



2012 Executive Board

Geof Benson
Chairman
Beverly Shores Town Council

David Uran
Vice-Chairman
Mayor of Crown Point

Brian Snedecor
Treasurer
Mayor of Hobart

Blair Milo
Secretary
Mayor of LaPorte

Roosevelt Allen, Jr.
Executive Board
Lake County Commission

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

Nancy Adams
Executive Board
Porter County Commission

James G. Ton
Executive Board
Chesterton Town Council

Ken Layton
Executive Board
LaPorte County Commission

Robert Schaefer
Executive Board
Long Beach Town Council

Chester Dobis
Executive Board
Indiana State Representative

John Swanson
Executive Director
NIRPC

2012 Year in Review

The year 2012 was a transition year in a number of respects for the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), with many significant changes occurring in the agency. At the same time, it was a year of accomplishment. 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. Owing in large part to the municipal elections which took place the previous fall, some 19 new commissioners were appointed to the NIRPC governing board early in 2012. With more than one in three commissioners new to NIRPC, it was necessary to conduct two separate orientation programs in order to introduce them to the agency and their roles and responsibilities.

The first Norman E. Tufford Award for regional leadership was presented posthumously to Norman Tufford, NIRPC's inaugural Executive Director. The award was accepted by Norman's son, Jim, a Munster resident.

At the first quarterly meeting of the year, a new set of officers and other Executive Board members were elected. Beverly Shores Council President Geof Benson took over as the new Chairman of the Commission, succeeding Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott. The other officers chosen were Crown Point Mayor Dave Uran as Vice-Chair, Hobart Mayor Brian Snedecor as Treasurer and LaPorte Mayor Blair Milo as Secretary. Chairman Benson commended Mayor McDermott for his distinguished service to NIRPC the past year and encouraged other commissioners to assume an active role in the Commission's work.

After vigorous debate, NIRPC adopted a series of legislative positions on various pieces of proposed federal and state legislation. At the federal level, NIRPC supports a new transportation authorization which would retain the existing authorities of metropolitan planning organizations, while providing for sustainable funding

for highways, bridges, transit and freight to meet growing needs for maintenance, operation and capacity increases. NIRPC also supports the reauthorization of the U.S. Economic Development Administration. At the state level, NIRPC opposed the proposed right-to-work bill, while supporting certain ethics legislation and principles for the long-term operation and maintenance of the Little Calumet River Basin Flood Control System and legislation.

NIRPC officials participated in the Northwest Indiana legislative reception sponsored by the Northwest Indiana Forum in Indianapolis.

February. A delegation of NIRPC Commissioners comprised of Geof Benson, Dave Uran, Brian Snedecor, Blair Milo and Dave Shafer attended the National Conference on Regions sponsored by the National Association of Regional Councils(NARC) in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 13 -14. The delegation received a series of briefings by various elected and appointed officials on certain federal legislative issues pending before the current session of Congress.

Following the conference, the NIRPC delegation held face-to-face meetings with Senators Dick Lugar and Dan Coats and Representatives Pete Visclosky and Joe Donnelly to discuss the NIRPC legislative positions and other issues of interest to Northwest Indiana. The NIRPC policy positions were well received by all four Congressional officials.



Geof Benson
Beverly Shores Town Council
2012 NIRPC Chairman

At the Transportation Policy Committee meeting, staff presented a report from the Rail Vision working group with preliminary findings relating to the fifteen most serious at-grade rail crossing locations in the region.

At the same meeting, staff also discussed the process for updating NIRPC's current *Public Participation Plan*, and commissioners were urged to provide their input on developing the new plan.

NIRPC was recognized with an award at the South Shore Clean Cities annual meeting for the agency's leadership in promoting alternative fuels.

**March.** Acting upon the recommendation of the Environmental Management Policy Committee, the Executive Board adopted a substantial revision to *The Northwest Indiana Watershed Management Framework*. The new framework will facilitate the development and implementation of watershed management plans by local governments and stakeholders.

The Executive Board was briefed by representatives of the Build Indiana Council on the federal and state gas taxes and the growing gap between the funding levels of these revenue streams and the increasing costs of highway and bridge operation and maintenance.

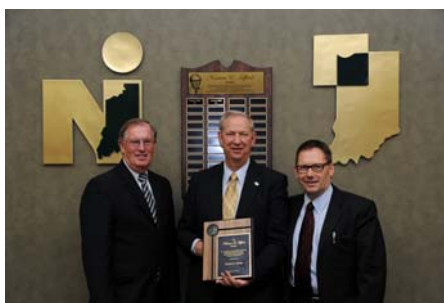
Chairman Geof Benson established a working group charged with the responsibility of addressing the congestion, safety, and air quality problems occurring at the East Gate entrance to the ArcelorMittal facility on U.S. 12 in Burns Harbor.

The new INDOT Deputy Commissioner for the LaPorte District, Robert Alderman, was introduced to and addressed the Executive Board.

