



2011 Executive Board

Thomas M. McDermott, Jr.
Chairman
Mayor of Hammond

Geof Benson
Vice-Chairman
Beverly Shores Town Council

David Uran
Treasurer
Mayor of Crown Point

Ken Layton
Secretary
LaPorte County Commission

Roosevelt Allen, Jr.
Executive Board
Lake County Commission

Brian Snedecor
Executive Board
Mayor of Hobart

Olga Velazquez
Executive Board
Mayor of Portage

James G. Ton
Executive Board
Chesterton Town Council

Kathleen Chroback
Executive Board
Mayor of LaPorte

Stephen Mockler
Executive Board
Wanatah Town Council

Chester Dobis
Executive Board
Indiana State Representative

John Swanson
Executive Director
NIRPC

2011 Year in Review

Each year at this time, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) looks back at the previous year in order to assess its accomplishments and significant developments, which have occurred. The chronological summary that follows is by no means a comprehensive list, but is intended to identify certain key activities, events and changes which took place during 2011.

January. At the first quarterly Commission meeting of the year, a new slate of Executive Board members was elected (see sidebar). Mayor Kathy Chroback of the City of LaPorte turned over the Chair position to Mayor Tom McDermott of the City of Hammond. The other officers who were chosen were Beverly Shores Town Council President Geof Benson as Vice-Chair, Crown Point Mayor Dave Uran as Treasurer, and LaPorte County Commissioner Ken Layton as the new Secretary.



Tom McDermott, Jr.
Mayor of Hammond
2011 NIRPC Chairman

Chairman McDermott thanked Mayor Chroback for her extraordinary service to NIRPC for 2010, and he noted that she would be serving as the new Chair of the Northwest Indiana Economic Development District.

The full Commission adopted the 2010 Update to NIRPC's Ped and Pedal Plan. The new plan takes stock of the excellent progress to date in implementing the original plan and sets forth a vision for 1,000 linear miles of off-road and on-road regional trails in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties.

Under the leadership of Mayor Joe Stahura of Whiting and the Local Government Assistance Advisory Committee, an agreement was reached with GRANTS, Inc. to provide low-

cost grant writing and grant management services to member local governments.

February. A NIRPC delegation traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend the annual National Conference on Regions sponsored by the National Association of Regional Councils and to meet with the region's Congressional representatives. The delegation was made up of Chairman Tom McDermott, Vice-Chair Geof Benson, Treasurer Dave Uran, Immediate Past-Chair Kathy Chroback, NARC representative Dave Shaffer, and Executive Director John Swanson. The NIRPC group met with Senator Dan Coats and Representatives Pete Visclosky and Joe

Donnelly and urged their support for a number of legislative issues, including the transportation and economic development reauthorizations and funding support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

A large group of NIRPC mayors convened a legislative reception for State of Indiana legislators in Indianapolis to voice their views on a number of legislative issues.

NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson testified before the Indiana Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs in opposition to a proposed bill which would impose qualification requirements

and reduce the size of Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) policy boards. The bill was subsequently not passed out of this committee.

At its February meeting, the Environmental Management Policy Committee was briefed by Commissioner Tom Eastery of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management on the status of various environmental programs of the State. He made special note of the progress which has made in northwest Indiana in attaining Federal clean air standards.

Approximately 40 elected and appointed officials participated in a NIRPC-sponsored workshop on the transition plan requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act for local governments with 50 or more employees.

March. NIRPC staff utilized keypad polling techniques at the monthly meeting of the 16 Plus communities of Lake County in Schererville for the purposes of identifying and prioritizing opportunities for “shared services” for municipalities.

The Towns and Smaller Cities Council met in New Chicago. Keypad polling techniques were again used to engage the local government officials in attendance in identifying and assessing the implications of NIRPC’s proposed *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* for their communities.

April. At its quarterly meeting, the full Commission approved the release of the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* for public review and comment. The pro-

posed plan integrated a regional transportation plan, which is required of an MPO into a comprehensive plan framework. The Commission also approved the release for public review and comment the *Fiscal Years 2012 - 2015 Transportation Improvement Program* and the supporting air quality conformity determination were also released at that meeting.

The Commission also voted to establish the Norman E. Tufford Award program, which memorializes NIRPC’s founding Executive Director by honoring commissioners and staff of the agency who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and service to the Commission and the region.

