

Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission



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ABOUT NIRPC

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) serves Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties in Northwest Indiana as a council of local governments that provides a forum for Northwest Indiana's elected officials to address regional issues relating to transportation, the environment, and community and economic development.

NIRPC also functions as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Northwest Indiana, working with federal and state departments of transportation, local transit operators, and various stakeholders and residents to plan for, prioritize, and fund regional transportation projects.

CREATING LIVABLE

COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Adopted unanimously by the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission in June of 2011, the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP) is Northwest Indiana's first plan to integrate transportation, land use, economic development, environmental management and social equity in Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties. The vision of the 2040 CRP is a vibrant, revitalized, accessible and united Northwest Indiana. The key strategy to accomplish this vision is an ambitious growth and revitalization framework that focuses new growth and development in "Livable Centers" within existing communities.

In a region such as Northwest Indiana, where significant physical constraints to ever-expanding urbanized areas often do not exist, strong and consistently implemented public policies regarding land use and transportation benefits are needed to ensure that population and employment growth occurs in a sustainable and responsible manner. It is with this understanding that the Comprehensive Regional Plan strongly endorses a future pattern of focused growth based on the concept of Livable Centers.

The Livable Centers concept is to concentrate future growth within a defined perimeter around central locations, which are defined within each community. These existing activity centers already are served by utility infrastructure and the roadway network. In some cases, significant reinvestment will be needed to upgrade existing utility and roadway capacity for the future. In order to align infrastructure investment to ensure more equitable land use planning, the 2040 CRP gives priority to regional transportation projects within these areas through the selection criteria based upon the reinvestment goals and objectives contained in the plan.

Livable Centers are defined in the CRP as compact, mixed-use, walkable and transit-accessible areas with a wide choice of affordable housing options that are developed at a density and scale appropriate to their community, whether urban, suburban or rural.

Four categories of livable centers are established in the Comprehensive Regional Plan. These are:

- Metropolitan Livable Centers Communities with a current population greater than 70,000, which includes Gary (population 80,294) and Hammond (population 80,830).
- Large Livable Centers Those with a current population between 20,000 and 70,000, including 11 communities ranging from La Porte (population 22,053) to Portage (population 36,828).
- Medium Livable Centers Those with a current population of between 6,000 and 20,000, including seven communities ranging from Lowell (population 9,276) to Griffith (population 16,893).
- Small Livable Centers Those with a current population of less than 6,000, including 21 communities ranging from Kingsbury (population 231) to Porter (population 5,379).

NIRPC Livable Centers Initiative

Livable Centers Initiative is one of the principal urban framework strategies to implement the CRP, which is fundamental to achieve the preferred regional strategy for land use, transportation, and environmental balance in Northwest Indiana. There is an urgent need to redevelop Northwest Indiana's cities and towns. Northwest Indiana's current population is 771,815 and it is forecasted to grow by approximately 170,000 people, for a total population of 941,815 by the year 2040. Projections based on current trends indicate that without implementation of the regional growth strategy, this growth will occur on greenfields and prime farmland at the urban fringe while the region's urban core, the oldest, densest, and most diverse communities, will continue to lose population.

The Livable Centers Initiative is the approach of the plan to promote investment and redevelopment in the places where we already live and work to create a better range of working, housing and travel choices. It allows us to preserve our environmental assets and use our dollars more efficiently to create livable, pedestrian-friendly communities that offer a high quality of life for all residents.

SYMBOL	CENTERS	GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS/ DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIONS	POPULATION INDICATION
	Small Community	 Small rural centers supporting basic living needs- low density residential land uses and some commercial or retail activities Residents depend on nearby medium or large communities to meet full service needs i.e. major purchases and health care Examples: Winfleld, Long Beach, La Crosse, Kingsbury 		up to 6,000
	Medium Community	 Moderate size urban/ suburban community with retail activities and residential land uses Important destinations primarily for the people from surrounding communities or towns Does not always function as a full "service community (ie lacks hospital, full retail services, employment, etc) Impacts traffic and land use patterns at local and sub-regional level Exemples: Lowell, Dyer, St. John 		7,000 - 19,000
	Large Community	More of a free-standing community with hubs of retail activities and residential land uses Includes nearly a full complement of services and facilities Typically sustains a higher percentage of employment Impacts traffic and land use patterns at local and sub-regional level Examples: Merrillville, Portage, Valparaiso, Hobart		20,000 - 70,000
	Metropolitan Center	 More urban center for commercial activities, services, amenities and residential land uses Includes major/ unique destinations for people around the region Areas with high density of employment and population Significantly impacts the regional economy, traffic and land use patterns Examples: Gary, Hammond 		70,000 +

WHAT ARE THE LIVABLE CENTERS?