NIRPC's Executive Director, John Swanson, announced his intent to retire from his position when his contract ended on December 31. Chairman Benson appointed an Executive Director Search Committee and named LaPorte County Commissioner Ken Layton as its chair.

**April.** The U.S. Attorney for Northern Indiana, David Capp, addressed the Commission and described the regional nature of criminal activity. He urged local government law enforcement officials to increase their cooperation and collaboration and especially to communicate with each other quickly and fully.

The Commission approved the Northwest Indiana Local Food Study, which identified the significance of agriculture in the region's economy, but the limited local consumption of food products grown in the region. The report identified areas of the region lacking access to fresh food ("food deserts") and identified opportunities for expanding the distribution and consumption of locally grown food within the region.



**Former Michigan City Mayor Chuck Oberlie accepting the Norman E. Tufford Award**

Former Michigan City Mayor and NIRPC Commissioner Chuck Oberlie was presented with the second Norman E. Tufford Award for his exceptional commitment of time and leadership skills during his tenure with NIRPC.

Representatives from the Illinois Department of Transportation and Indiana Department of Transportation provided a briefing on the study currently underway for the Illiana Expressway corridor. Staff identified the process which would be used to evaluate the project for possible inclusion in the long-range plan and Transportation Improvement Program.

Cal Bellamy of the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission advised the Commission that, at the request of NIRPC, eligibility for membership in that body had been expanded to include Porter and LaPorte

County local governments.

The annual Ped, Pedal, and Paddle Cornucopia event was held at the Lost Marsh clubhouse in Hammond, with attention being directed to the significant progress being made in the development of trails systems throughout Northwest Indiana.

NIRPC commissioners and staff participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the widening and safety improvements at the interchange of I-65 and S.R. 2 in Lowell.

**May.** At the request of the Environmental Management Policy Committee, the Executive Board passed a resolution requesting the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) develop a Total Maximum Daily Load Study (TMDL) of the Deep River - Portage Burns Waterway Watershed. A Clean Water Act Section 319 grant application was subsequently submitted to IDEM to develop a non-point source program for the watershed. The Executive Board also adopted the Unified Planning Work Program of the agency for FY 2013 and 2014.

With a shutdown of service looming for the Regional Bus Authority (RBA), Chairman Geof Benson submitted a request to the Lake County Council seeking their support for dedicated funding for the RBA.

The newly-created Lake Michigan Marina and Shoreline Development Commission held its first meeting for organizational purposes, with NIRPC providing staff support for the new entity.

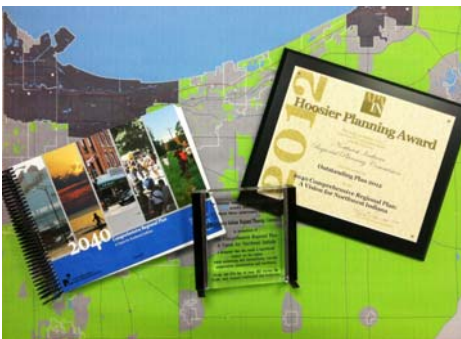
Professor Robert Rescott of Purdue University - Calumet presented a project on Northwest Indiana railroad crossings performed by a group of his engineering students for NIRPC.

The 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan received the APA Indiana's Hoosier Planning Award for the "Outstanding Plan" at the annual conference in Muncie.

**June.** At the annual conference of the National Association of Regional Councils

(NARC) in St. Petersburg, FL, Commissioner and Munster Clerk - Treasurer Dave Shafer was elected as the NARC President for the next year. This represents the first time a NIRPC and Indiana official has headed up this national organization.

Commissioner Geof Benson was elected to fill the NARC board seat previously occupied by Dave Shafer, thus giving NIRPC two representatives on the organization's Executive Board.



**2012 was an award-winning year for NIRPC and the 2040 CRP**

For the third consecutive year (and the fourth time in six years), NIRPC was awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award for a Mid-Sized Regional Council by NARC for the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

Congress passed (and President Obama subsequently signed into law) the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) transportation authorization. While the new authorization extends only through September 30, 2014, a number of restrictions upon metropolitan planning organizations did not make their way into the final version of the legislation which was enacted.

The Executive Board received a briefing by Steve Landry, Interim Director of the Gary - Chicago International Airport, on the runway extension program now underway.

After failing to secure a sustainable source of local funding, the Regional Bus Authority shut down its fixed route, complemen-

tary paratransit, and commuter bus services.

**July.** After convening a series of meetings with various bus operators in Lake County, NIRPC secured a grant from the Regional Development Authority (RDA) to provide interim demand response service by AAA Express to riders previously receiving complementary paratransit service from the RBA until North Township can expand its demand response capabilities. Gary Public Transit Corporation and East Chicago Transit increase their service with NIRPC funding assistance in order to also assist in providing service to the former RBA complementary paratransit ridership.

The Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration advised NIRPC that the two corrective actions identified in their quadrennial review have been satisfied and NIRPC is fully and unconditionally certified as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties.

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

Paul Leffler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made a presentation to the full Commission on the need for improving wetland protection and early coordination by local governments with the Corps before allowing development to proceed in such sensitive areas.