May. Staff embarked on an ambitious schedule of 18 public meetings in just under 30 days throughout the three-county area in order to obtain input on the draft *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan* and accompanying transportation documents. More than two-thirds of NIRPC’s 30 employees were actively involved in carrying out these sessions.

Approximately 40 local plan commissioners, building and zoning commissioners and staff planners attended a two-night workshop entitled, “Rolling up our Sleeves: the Nitty Gritty Work of Plan Commissions.” This basic course on the role and responsibilities of plan commissioners was extremely well received, and feedback from attendees indicated that NIRPC should repeat this session annually and offer an advanced program of plan commissioner training, too.

NIRPC outreach staff conducted a Youth

Summit for approximately 40 Merrillville High School students. In addition to discussing NIRPC’s proposed *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*, the students became actively engaged in facilitated discussions regarding issues and opportunities in their community.

June. The Lake Michigan Water Recreation Trail was dedicated by the U.S. Department of the Interior at a ceremony at Portage Lakefront Park on June 4. This new three-state water trail was based in large part upon the *Greenways and Blueways Plan* of Openlands and NIRPC.

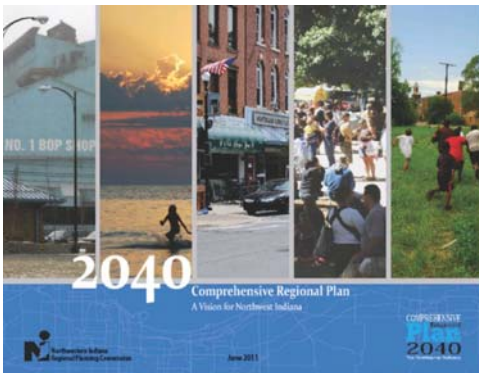
An environmental workshop was held by NIRPC to secure stakeholder input regarding the understanding, relevance and importance of NIRPC’s environmental work. Keypad polling was used to obtain this feedback.

At its annual meeting in San Diego, the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) elected NIRPC Commissioner and Munster Clerk-Treasurer Dave Shafer as its President-Elect. Dave is the first Indiana official to be chosen for this leadership position. At the same meeting, LaPorte Mayor Kathy Chroback was elected to fill Dave’s vacated District VI position on the NARC board. John Swanson was elected to serve a third term on NARC’s Executive Directors Council.

For the second consecutive year and the third time in five years, NARC awarded NIRPC the outstanding achievement award for a mid-sized regional council. NIRPC received this year’s award for the *Marquette Plan: Phase II, A Vision for Lakeshore Reinvestment*.

The State Departments of Transportation for Indiana and Illinois began a bi-state, multi-year study for the 50-plus mile Illiana Corridor. NIRPC was invited to join the two advisory groups to provide input for different parts of the study.

The Northwest Indiana Economic Development District, a partnership between NIRPC and the Northwest Indiana Forum, received its first \$50,000 planning grant from the U. S. Economic Development Administration.



The cover of NIRPC's 2040 CRP.

By a vote of 31 – 0, the full Commission adopted the *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*, the first regional plan for Lake, Porter and LaPorte Counties to integrate land use, transportation, environment, economic development and social equity into a unified vision and action plan. A regional transportation plan, which was fully integrated into the comprehensive plan, and was included with this action. The Commission acted to certify that NIRPC is meeting all of the transportation planning requirements mandated of an MPO.

In a similar vote, the full Commission approved the *Fiscal Years 2012 – 2015 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)*. The new *TIP* allocates \$665.4 million for

465 highway, transit and transportation enhancement projects, using selection criteria flowing from the new *2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan*.

July. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) conducted its triennial review of NIRPC and its eight subgrantee transit operators to determine compliance with the federal grant requirements. NIRPC and the transit operators received high marks from the review team, and an Achievement of Excellence certificate was subsequently awarded to the agency.

A working group of Class 1 and shortline railroad operators and other stakeholders was formed in order to examine freight rail movement in the region and prioritize at-grade crossing needs. Leigh Morris of the Regional Development Authority and Indiana Economic Development Corporation served as chair of the working group, which was subsequently named IN-Vision.

A second Americans with Disabilities Act Transition Plan workshop was held at NIRPC for the purposes of assisting local governments in meeting the requirements of the federal law for transportation facilities.

August. For the seventh consecutive year, the annual audit of NIRPC by the Indiana State Board of Accounts contains no adverse findings, comments or disallowances.

Joe Exl of the NIRPC staff conducted a “Hoosier Riverwatch Workshop” to train participants in the monitoring of water

quality conditions of area rivers and streams. Joe was subsequently honored as the “Educator of the Year” by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources for his outstanding work in this regard.