Livable Centers can vary in purpose based on their overall scale and location and on the role they play within the local and broader regional planning context. Some Livable Centers can serve as a "regional center" that encompasses a concentration of employment opportunities and/or major trip generators, such as a university or hospital. Others can serve a more traditional "downtown" purpose by providing both retail and employment options for a larger area. Smaller Livable Centers can serve as a "town center" with a more local focus to their retail and civic destinations.

While all Livable Centers share a need to be mixed in character, compact in arrangement, walkable and well-connected to their surroundings

- I. Livable Centers support existing communities, leveraging public investment to encourage an efficient pattern of population and em ployment growth that maximizes the use of areas already served by the roadway network and utilities.
- 2. Livable Centers promote local walkability within the Livable Center, offering pedestrians and bicyclists a convenient and safe alternative to driving for local trips. This is achieved through the provision of a well-connected street and sidewalk network, and "complete streets" that are designed to accommodate all modes of travel.
- 3. Livable Centers provide a mix of uses; these uses are provided in an integrated pattern

- that promotes ease of movement between them, requiring coordinated landuse and transportation planning as both public and private investments are made.
- 4. Livable Centers promote regional connectivity between Livable Centers, including being supportive of public transportation.
- 5. Livable Centers Streets are designed to facilitate safe and comforable use of transit vehicles, even if public transportation is not yet provided. This includes planning for transit stop locations and providing appropriate amenities at current and potential transit stops, such as benches and shelters.

At any scale, it is important that each Livable Center provides some measure of housing capacity and accommodates if possible, both present and future public transportation.



Crosswalks, Downtown Valparaiso (NIRPC)

What are the Benefits of Livable Centers?

- Community Benefits A strong policy of support for Livable Centers establishes the value of existing communities and neighborhoods, bolstering the sense of community among residents. Livable Centers, once well established, provide an appealing and comfortable environment in which residents can interact more frequently, on an impromptu basis or at organized community events. Parks, plazas, and a complete sidewalk network accommodate public gatherings and encourage community building. Livable Centers also provide the region with stable communities that are successful and offer amenities for residents.
- Mobility Benefits Livable Centers increase mobility options and reduce mobility costs for residents by concentrating destinations closer together and making walking, bicycling, and use of public transportation safer and more convenient. Support of public transportation initiatives with related improvements (such as transitoriented development projects) in Livable Centers reduces dependence on automobiles. With fewer local driving trips needed to conduct daily business, the region benefits through lower vehicle emissions and reduced congestion on regional thoroughfares.
- Sustainability Benefits Livable Centers reap rewards for the region from a sustainability perspective by making the most efficient use of limited public resources for investment in transportation and development initiatives. Existing assets are maintained and actively used, keeping development patterns compact and maximizing the utility of existing infrastructure. If public funds are invested in expanding outward at the community's perimeter, the long-term financial burden for infrastructure maintenance will continue to grow. Investment in Livable Centers is instead a far more resource-efficient strategy.

CREATING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Part I: Defining Livable Centers

Project Overview

As a major defining element of the Comprehensive Regional Plan, Livable Centers (see Figure I) have been conceptually defined in 40 in the 41 established municipalities in Northwest Indiana. These Livable Centers vary widely in scale, use, mix, and purpose within each community today, but all represent areas of regional significance. Some of these locations already exhibit many of the desirable features of livable centers, while others are "works in progress" will benefit from concentrated planning and development effort and investment, both public and private, in order to achieve their full potential.



Pedestrian Infrastructure, Munster (NIRPC)

What Defines a Livable Center?

The development and evolution of Livable Centers can be guided by the principles of "place-making" in that consideration should be given not just to ensuring a mix of uses to serve each community's needs, but to the relationship of these land uses to one another.

