

From Brownfields to Quantum-Ready: What It Takes to Transform a Region

2.5 years of research, community engagement & ecosystem mapping
for the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission

Celena Green, CEcD, EDP

NIRPC Full Commission Meeting 7.16.2026

Project Overview

Brownfield Redevelopment for New Business Attraction to Quantum Fiber Corridor

- Part of nationwide Economic Recovery Corps (ERC), hosted locally by NIRPC.
- Goal: Identify 8 brownfield sites within the quantum fiber corridor and research strategies for overcoming barriers to their redevelopment
- Lake County: Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, Lake Station

How This Work Supports the CEDS



Goal One: Economic Diversification and Entrepreneurship

→ Supports innovative growth by identifying and preparing brownfield sites for reuse by quantum, data, and other emerging industries, strengthening the region's legacy-to-future industry transition.



Goal Two: Workforce Resiliency

→ Lays the groundwork for future workforce development by aligning site reuse with opportunities for collaboration among training providers, workforce programs, and private sector employers in high-growth sectors.



Goal Three: Quality of Place

→ Directly advances brownfield cleanup and redevelopment priorities by focusing on underutilized industrial properties near the I-90 corridor, contributing to long-term placemaking and equitable growth across the region.

Program Activities



Community and Stakeholder
Engagement



Mapping, Property Research &
Prioritization



Networking with Local and National
Experts



Analysis of Redevelopment Models
and Proven Strategies



Research funding opportunities and
support resource mobilization efforts

Redevelopment Challenges & Opportunities

Ambiguous Ownership / Site Control

- Opportunities to update policies
- Proactively acquire and steward key parcels

Limited Redevelopment Staffing

- Expand professional development
- Explore shared services, technology tools and partnerships

Developer Hesitancy

- De-risk with transparent processes, updated policies and clear incentives

Redevelopment Challenges & Opportunities

Potential for displacement

- Engage local developers in placemaking
- build trust with inclusive planning
- preserve heritage

Potential community opposition to reuse

- Early community engagement in planning
- Increased awareness of key industries & community benefits

Limited access to redevelopment financing

- Increased lender education around reuse
- Cultivate ecosystem of patient/impact capital investors, CDFIs

Three findings that reframe the region's potential

01

The Land Can be an Asset, Not a Liability

NW Indiana holds some of the most infrastructure-rich brownfield acreage in the Midwest — rail, NIPSCO power grid, Lake Michigan water access, and I-90 positioning. What's missing is managed inventory and a coordinated pipeline.

02

The Ecosystem Is Fragmented

NIRPC, the RDA, NW Indiana Forum, One Region, and city EDCs operate in adjacent lanes with no single convener. No CDFI in the region specializes in brownfield predevelopment or cleanup lending above \$500K — a critical gap.

03

Communities Need Capacity, Trust, and a Seat at the Table — Before the Deal

Developers move fast. Research revealed local governments often lack the technical staff and policy frameworks to negotiate community benefits into development agreements.

2.5 years. Four deliverables. A blueprint for a region.

01 Brownfield Site Profiles

8 high-priority sites across Gary, Hammond, East Chicago & Lake Station — barriers, ownership, contamination, and reuse potential documented

02 8 Redevelopment Barriers + Strategies

Regional barriers mapped and matched to strategies: finance gaps, legal complexity, infrastructure deficits, ecosystem fragmentation

03 Ecosystem & Gap Analysis

Interactive actor map — funders, CDFIs, land banks, developers, intermediaries — plus a critical gap assessment. No brownfield-focused CDFI above \$500K identified.

04 Regional Policy Brief

Recommendations for NIRPC as regional convener and catalyst for a brownfield-to-opportunity pipeline serving quantum and data center industry

The fellowship is producing assets the region can act on.

Northern Lake County Brownfields Tools

A set of interactive, public-facing tools built to support public capacity and decision-making.

Data: EPA · Indiana Brownfields · IDEM · NIRPC community engagement

Applied AI for Small Government Inventory Capacity

AI-powered site status tracking and redevelopment pipeline management — purpose-built for under-resourced local governments

OZ + READI 3.0 Site Targeting /Small Scale Development

Brownfield sites at the intersection of Opportunity Zones and READI 3.0 eligibility. Support for small-scale development.

