

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

FoundRE.co · ProsperWorks

Northern Lake County: America's most underutilized industrial corridor.

Gary

Former steel capital
Steelyard corridor
High OZ concentration

Hammond

Dense industrial base
OZ-eligible sites
Calumet corridor

East Chicago

Refinery legacy sites
Idem-listed brownfields
Heavy contamination

Lake Station

I-90 corridor access
Smaller footprint
Growing developer interest

NW Indiana has emerged as one of the hottest data center markets in the Midwest.

\$14.8B

Indiana data center
commitments in 2024 alone

Microsoft, Meta, Google & Amazon
— largest wave in state history

50 mi

from downtown Chicago
— NWI's strategic edge

Chicago land saturating;
developers crossing the border

7+

active proposals across
Lake, Porter & LaPorte

Including Microsoft (\$1B, La Porte),
Karis Critical, QTS, Digital Crossroad

Can brownfield land become the foundation for quantum-era economic growth — and who benefits when it does?



Power Infrastructure

Data centers need 50–500 MW of reliable power. NW Indiana's industrial legacy — including NIPSCO's heavy-load grid — is a match that greenfield sites can't replicate.



Land & Scale

Data centers need 50–500+ acres, contamination clarity, and clear title. Brownfield remediation + redevelopment addresses all three — if the ecosystem is in place.



Community Leverage

Local governments have real power — but only during planning & permitting. Research showed communities often negotiate from weakness due to speed, confidentiality, and technical capacity gaps.



Workforce & Equity

Data centers create construction jobs but few permanent positions. The research question: how does the community ensure shared prosperity, not just tax revenue, from these projects?

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

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

Three findings that reframe the region's potential

01

The Land Is 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 a coordinated pipeline, not the land itself.

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 a Seat at the Table — Before the Deal

Data center developers move fast. Research revealed local governments often lack the technical staff and policy frameworks to negotiate community benefit agreements. The leverage window closes at permitting.

The research is done. The case is made. Now comes the hard part.

Fill the Ecosystem Gaps

Recruit a brownfield-focused CDFI.
Connect NMTC allocatees to pipeline sites. Convene the RDA, NW Indiana Forum, and One Region around a unified site-readiness strategy.

Build the Power Case

Partner with NIPSCO to document power availability at priority sites. Power certainty is the #1 differentiator for quantum and data center business attraction.

Create a Site Pipeline

Implement a quantum/advanced-industry site certification process. Use Applied AI for Small Government Capacity to track and prioritize the top 8 sites toward shovel-ready status.

The fellowship produced assets the region can act on.

Northern Lake County Brownfields Tools

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

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

Applied AI for Small Government Capacity

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

OZ + READI 3.0 Site Targeting

Brownfield sites at the intersection of Opportunity Zones and READI 3.0 eligibility — the highest-leverage targets for capital deployment

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 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.

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
Portage, IN 46368



LUNCH
Lunch
Provided