NIRPC contracted with South Shore Clean Cities for air quality education and project management services for the school bus diesel oxidation retrofit initiative.

NIRPC hosted the quarterly meeting of Chicago Wilderness in its office and conducted a tour with Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore staff of the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk.

**August.** The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) conducted a

brownfield workshop in Gary for NIRPC, Regional Development Authority (RDA), Gary, Hammond and East Chicago staff to discuss its federal grant program and present certain "best practices" for regional brownfield assessment and revolving loan fund programs.

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation awarded NIRPC a \$50,000 grant for purposes of conducting a pilot program for several green infrastructure programs in the region. Projects from Cedar Lake and East Chicago are subsequently selected for the pilot program.

The Lake Michigan Coastal Program awarded a grant of \$50,000 which will be matched by \$50,000 from the RDA for purposes of updating the Marquette Plan. The update will assess progress to date in implementing the plan and include a new historic and cultural inventory. The plan will also be converted into a Geographic Information System database administered by NIRPC.

A call for projects was issued for purposes of the updating the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy of the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District, a joint undertaking of the Northwest Indiana Forum and NIRPC.

**September.** Officials from the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration briefed the full Commission on the new MAP-21 federal transportation authorization.

The Executive Director Search Committee conducted interviews with finalists for the position. Approximately 250 applicants submitted their resumes for the Executive Director position.

Matt Greller, Executive Director of the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns (IACT), addressed a joint meeting of the Local Government Assistance Advisory Committee and the Northwest Indiana Council of Towns and Smaller Cities on the resources, services and legislative program of IACT.

Grants were received from the Dean and





Barbara White Foundation, the Discovery Alliance, the Legacy Foundation, and the Porter County Community Foundation for purposes of matching a grant from the Federal Transit Administration to produce a video about the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan.

**October.** At the Commission meeting, President and Chief Executive Officer of the RDA, Bill Hanna, discussed the role of the RDA and its accomplishments to date. He highlighted the projects which have thus far been funded, the leveraging of its grant funds, the job creation and return on its investments.

The Commission adopted the FY 2013 annual budget of \$3,346,416, a 7 ½% reduction in funding from the previous year.

A major update of the agency's Public Participation Plan was released for public review and comment.

A group of NIRPC staff members volunteered their time and services for the Adopt-a-Beach Clean Up Day. Staff collected more than 68 pounds of trash during the day.

At the annual conference of the Indiana Metropolitan Planning Organization Council in Bloomington, Executive Director John Swanson accepted an award for the Outstanding Transportation Project on behalf of the Cities of Hammond and Whiting for the George Lake Pedestrian Bridge.

At a special Commission meeting on October 29, the Commission unanimously appointed Mr. Tyson Warner as its fourth Executive Director. Warner previously served as the Planning Director of the Will County Land Use Department and was on the staffs of the North-eastern Illinois Planning Commission and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. At the time of his selection, he was serving as the inaugural Executive Director of the Flint Hills Regional Council in Kansas, the first new regional council to be established in twenty years. He began his service with



**Tyson Warner**  
*NIRPC's fourth Executive Director*

NIRPC on January 1, 2013.

**November.** As President of the National Association of Regional Councils, Dave Shafer addressed the annual conference and meeting of the Indiana Association of Regional Councils. John Swanson was recognized for his service as President of the organization for the past year.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held outside the NIRPC office for the City of Portage's 1.3 mile North Side Trail. The NIRPC/Forum building entrance area is the trailhead for the facility.

The Environmental Management Policy Committee considered a request by the Pines Group to request a USEPA study of the radioactivity of fly ash present in the Town of Pines.

NIRPC staff participated in the dedication of the Vale Park Interchange on Hwy. 49 in Valparaiso, which features context sensitive development, natural landscaping, and a pedestrian and bicycle lane.

A joint meeting of the Local Government Assistance Committee and the Towns and Smaller Council was held in Cedar Lake and featured a presentation by a representative of the Purdue Local Technical Assistance Program regarding cost recovery for damage to highway facil-

ities and the NIRPC role and process for evaluating the Illiana Expressway.

**December.** Acting upon the recommendation of the Transportation Policy Committee, the Executive Board approved the new Urban Area Boundary for the region based upon the 2010 Census.

The project staff for the Illiana Expressway provided an updated briefing on the Illiana Expressway study and the preferred alignment for the potential facility. The Executive Board was advised that a Record of Decision and sign-off on the Environmental Impact Statement is expected early in 2013.

A memorandum of understanding was negotiated between the RBA and NIRPC to dispose of the remaining funds of the former organization to other transit entities in Lake and Porter Counties.

Legislative positions were adopted for the forthcoming session of the U.S. Congress on the topics of reauthorization of the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the next surface transportation authorization.

A new NIRPC website was developed and went live in time for the new year.

Work was completed on the video for the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan, which became available for viewing after the first of the year.



**Hammond entrepreneur Raymundo Garcia**  
*being interviewed for the 2040 CRP video*