- I. Depending on the size and purpose of each Livable Center, appropriate overall density will vary. In every Livable Center, there is support for the physical integration of development, either vertically (differing uses within the same structure) or horizontally (differing uses in close proximity).
- 2. Provide adequate parking that is conveniently located, but that does not result in an over-supply of poorly utilized parking lots.
- 3. Provide on-street parking that counts toward the overall parking requirements for the Livable Center.
- 4. Promote the use of shared parking, in particular for uses that have parking demands at different times of the day and week. Where feasible in retail and civic activity areas, provide structured parking to maintain a compact development pattern.
- 5. Provide residential options in close proximity to supporting commercial and institutional uses, including higher-density alternatives that provide for a full "life cycle" of housing types within each community.
- 6. Uses and activities should be complementary to one another, with retail and services that meet

the needs of nearby residents, and activity at different times of the day and week to balance traffic and parking demands.

- 7. In several Livable Centers, TOD (Transit Oriented Development) opportunities should be facilitated to mutually support transit investments.
- 8. A traditional street grid provides direct and multiple routes, which can encourage pedestrian movement, reduce congestion, and facilitate emergency vehicle access.
- 9. Utilize access management techniques (medians, shared curb cuts, rear service alleys) to increase pedestrian safety and facilitate bicycles and public transportation.
- 10. Within the core of the Livable Center, make



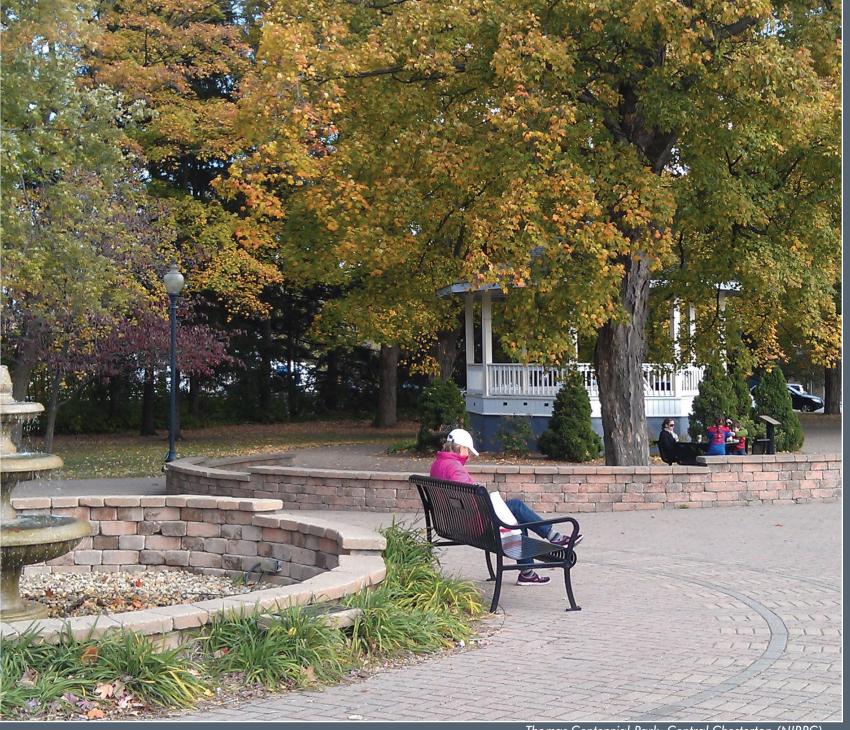
City Hall, Downtown La Porte (NIRPC)

- 11. Circulation of private automobiles secondary to other travel modes, incorporating pedestrian-friendly speed limits, short block lengths, clearly delineated bicycle lanes and minimal dead end street conditions.
- 12. Balance street width and sidewalk width to slow down traffic and enhance pedestrian safety. Sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate streetscape amenities and shade trees.
- 13. Provide public spaces that are accessible, well-lit, comfortable and visually interesting.
- 14. Minimize building setbacks and provide prominent entrances for pedestrians, relying on onstreet and rear parking areas so that parking lots do not dominate the Livable Center.

While the ongoing evolution of Livable Centers will require continuing investment in infrastructure, public investment should be focused on maintaining and expanding existing capacity rather than continuing to expand the urbanized area outward in an increasingly dispersed pattern.

The relationship between investments in public transportation services and Livable Centers is direct and critical. These land use and transportation initiatives are mutually supportive and both of vital importance in ensuring the long-term quality of life in Northwest Indiana.

ALL LIVABLE CENTERS SHARE A NEED TO BE MIXED IN CHARACTER, COMPACT IN ARRANGE-MENT, WALKABLE AND WELL-CONNECTED TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS.