AI-Assisted Local Decision-Making on Tech Infrastructure

Frameworks for local officials to use AI tools for evaluating complex tech infrastructure projects like data centers-using Sensible Tools.

The research is done. Now comes the implementation.

Fill the Ecosystem Gaps

Recruit a brownfield-focused CDFI.
Connect NMTC allocatees to pipeline sites. Support convening the RDA, NW Indiana Forum, and One Region around a unified site-readiness strategy. Identify additional funding sources for pre-development.

Build Local Capacity

Support local decision-makers in understanding quantum and other tech-infrastructure opportunities. Provide tools, expert bench, and technical assistance for decision-making and public engagement.

Create a Site Pipeline

Support cities in preparing potential quantum/advanced-industry sites for State Site-Ready certification process. Use Applied AI for Small Government Capacity to track and prioritize the top sites toward shovel-ready status.

Smart Decisions for a Changing Economy

A Lunch & Learn to Help Local Leaders Evaluate
Data Centers and Other Technology
Infrastructure Projects

Practical insights, national perspectives, and actionable tools for
local governments and economic development organizations
navigating the next generation of infrastructure investment.

Artificial intelligence, cloud computing, advanced manufacturing, and quantum
technologies are accelerating demand for data centers and other digital infrastructure
across the country—including Northwest Indiana.

For many communities, these projects present significant opportunities—but also
important questions about infrastructure, public incentives, workforce, land use,
environmental impacts, fiscal sustainability, and long-term community benefits.

Join national experts and regional practitioners for a practical conversation designed
specifically for local leaders making high-impact decisions for their communities.

YOU'LL LEARN:



Key questions local officials
should ask before approving
major technology infrastructure
projects



How to evaluate costs, benefits,
incentives, and long-term
community impacts



National trends and lessons
from communities already
navigating these decisions



Resources available to help
local governments build
capacity and make informed
decisions

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?



County Commissioners



Mayors



City and Town Council Members



Planning Commissioners



Economic Development Professionals



Redevelopment Commissioners



Local Economic Development
Organizations (LEDOs)



Utility and Infrastructure Partners

FEATURED PRESENTERS



Celena Green, CEcD
Economic Recovery
Corps Fellow at NIRPC
Community readiness,
redevelopment strategy,
and practical evaluation
tools for local decision
makers.



Joe D'Antonio
National Association
of Development
Organizations (NADO)
National perspective on
regional development,
infrastructure readiness,
and community capacity.



Christopher Jordan
Program Manager of
AI and Innovation
NLC – National League
of Cities
Local government perspectives,
governance considerations,
and lessons from communities
across the country.



DATE
Monday,
July 13, 2026



TIME
12:00 – 2:00 PM CT



LOCATION
NIRPC
6100 Southport Road
Porter, IN 46368



LUNCH
Lunch
Provided

The fellowship didn't just build a project. It built a practitioner.



Credentials & Certifications

- CEcD — Certified Economic Developer
- EDP — Economic Development Professional
- AI Governance Professional (AIGP) — in progress
- ERC Fellowship completion



Expanded National Network

- ERC Fellows cohort across 30+ communities
- NADO, NLC, ICMA & NGIN — ERC partner networks
- CDFA — Community Development Finance Association
- Neighborhood Economics & Mechanism networks
- NW Indiana Forum, RDA & One Region leadership
- Data center developers & quantum infrastructure actors



Enhanced Skills & Capabilities

- AI-assisted site readiness & data analysis
- Community engagement & public facilitation
- Data center site selection research
- Ecosystem mapping & gap analysis methodology
- Policy brief writing & commissioner briefings

**Brownfields aren't blight.
They're the infrastructure
for the next economy —
if we build the ecosystem
to unlock them.**

That's what 2.5 years at NIRPC taught me.

And it's exactly the work I'm taking forward.

Stay Connected

- Celena Green, ERC Fellow
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