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Regional Development Authority Goes Green for Final 2011 Board Meeting

RDA approves funding for brownfield and economic development initiatives accepts award for environmental achievement from Indiana Dunes Superintendent.

Crown Point (December 12, 2011) – The Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority (RDA) continued to promote economic development and environmental remediation efforts in Northwest Indiana, approving funding at today’s quarterly Board Meeting for two initiatives aimed at restoring brownfields and laying groundwork for development.

The Board unanimously approved an additional \$100,000 in matching funds to establish an Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Assessment Program and Revolving Loan Fund. The effort, done in partnership with the cities of Hammond, Gary and East Chicago, will create a fund to clean up contaminated sites in the three cities. The RDA has filed applications to establish the program and fund, which will consist of 80 percent federal dollars and 20 percent local matching funds. “This will allow for brownfield sites to be cleaned up in a way that maximizes our current investment,” said RDA Executive Director Bill Hanna.

The Board also approved \$30,000 to match a grant from The Donnelley Foundation, a Chicago-based nonprofit foundation. Since work began on the runway extension project at the Gary Chicago International Airport, “we have seen an increasing number of developers and foundations showing interest in the area around the airport,” Hanna said the combined funds will pay for a study by Cardno JFNew, an ecological consulting and ecosystem restoration firm, of

the area around the airport to determine which areas should be targeted for development and which for environmental preservation in order not to disturb rare species of plants or wildlife.

“There are a number of areas like this throughout Northwest Indiana where there is a need to balance development with environmental preservation,” noted RDA Chairman Leigh Morris. “So this effort can serve as a model for other places outside the airport.”

The Board also gratefully received an award for environmental achievement from Costa Dillon, Superintendent of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The award was a duplicate of one which was awarded to Indiana Dunes by the Department of the Interior for the Portage Riverwalk, which was funded by the RDA.

“The RDA was instrumental in the Portage Riverwalk facility. This represents one of just 10 awards given out in the country for environmental achievement,” Dillon said, adding that the public is definitely noticing our accomplishments. “When the final attendance figures for 2011 are in, it looks like the Portage Riverwalk will surpass Mt. Baldy as the most popular attraction on the lakefront,” he said.

In other business, the Board approved the organization’s proposed 2012 budget. Hanna reported that the RDA was under budget for 2011 and that overhead for RDA staff and expenses amounted to just 2.4 percent of expenditures. Under the 2012 budget overhead will rise to 3 percent due to increased staff needs. Hanna noted that this would still be half of the 6 percent that the state of Indiana allows to be charged to overhead for public works projects.

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About the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority

Established in 2005 through a bipartisan effort including Governor Mitchell E. Daniels, Congressman Peter J. Visclosky, key state legislators, and local elected officials, the RDA is quasi-governmental development entity entrusted to make public investment decisions within a regional framework for supporting catalytic infrastructure projects and inducing private sector investment. Its mission is to be a catalyst for transforming the economy and quality of life for Northwest Indiana. For more information, visit www.in.gov/rda