Thomas Centennial Park, Central Chesterton (NIRPC)

METHODOLOGY

Defining the Centers

A key feature of Creating Livable Centers was to define the boundaries of the region's Livable Centers. The project team worked with local communities to define the perimeter of each center based on the following scope:

Scope

Step Ia: Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Analysis to identify areas preliminary Livable Centers.

- Block length: to find areas where walking and connectivity is easy and direct
- Residential density: in terms of population and housing per acre
- Employment density: number of employee per acre
- Transit: locating stations and stops
- Land Use: mapping important features like land use type, schools, civic halls, transit, and trailsfeatures that make a community more livable.

Step 1b: Analysis of plans and codes to identify planned livable centers:

• Evaluate the level of planning and regulations for each center. For example, it is determined whether or not livability elements have been incorporated into the plans and/or zoning and subdivision codes for the center.

Step 2: Gather data and complete Livability Checklist for preliminary Livable Centers to the extent possible

Step 3: Establish existing and proposed context zones

Step 4: Inventory thoroughfare characteristics and determine thoroughfare type. Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) report is utilized for this step to develop the typology of Livable Centers in Northwest Indiana. The CSS uses flexibility and creativity to shape effective transportation solutions, while preserving and enhancing community and natural environments.

Step 5: Based on the study of existing centers, develop Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) evaluation tables (see appendix).

Step 6: Conduct meetings with elected officials and practitioners in the 41 communities in Northwest Indiana, to identify and define and map the geographic boundaries of the Livable Centers.

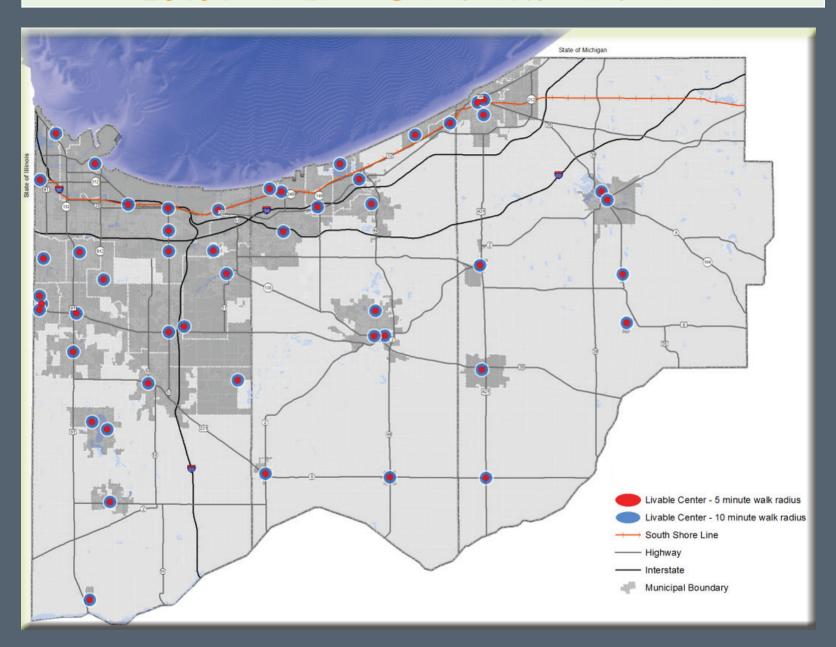


Harbor District, East Chicago (East Chicago Comprehensive Plan)

Livability Checklist

- Residential density: Dwelling units per acre
- Employment density: Jobs per acre
- Jobs/housing balance: Number of jobs/number of dwelling units
- Number of transit stations
- Number of transit stops
- Number of transit routes
- Speed limits
- Block lengths
- Block perimeter
- Percentage of streets with minimum width sidewalks
- Sidewalk widths
- Roadway widths
- Roadway number of lanes
- Roadway functional class
- Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT)
- Distance to an expressway interchange
- Building setbacks
- Attached or detached buildings
- Percentage of roads with onstreet parking
- Diagonal parking
- Parallel parking
- Rear parking
- Structured parking
- Building Height: Low rise (1-2 stories), mid-rise (3-4 stories), high-rise (5-12 stories)

2040 PLAN - LIVABLE CENTERS IN NORTHWEST INDIANA



WHERE ARE THE LIVABLE CENTERS IN

NORTHWEST INDIANA?

