

# OUR VALUES, OUR VISION

the final report from

## CREATING TOMORROW TODAY

A FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHWEST INDIANA



DECEMBER 6, 2008



NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN 46368

# Acknowledgements

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**NIRPC Staff Core Team -**

Gabrielle Biciunas  
Belinda Petroskey  
Steve Strains  
John Swanson  
Mary Thorne  
Thomas Vander Woude

*Special thanks to the additional NIRPC staff who contributed time and effort in support of the Forum on the Future.*

Mitch Barloga	Kathy Luther
Bill Brown	Jody Melton
Carolyn Brown	Kyle Nelson
Gary Evers	Judy Penn
David Gutowsky	Amanda Peregrine
Ryan Hicks	Lauren Rhein
Eman Ibrahim	Mary Jane Shkroba
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*AmericaSpeaks* is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization with a mission of providing Americans a greater voice in the most important decisions that impact their lives. *AmericaSpeaks* has engaged more than 130,000 citizens across the country on topics such as healthcare reform in Maine, shaping municipal budget priorities in Washington, D.C., and developing rebuilding plans for the World Trade Center in New York City.

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**Valerie Denney Communications**

Hugh McMullen  
Ambar Mentor

*Special thanks to the many volunteers who served as Table Facilitators and members of the Theme Team. Thanks also to the members of the Transportation Policy Committee, Land Use Policy Committee and Environmental Management Policy Committee for their support and involvement.*



January 2009

Dear Citizens of Northwest Indiana,

This report summarizes the December 6 *Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana* - the kick-off public participation event of a two year planning process that will culminate in the adoption of Northwest Indiana's first three-county comprehensive regional plan. That event brought together Northwest Indiana, in all its rich diversity, to share values, challenge assumptions and set a course for the future. The ideas, insights and concerns that emerged from the conversations and are recorded here will be the foundation upon which NIRPC builds its new plan.

If you were at the *Forum on the Future*, we thank you for your participation. Your commitment to Northwest Indiana is commendable and your interest in regionalism places you at the forefront of a new way of thinking about our place in this world. We hope that you will continue to participate in shaping the future of Northwest Indiana.

If you were not there, it is not too late to get involved. The *Forum on the Future* was only the beginning of a two-year planning process that will include a number of opportunities to participate. Please check our website [www.nirpc.org](http://www.nirpc.org) for more information.

Dear Forum Advisory Committee members and volunteers,

Congratulations on a job well done! By all accounts, the *Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana* was a rousing success. Thanks to your dedication and hard work, nearly 500 people were given the opportunity to engage in the discussions that will shape the future of our region.

Please consider staying involved as we begin crafting this vision into the Comprehensive Regional Plan.

Together We Make The Difference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph Stahura".

Joseph Stahura  
Chairman, NIRPC  
Mayor, City of Whiting

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Swanson".

John Swanson  
Executive Director, NIRPC



## Background

On the cold and snowy morning of December 6, 2008, people from across Northwest Indiana braved the icy roads and blustery weather to participate in *Creating Tomorrow Today: A Forum on the Future of Northwest Indiana* and contribute their ideas to the opening discussions for NIRPC's next Comprehensive Regional Plan (CRP). Held in Merrillville at the Radisson Hotel at Star Plaza, participants spent the morning talking about places in the region they value and why, regional opportunities and challenges, and their collective and individual visions for the future. In the afternoon, participants were asked to narrow their focus and to identify regional planning priorities within five planning areas: transportation, economic development, environment, land use and social equity.

Over 50 tables of up to 10 participants each engaged in small group dialogue, sharing and hearing each other's perspectives and opinions. Then with the support of the "theme team" rapidly reading and synthesizing ideas from the tables, participants identified room-wide themes and collective priorities. They were aided by keypad polling equipment, regional maps and a participant guide, which described important issues within NIRPC's planning domains as well as related quality of life topics. The overall process flowed with the assistance of more than 80 table facilitators, computer technicians, theme team members, data analysts, greeters, volunteers and staff.

This report is an account of the *Forum on the Future* and a summary of the ideas of the people of Northwest Indiana.