The Executive Board recognized Stu Summers of the City of Valparaiso for his dedicated service as the chair of both NIRPC’s Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Committee and the Congestion Management Subcommittee.

The Executive Board also passed a resolution urging the Federal Railroad Administration to obligate \$71.4 million to the Indiana Department of Transportation for the Indiana Gateway Project. This project would significantly improve the flow of both passenger and freight rail on the Norfolk Southern line between the Illinois stateline and the Town of Porter, the most congested and heavily trafficked rail corridor in the region.

September. Cal Bellamy of the Shared Ethics Advisory Commission (SEAC) spoke at the NIRPC full Commission meeting and urged participation of more communities in SEAC. Five Lake County municipalities currently are members of SEAC, and Bellamy indicated that, following up on NIRPC’s suggestion, the organization was looking into allowing membership from Porter and LaPorte County communities as well.

The full Commission approved the *Calumet Connections Plan*, a broad, bi-state initiative to expand safe non-motorized transportation connections between



Indiana and Illinois.

Responding to a recommendation emanating from the Environmental Management Policy Committee (EMPC), the full Commission agreed to utilize the EMPC in the future ranking of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant requests for projects other than roads, transit or trails.

Senator Karen Tallian briefed the Towns and Smaller Cities Council on the results of the last session of the Indiana General Assembly.

October. The Indiana Department of Transportation completed installation of a cable barrier system on the median strip of I-65 in Lake County. This project came about at the urging of Mayor Tom McDermott, who garnered strong NIRPC support for this important safety initiative.

Porter County Surveyor Kevin Breitzke and staff planner Kevin Garcia reported to the Executive Board on the preliminary results of NIRPC's local food systems project.

Jim Vanderkloot of the Region V office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency briefed the Executive Board members on his agency's green infrastructure, brownfield redevelopment and sustainable communities initiatives.

NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson was elected president of the Indiana Association of Regional Councils, an organization representing the interests of regional councils, metropolitan planning organizations, and economic development dis-

tricts in the state.

Full and summary versions of the *Comprehensive Regional Plan* were printed and began to be widely distributed, supplementing its availability on NIRPC's website.

November. The Pathway to 2040 Committee, a body charged with overseeing the implementation activities for the 2040 *Comprehensive Regional Plan*, held its first meeting. Committee Chair and Highland Clerk-Treasurer Michael Griffin stressed the importance of working toward the attainment of the plan's vision for the region and asked for a strong commitment to the committee's charge by committee members.

The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation awarded NIRPC a \$50,000 grant for purposes of carrying out two or three green infrastructure pilot projects in the region with interested local governments.

NIRPC hosted a gathering of the Quad-State regional planning directors from northeastern Illinois, southeastern Wisconsin and southwestern Michigan. NARC Executive Director Fred Abousleman provided a briefing on the status of and outlook for various federal programs of interest to the agencies.

December. NIRPC outreach staff conducted a program at Lafayette Elementary School in Hammond to engage students in identifying and addressing their issues and concerns using NIRPC's keypad polling system. NIRPC Chairman and Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott urged the students to assume re-

sponsibility for their futures and well-being of the community.

Staff provided a briefing to the Environmental Management Policy Committee on the update to the *Regional Watershed Management Framework Plan* and the tools which would be made available to stakeholders for future watershed planning efforts.

The first edition of the newly-resurrected NIRPC newsletter, *the regional view*, was published.

The full Commission approved the first amendment to the new *Comprehensive Regional Plan* with the addition of projects for Kennedy Avenue in Schererville and State Route 312 in Hammond.

The full Commission adopted its annual budget for 2012. The \$3,484,294 budget represents a 17.1% reduction from 2011. Despite the funding cutback, the new budget does not entail any significant reductions in staff capacity, programs or services.

Mayor Tom McDermott acknowledged those commissioners who would shortly be leaving their local government positions and thanked them for their service to NIRPC and the region. Departing commissioners included Mayor Kathy Chroback of LaPorte, Mayor Chuck Oberlie of Michigan City, Mayor Olga Velazquez of Portage, Councilman Ron Lombard of Trail Creek, Councilwoman Michele Bollinger of Porter, Councilwoman Susan Rochelle of Pottawatomie Park, Clerk-Treasurer Steve Millick of Michiana Shores and Clerk-Treasurer Steve Mockler of Wanatah.