She can be reached by email at kluther@nirpc.org or by phone at 219-763-6060, ext. 127.

By: *Hubert Morgan*

Sylvia Planer, a resident of the City of Hammond, was my guest at the Whiting Public Library for a conversation about her role as a regional advocate and community organizer. We talked about NIRPC, and what it was like being part of a handful of pioneering Latinos in the neighborhoods of East Chicago and Whiting.

HM: Sylvia, thanks for joining me. First, let me share with our readers that you've lived in Northwest Indiana most of your life. You currently live and work in Hammond, but you went to grade school in East Chicago, high school in Whiting, and University at Purdue University Calumet. Hammond and East Chicago are two of the communities that NIRPC is focusing its Urban Core strategies on, the challenge is bringing public resources to re-invest in their infrastructure, to encourage private and other local investment in housing, the school systems and local businesses. This is the work you're advocating for in Hammond as the President of HHCC. Share with us some of your current work.

SP: My civic involvement stems from a deep-rooted appreciation of how we were brought up by my parents and by my grandparents on visits back to Texas during the summer. Giving back to my community, understanding the broader vision and its impact on the Latino community is my civic passion. I strongly believe that the more informed my community is about the available resources, the more that decisions can then be made that improves our quality of life. But the community can also be more strategic in the short-term and in its long-term future direction.

HM: You serve on a multitude of committees and boards, including NIRPC's. Tell us about their impact.


SP: I got involved with regional work to get an appreciation of the bigger picture and a regional perspective. The NIRPC 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan Steering Committee and now its Urban Core

Sub-Committee with its implementation mission, allows me to understand the region's long term vision, how the communities we live in are being planned. The work with NWI Quality of Life Council allows me to understand how we monitor the health of our communities, the indicators that measure community health.

HM: Talk about the community work you're involved in and how the regional exposure impacts that work.

SP: First, the HHCC has been around for almost 20 years. I'm currently its President. Its mission is simple, the organization comes together to enhance the quality of life for Hispanics and improve the larger community by providing information and sharing the diverse cultures we represent. We're located in Hammond. Secondly, I'm co-hosting a Hispanic/Latino Community Organization Roundtable with Ms. Brenda Pena from Su Casa in East

Chicago. There will be a series of engaging group discussions. The first is on Socio-Economics in the Latino Community, touching on how we would like to see positive impacts from new developments in our community. NIRPC's 2040 Plan helps to inform this discussion. We will have a Social Justice discussion about how media is portraying the Hispanic/Latino community and how it has shaped the public perception of Hispanic/Latino families and lifestyles. We also have an Engaging Youth for Leadership discussion and an Immigration discussion, a full agenda.

HM: You've asked me to present the 2040 CRP and its scope for implementation, the impact it could have for the Latino Community at a future HHCC meeting, I look forward to that engaging conversation in June. Sylvia, thanks for spending some time with me, you have NIRPC's full support. 

Hubert Morgan is NIRPC's Public Involvement Coordinator. Email: hmorgan@nirpc.org; Phone: 219-763-6060, ext. 153. Search Involve Northwest Indiana to connect on Facebook.




Meet the Commissioner . . .



La Porte County Commissioner Ken Layton represents the La Porte County Commission on the NIRPC board. He also serves as a member of NIRPC's Executive Board.

Born in Danville, Illinois, Mr. Layton moved to La Porte County as a child, graduating from the Westville school system in 1964. He enrolled at Indiana University Northwest and was inducted into the U.S. Army in 1966, serving in Vietnam until 1967.


Upon leaving the military, he joined the La Porte County Sheriff's Department in 1968. Mr. Layton was elected county sheriff for two terms, retiring from the department in 1996. Continuing in public service, Mr. Layton served two terms as county auditor, one as county treasurer, and was elected as a county commissioner in 2009.

Commissioner Layton is married with three children and four grandchildren. In his spare time, he enjoys many hobbies, including fishing and woodworking. As an avid motorcyclist, he particularly enjoys opportunities for cross-country travel on his motorcycle. 

Meet the NIRPC Staff . . .

Mary Thorne has served for five years as NIRPC's Planning Department Secretary. Mary came to NIRPC with a diverse employment background, from a career secretary when she lived in Chicago to an office assistant at a major campground in Indiana. Mary plays an important role as the Planning Secretary, from assisting the Deputy Director and 11 staff members with various meetings to helping with the 2008 Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana and the planning and implementation of the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.



Mary has lived in Portage for 15 years with her husband and two sons. Mary is a Porter County Master Gardener, and an active member of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Portage VFW. She is an award-winning amateur nature photographer, creating most of her work in her own backyard, designated a Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. She is currently featured in the April/May 2012 edition of *Birds & Blooms Magazine's* Backyard Photo Contest Butterfly category. 

NIRPC Receives Award for Alternative Fuel Efforts


By: Amanda Pollard

South Shore Clean Cities recently recognized region leaders for their commitment and support of alternate fuels during the group's annual meeting. The Stakeholder Awards were presented by Carl Lisek, executive director. He said the awards recognize the results of preserving and revitalizing Northern Indiana through promoting the use of clean fuels and clean-vehicle technologies.



(L-R) Charlie Cates, City of Michigan City; Jim Alexander, U.S. Steel; Kathy Luther, NIRPC; Cindy & Charlie Lundquist; and Pete Gage, Tube City IMS.

NIRPC, one of the five recipients, received the award for outstanding achievement in promoting alternate fuels and diesel emission reductions for its work to apply federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds to al-

ternative fuel vehicles. As a result, 210 vehicles were bought by local governments in the last two years. The funds have also been used for alternative fuel infrastructure and fuel purchases. NIRPC currently has more than \$10 million in federal funds programmed for local Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality projects in the 2011-2015 Transportation Improvement Program. 

Amanda Pollard is NIRPC's Environmental Educator. She can be reached by email at: aperegrine@nirpc.org or by phone at: 219-763-6060, ext. 142.