This report is available electronically as a PDF download on NIRPC's website: [www.nirpc.org](http://www.nirpc.org). Requests for alternate formats of this document may be directed to NIRPC at [nirpc@nirpc.org](mailto:nirpc@nirpc.org) or tel: 219.763.6060. TTY users may dial 711 for Relay Indiana.



## Goals of the *Forum on the Future*

NIRPC’s three central goals for the *Forum on the Future* were:

- *Gather together* a demographically-representative cross-section of Northwest Indiana residents

In order to:

- Facilitate communication between groups
- Receive input reflecting a broad range of perspectives

- *Collect data* for the Comprehensive Regional Plan
- *Generate interest* and encourage ongoing participation in the regional planning process

### *Gather Together*

Nearly 600 people (almost 500 participants and around 100 volunteers) attended the *Forum on the Future*. An intensive and targeted communications and outreach plan, coordinated by Valerie Denney Communications and the *AmericaSpeaks* consulting team and implemented by staff and volunteers, ensured that a diverse and, in many cases demographically representative, cross-section

of the regional population was in the room. NIRPC recruited participants that represented Northwest Indiana’s population across age, income, gender, race, and geography. These efforts resulted in a strongly representative group of participants.

Although the type of people commonly seen at planning events – business leaders, government employees, nonprofit agency employees – comprised the majority of the participants, the gathering also included many new faces. A number of high school students and young people (41 participants under the age of 25) were in attendance. In addition, 23% of the participants there represented only their individual interests as concerned citizens, each describing him or herself as an “Individual or unaffiliated participant.”

NIRPC and their consultants put significant effort into ensuring balance and encouraging communication. In order to maximize the number of perspectives in each conversation, participants were randomly assigned to tables for the morning session. Trained volunteer facilitators guided the discussions and facilitated dialogue.

### *Collect Data*





As the kick-off meeting of the CRP, one of the primary purposes of the *Forum on the Future* was to produce the initial data, both quantitative and qualitative, used to craft a vision statement and guide the planning process. At the outset of the day, participants used keypad polling devices to record their demographic characteristics, which was then compared to that of the entire region. During the table discussions, a volunteer recorder sat at every table, monitoring and documenting key ideas. Throughout the day, more than a hundred vision statements as well as thousands of comments were generated and recorded. As these comments were sorted and processed by the theme team, they were submitted to the participants, who used their keypads to register agreement and rank priorities.

The voting history of each keypad was tracked and logged as well.

*Generate Interest*

The overarching theme of the day was the need for meaningful public participation. Participants displayed great eagerness to plan for the region's future. The nearly 600 people that attended the *Forum on the Future* offered solid evidence for that. Of those, 92% rated the event either "good" or "excellent." The strongest indication of interest, though, was the sheer number of people who expressed a desire to stay involved: 174 participants said they would attend another major regional forum and 153 said they would join an ongoing working group.

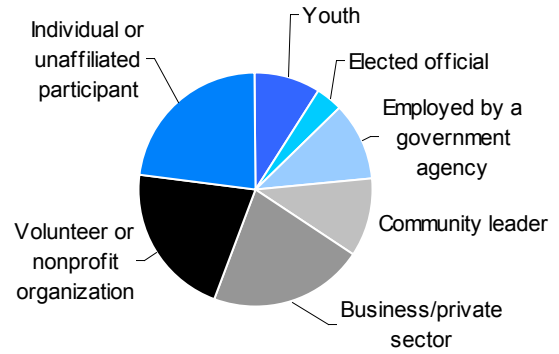


# Demographic Representation

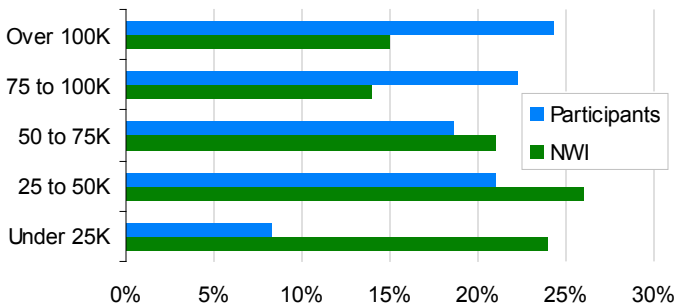
The outreach and recruitment efforts initiated by NIRPC, the Forum Advisory Committee and the consulting team were largely successful, resulting in a group of individuals that was highly representative of Northwest Indiana as a whole. In fact, only *two* of the key demographic indicators showed a 10% or greater difference between participants and actual populations.

