

Land Use Committee
NIRPC
August 30, 2023
Minutes

George Topoll called the Land Use Committee (LUC) meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call.

In attendance were George Topoll, A.J. Monroe (Portage), Bailey McGrath (Portage), and Kevin Brietzke.

Staff present were Eman Ibrahim, Thomas Vander Woude, Stephan Hughes, Kevin Polette, and Flor Baum.

On motion by Ashley Abernathy and second by Tom Vander Woude (whom was a member of the LUC during that time), the committee voted to approve the April 26, 2023 meeting minutes.

Portage Downtown Master Plan

A.J. Monroe presented the Portage Downtown master plan. The area focuses on Downtown Portage, which is bordered by Willowcreek on the west, Hamstrom Rd on the east, Central Ave to the south, and Interstate 80/90 to the north. Currently there is limited mobility on the northern end of Central due to a fragmented block pattern. The project proposes to develop a pattern for Downtown Portage that is supported through an open space network. A steering committee took added valuable input, such as enhance the sense of safety and belonging, providing outdoor activities, to taking two lanes out of Central Ave and reducing the speed. Development testing alternatives were shown. The top pick was alternative 2: repurpose lanes for on-street parking. Implementing tools generated to bring the plan to life include defining building and open space typologies appropriate.

for Portage's downtown. These tools examined trends in the market, analyzed site microclimate, and defined a desirable aesthetic. Notable guiding principles to finish Founders Square include: delineate crossings, plant trees, add pedestrian scale lighting, head-in parking along N side of Alley, and establish a primary downtown connector route. To view the complete master plan, please visit <https://www.portagein.gov/169/Planning-Community-Development> , or click [here](#).

NIRPC Regional Update

Eman Ibrahim spoke on e-commerce in NW Indiana Ph II Projects Updates. Ph I was a project for the E-commerce in NWI report and was adopted by the Commission in 2020. It is a regional plan about how the Region can best prepare for investments in e-commerce. Ph II is looking more at the local level for e-commerce preparedness. NIRPC staff looked at e-commerce trends and impacts on land use, transportation network, and traffic. Local impact analysis on urban land use planning and freight movement were also taken into consideration. Additional project outcomes looked at potential locations for warehouses and distribution centers and travel demand around existing and future e-commerce facilities. NIRPC staff came up with a set of recommendations to NWI municipalities on how best to anticipate e-commerce impacts, mitigate their effects, and benefit from the opportunities presented by e-commerce. Recommendations for Ph I were discussed. Diversifying the workforce to meet the future logistics job demand, increasing and prioritizing funding to improve urban freight movement, and continuing to raise the Region's profile as a thriving place to do business. Create loading zones on high-traffic roads to make it easier for delivery drivers to find

space and access buildings without impeding other road users. Demand for warehouse and distribution centers that exceed 250,000 square feet is growing in secondary major distribution and population hubs. e-commerce Ph II strategies involve exploring new tax structures to address expected issues with the decrease in property tax revenue because of the closure of brick-and-mortar retail. Since online shopping will continue to grow, local governments should find other ways to sustain local public services. A second strategy is to develop and expand warehouse floor space and distribution centers to accommodate the growth of e-commerce. There is also a plan to repurpose big box retail and large surface parking to turn into distribution centers, logistics hubs, and supply chains. The e-commerce recommendations are to redevelop blighted sites, which is especially vital for inner-ring communities that have no land available to grow their tax base. Local governments should establish redevelopment plans that provide solutions to repurpose vacant major retail within Northwest Indiana. NIRPC recommendations include transforming vacant space into shared creative workspaces and community gathering places; provide coworking space, opportunities for artists to exhibit and sell their work, revenue-sharing deals, and active programming open to the community. The parking recommendation was noted as being redesigned for other use. However, various e-commerce companies require larger sites to accommodate employee parking because they hire intensive labor forces for picking and packing to fill online orders. Of the five subarea plans, Gary has been completed. The key planning objectives ensure efficient modes of transportation and safety. Diversity of the business landscape in Gary and the Region. Stimulate private investment and maximize transportation, distribution, and logistic (TDL) business presence. Additional objectives include establishing a distinct atmosphere along major corridors and unsure Gary can leverage the benefits of e-commerce. The Gary Subarea Plan – Priority Sites were shared. For the Ph II Subarea Plan selection process, the first candidate area is cluster 3, Burns Harbor/Portage area. Cluster 3 has land availability. The Region is highly developed, especially in the northwest corner closer to Chicago, and runs out of vacant or developable land. The Burns Harbor/Portage cluster is less congested and has access to five interchanges. Cluster 3 also has proximity to the Port of Indiana and US Steel. The second candidate is Cluster 2, Winfield/Crown Point area. Cluster 2 is next to I-65, and it provides north-south connectivity and is less congested. The shift-share analysis also showed that the transportation and warehousing industry is more important to Lake County's economy than Indiana in general. For more information, please contact Eman Ibrahim at eibrahim@nirpc.org.

Legislated updates were made. Announcements were made.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 15, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. Hearing no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:52 a.m.