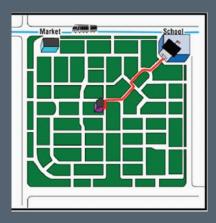
As a major defining element of the Comprehensive Regional Plan, Livable Centers (see map to left) have been defined in 40 of the 41 municipalities in Northwest Indiana. These Livable Centers vary widely in scale, use, mix, and purpose within each community today, but all represent areas of regional significance. The Livable Centers concept will concentrate future growth within a defined perimeter around this central location that has been defined within each community. These existing activity centers already are served by utility infrastructure and the roadway network. While in some cases, significant reinvestment will be needed to upgrade existing utility and roadway capacity in the future, to do so is a more efficient use of limited public resources than to extend new capacity to the perimeter of the community.

Some of these locations already exhibit many of the desirable features of Livable Centers, while others are "works in progress" that will benefit from concentrated future planning, development effort, and investment, both public and private.

- Livable Centers make it easy to reach multiple destinations by foot, bicycle, car, or transit.
- A well-designed street and sidewalk system provides good connectivity and safety for everyone.
- Livable Centers have a traditional street grid providing multiple direct routes, reducing congestion and encouraging pedestrian access.
- Mixing land uses makes walking more attractive, convenient, and encouraging to healthier lifestyles.



POOR CONNECTIVITY



GOOD CONNECTIVITY

MINIMUM RECOMMENDED STREETSIDE DIMENSIONS IN LIVABLE CENTERS

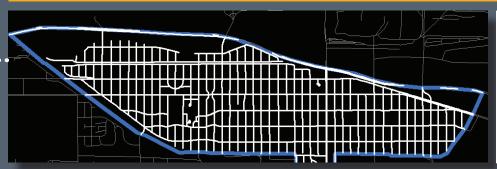
Streetside Zone	Minimum Dimension
Residential (All Context Zones) Total Minimum Streetside Width:	9 feet
Edge and Furnishing Zone (Planting Strip, utilities, etc.)	3 feet
Clear Pedestrian Travel Way	5 feet
Frontage Zone	I foot
Commercial with Ground Floor Retail (All Context Zones) Total Minimum Streetside Width:	12 feet
Edge and Furnishing zone (Treewell, utilities, bus stops, etc.)	4 feet
Clear Pedestrian Travel Way	6 feet
Frontage Zone	2 feet

Source: Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach: An ITE Recommended Practice - 2010

EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS

- Improve and widen sidewalks
- Build buildings up to the street
- Create active facades
- Make navigation easy
- Develop transportation and land use-related zoning ordinances
- Develop pre-development plans to revitalize existing centers
- Improve transit station areas
- Develop detailed redevelopment designs and economic feasibility analysis
- Make access management plan
- Create streetscape improvements
- Improve area connectivity
- Improve accessbility to transit
- Create walkable places with quality mixed use development
- Develop a downtown plan to link land use and transportation

LIVABLE CENTERS EXAMPLES BY SIZE



Livable Centers have been defined in 40 of the municipalities in Northwest Indiana. These Livable Centers vary widely in scale, use, mix and purpose within each community, but all represent areas of regional significance. They are already served by utility infrastructure and the roadway network. In some cases, significant reinvestment will be needed to upgrade existing utility and roadway capacity for the future. The centers are classified in four categories: Metro Center, Large Center, Medium Center, and Small Center.

















Metro Center Gary City Hall, US Steel in background

Downtown Gary

North End, Michigan City

Large Center

Historic Buildings, Downtown Lowell

Downtown Hebron

CREATING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Part II: CLC Funding Program

Project Overview

NIRPC developed the Creating Livable Communities (CLC) funding program. This program will establish a sustainable funding source for local governments to fund projects that advance livability in Northwest Indiana. Since NIRPC does not regulate land use, this funding will provide a critical incentive for local governments to focus new development in existing developed areas and continue to implement the 2040 CRP

The purpose of this program is to support community based transportation and land use projects that bring vitality to downtown areas, neighborhoods, station areas, commercial cores, and transit corridors. It will fund development and redevelopment projects that achieve connected development patterns, linking transportation, housing, jobs and services, while maximizing the development potential of existing infrastructure and regional facilities. The program is designed to account for rising energy prices, climate change, reduced infrastructure funds, and land use — with a goal of more efficiently using existing infrastructure, and reducing vehicle miles traveled, emissions, energy use, and personal transportation costs.

This program is guided by the principle of "place-making" to ensure increased residential development, a mix of uses, and connectivity in Livable and Neighborhood Centers that can serve each community's needs. This program will reward those communities that demonstrate a commitment to livability principles.