Note that participants identified themselves in response to the questions that are at the top of the charts and registered their answers using keypad polling.

## Which of the following categories best describes you today?

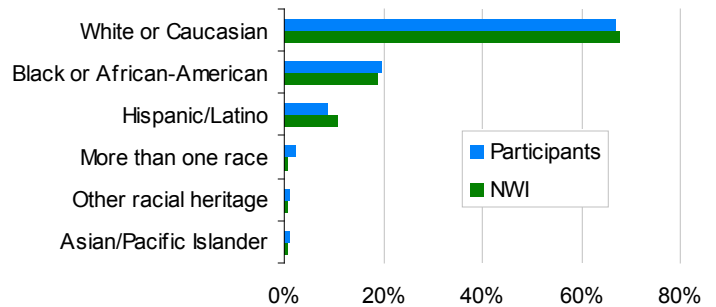


## What is your income?

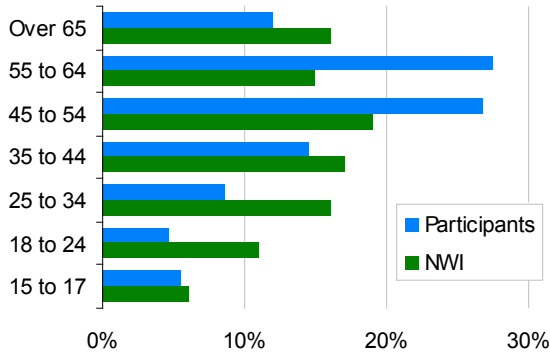


Note: 5% selected the option "Not sure/Prefer not to say"

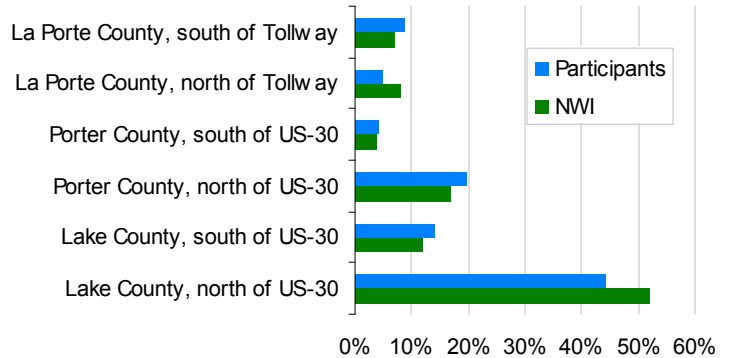
## What is your race/ethnicity?



## What is your age?



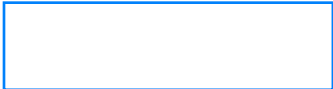
## Where do you live?






### Forum Participant Demographics

	Participants	Northwest Indiana		Participants	Northwest Indiana
<b>Age</b>			<b>Gender</b>		
15 – 17	5%	6%	Female	43%	51%
18 – 24	5%	11%	Male	57%	49%
25 – 34	9%	16%	<b>Where do you live?</b>		
35 – 44	15%	17%	Lake Co, north of US-30	44%	52%
45 – 54	27%	19%	Lake Co, south of US-30	14%	12%
55 – 64	28%	15%	Porter Co, north of US-30	20%	17%
65 & Over	12%	16%	Porter Co, south of US-30	4%	4%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			La Porte Co, north of Tollway	5%	8%
African-American/ Black	20%	19%	La Porte Co, south of Tollway	8%	7%
Asian	1%	1%	Elsewhere in Indiana	2%	
Caucasian/White	67%	68%	Illinois	2%	
Latino	9%	11%	<b>Where do you work/go to school?</b>		
Two or more races	3%	1%	Lake County	48%	
Other	1%	1%	Porter County	14%	
<b>Household Income</b>			La Porte County	10%	
\$0 - \$25,000	8%	24%	Elsewhere in Indiana	4%	
\$25,000 - \$50,000	21%	26%	Illinois	8%	
\$50,000 - \$75,000	19%	21%	Elsewhere	1%	
\$75,000 - \$100,000	23%	14%	Not working currently	3%	
\$100K or more	24%	15%	Homemaker	1%	
Not sure/prefer not to say	5%		Retired	11%	
			Do not work - other	<1%	



Denotes the demographic segments in which proportional participant representation was within 10% of the actual population of Northwest Indiana



## Key Themes and Values

A number of common threads knit together the participant discussions. These themes, values and ideas emerged again and again throughout the day in widely varying conversations.

### *Strong Connections*

Participants recognized both the interdependence of our communities and the interrelatedness of the issues. When they spoke about places that they valued, such as Lake Michigan or the urban core, the reasons varied widely. Likewise, the problems participants identified and the solutions they proposed were not always confined to narrowly defined planning areas. For example, they pointed to green industry as integral to both our economic and environmental future.

In a similar way, participants advocated for citizens, businesses, institutions and local governments collaborating across sectors and geographies. Public investment in regional transit was highlighted as a way to stimulate private investment in economic development: the statement “Building on our transportation system, particularly rail and bus, can provide easy access to jobs and can attract new employers – ‘We are the crossroads of the entire U.S.’” was selected by 49% of participants as a top regional opportunity.

### *Pride of Place*

Participants expressed a love of Northwest Indiana and a strong desire to improve its reputation. They are proud of where we live and believe we deserve greater recognition from our neighbors. 14% of participants selected the statement “ ‘Northwest Indiana is not taken seriously by Indianapolis or Chicago’ and we too have a negative self-perception,” as one of the top regional challenges.

### *Optimism*

While realistic about our very serious challenges, participants were nevertheless generally optimistic about the region’s future. Many believe that Northwest Indiana can evolve into a leader in smart growth, regionalism,

redevelopment strategies, environmental policy and transportation infrastructure. “Potential to ‘go from an industrial region to a vacation region’ by expanding our parks, museums and access to the lake” was selected by 27% of participants as a top regional opportunity.

A significant number of participants stated that the key to unlocking the region’s potential lies in merely capitalizing on those assets we already possess. In the Regional Opportunities list we find the following:

“Building on our transportation system...” (49% agreed),

“Expanding the Gary-Chicago airport...” (26% agreed),

“Proximity to Chicago...” (18% agreed),

“Our universities can help drive innovation...” (26% agreed).

### *Greening the Region*

Participants expressed a strong commitment to our natural environment, repeatedly listing it as one of our most precious resources and identifying the environmental aspect of nearly every subject. This theme was most often highlighted in the context of lakefront protection and restoration, but was also frequently cited in conversations about land stewardship and development patterns as well as mass transit and pedestrian/bicycle accessibility. Undergirding many conversations was the sentiment that restoration and protection of our environment is ultimately good for the economy. One in four participants envision Northwest Indiana as “a leader in environmental stewardship, green economy and jobs, green technology and green infrastructure, which drives our region’s economy.”

### *Development Priorities*

In general, participants indicated that increased development is desirable, but that our first priority should be the redevelopment of our cities and towns. They cited a number of reasons for this including environmental, economic and cultural concerns. For example, 17% agreed



that one of our greatest regional challenges is the need to “ ‘Address urban and suburban sprawl’ [and] balance growth with preserving agricultural and green spaces.” Others remarked that “Farm land and rural areas support business, hunting, fishing and the region’s economy.” The revitalization of our industrial cities as essential to the overall health of the region was a frequent conversation topic as well. The “Tri-city area (Gary, East Chicago and Hammond)” was listed as one of the top-valued places in Northwest Indiana, because it “is historically and culturally significant, with redevelopment potential.”

### *Jobs*

While the country continues its downward spiral into a recession, it is no surprise that economic development was foremost in the minds of many participants. One in four agreed that one of the region’s top challenges was “Not enough good jobs in the region, which leads to brain drain and reliance on Chicago.”