This transportation funding program was created by allocating a portion of NIRPC's federal surface transportation formula funding, the Surface Transportation Program (STP). Allocating separate funds for transportation-related land use projects will enable cities and developers to expand their range of pentiential development options available in the market. It will promote well designed urban development areas using "complete streets" with interconnected local street networks. The program would be used to fund planning projects.

CLC Funding Program Eligibility

CLC projects should be identified in two emphasis areas:

- I. Livable Centers Map
- 2. Transit Area Map (within the urbanized area).

Livable Centers Map:

As described in Part I of Defining the Livable Centers, a Livable Centers Map (figure 2) was created at the completion of the process. The map includes 40 Main Centers and 33 neighborhood centers. While only 16% of the incorporated areas in the region are within a Livable Center boundary, 41% of the people live in a Livable Center

Transit Area Map

Transit Area Map (figure 3) includes areas within a half mile of transit stop or station. The goal of

this map is to support more transit oriented development projects around transit stops and stations and to encourage more transit use in the region.

Projects identified in the two emphasis areas have to meet the minimum requirements of the Livable Centers goals. The Livable Centers goals were created from the 2040 Plan's goals and objectives.



Sculpture Installation, Uptown Arts District Michigan City (NIRPC)

2040 Plan - Livable Centers Goals & Objectives

Vision Theme: Vibrant Region - Planned Growth

Goal: Livable urban, suburban and rural centers

Objectives:

- Encourage the compact mixing of uses
- Encourage a diverse mix of housing types and affordability levels near job centers and transit routes
- Facilitate the remediation and redevelopment of abandoned and underutilized land, including brownfields and greyfields.
- Promote community green infrastructure and access to public open space
- Promote the preservation of historic and cul tural resources
- Promote the integration of Context Sensitive Solutions into transportation planning projects

Vision Theme: Revitalized Region - Renewed **Urban Areas**

Goal: Revitalized urban core

Objectives:

- Foster the development of livable, mixed-use downtowns
- Promote adaptive reuse, infill development and the remediation and reuse of underutilized properties, particularly brownfields
- Facilitate the rehabilitation of neighborhoods

and maintenance of high-quality and affordable housing

- Expand visual and physical access to Lake Michigan and other open space
- Partner to protect threatened natural rem nants
- Enhance community design and aesthetic

Planning Projects

Both planning projects and pre-development plans are eligible for the CLC funding. Funding will support such activities as urban design, detailed redevelopment designs and economic feasibility analyses to prepare projects to compete for Surface Transportation Program (STP) transportation funding. It may also fund projects related to access management, transportation and land use-related zoning ordinances and streetscape improvements.

The following sections of the report describe the characteristics and the typology of each center. These sections are classified into four categories:

- 1. Metro Center: includes two municipalities, Gary and Hammond
- 2. Large Center: includes eleven municipalities: Crown Point, East Chicago, Highland, Hobart, LaPorte, Merrillville, Michigan City, Munster, Portage, Schererville, Valparaiso.
- 3. Medium Center: includes seven municipalities: Cedar Lake, Chesterton, Dyer, Griffith, Lake Station, Lowell, St. John

4. Small Center: includes twenty municipalities: (Population 4,000-6,000): Porter, Winfield, Whiting (Less than 4,000): Beverly Shores, Burns Harbor, Hebron, Kingsbury, Kingsford Heights, Kouts, LaCrosse, Long Beach, Michiana Shores, New Chicago, Ogden Dunes, Pottawattamie Park, Schneider, Pines, Trail Creek, Wanatah, Westville

BEST PRACTICES



Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) for **Livable Centers Incentives**

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) conducted a study on livable centers incentives strategy to help implement the program. It indentified eight Major impediments in achieving Livable Centers, including:

- Obtaining financing for mixed-use development
- Land assembly/presence of multiple property owners
- Cost of infrastructure improvements
- Regulatory process to develop
- Cost of upgrading utilities
- Development costs of higher density development
- Cost of structured parking
- Market support

H-GAC further identified available local incentives to help implement livable center program overcoming above barriers. Like financing for parking structures, tax incentives, economic development zone, Bond financing, and public improvement district.

It created a fiscal impact analysis tool allowing local governments to estimate potential revenues associated with future Livable Center and other private development.

Source: Livable Centers Incentives Strategy Study- Houston-Galveston Region, Texas