As with other issues, suggestions for job creation were integrated with other concerns. Prominent among them was the need to link education with job training. While 26% of participants identified our universities as a top opportunity to “drive innovation and train the workforce for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs”, a higher proportion, nearly a third, agreed that our “Schools suffer from poor results, low graduation, unequal funding – ‘We are

undereducated’ and unprepared for jobs.” Participants registered the strongest support, though, for investment in transportation infrastructure. Nearly half advocated “Building on our transportation system, particularly rail and bus, [to] provide easy access to jobs and [to] attract new employers” and 26% agreed that “Expanding the Gary-Chicago Airport creates the opportunity for more jobs...”. Finally, a significant percentage of participants also viewed our relationship to Chicago as integral to future job growth: 9% agreed that the 2016 Olympics could “spark economic development” while 18% identified proximity to Chicago (“location, location, location”) as a top opportunity to strengthen employment in Northwest Indiana.

### *Government Reform*

Local government reform was frequently identified as a high priority. Nearly half of the participants selected the statement “Local and County Government is inefficient, unaccountable and uncoordinated” as one of our top regional challenges. Additionally, 36% selected “greater collaboration between local governments for better planning and coordination” as a top opportunity.

Overall, participants displayed a fairly negative opinion of the current state of government. 34% of participants envisioned a future wherein “local government... is regional, accountable, honest and effective.”



## What we think of Northwest Indiana

The first discussions of the day centered around a table activity in which participants identified where they lived, where they worked and another place that they valued on a large, regional map. They then discussed regional opportunities and challenges. A recorder seated at each table documented the many ideas and sent them to the Theme Team who sorted and grouped them, combined similar ideas and crafted the following lists:

### Places We Value in the Region

- Indiana Dunes and other parks offer recreational opportunities, beauty and tranquility
- Lakeshore has recreation and economic opportunities and beautiful environment – “an oasis of nature in a sea of industry”
- Farm land and rural areas support business, hunting, fishing and the region’s economy
- Chicago provides entertainment, culture and jobs
- Regional universities prepare us for new opportunities
- Transportation network – e.g. highways, rail, airports – provides access to jobs and connects communities
- Tri-city area (Gary, East Chicago and Hammond) is historically and culturally significant, with redevelopment potential
- Our communities, because they are built on small town values, are family-friendly, and have places to gather





## Our Opportunities


1. Building on our transportation system, particularly rail and bus, can provide easy access to jobs and can attract new employers – “We are the crossroads of the entire U.S.” (49%)
2. Opportunity for greater collaboration between local governments for better planning and coordination (36%)
3. Potential to “go from an industrial region to a vacation region” by expanding our parks, museums, and access to the lake (27%)
4. Expanding the Gary-Chicago airport creates the opportunity for more jobs and strengthens our role as a transportation hub (26%)
5. Our universities can help drive innovation and train the workforce for 21st Century jobs (26%)
6. Proximity to Chicago creates employment opportunities there and here – “location, location, location” (18%)
7. 2016 Olympics creates an opportunity to spark economic development and improve infrastructure (9%)

## Our Challenges

1. Local and County government is inefficient, unaccountable and uncoordinated (49%)
2. Schools suffer from poor results, low graduation, unequal funding – “We are under educated” and underprepared for jobs (32%)
3. Not enough good jobs in the region, which leads to brain drain and reliance on Chicago (25%)
4. “Lack of robust transportation system” including inadequate and underfunded public transportation (21%)
5. “Address urban and suburban sprawl” – balance growth with preserving agricultural and green spaces (17%)
6. Racism, economic disparity and lack of inclusiveness divide our community (16%)
7. “Northwest Indiana is not taken seriously by Indianapolis or Chicago”, and we too have a negative self-perception (14%)
8. Crime and lack of public safety (7%)
9. Preserving quality and ensuring wise use of Lake Michigan water (7%)
10. “NIMBYism”, belief that public opinion is not valued and general public apathy (5%)

Participants used their keypads to register their agreement with particular statements. The percentage indicates the proportion of participants who selected that statement.





## Our Vision for Northwest Indiana's Future

After participants thought about and discussed their assessment of the Northwest Indiana of today and registered their agreement with the rest of the room, they were asked to think ahead to the year 2040. Each participant was asked to envision an ideal future for the region and to describe the place they imagine that Northwest Indiana could become in terms of the five planning elements identified by NIRPC and the related issues identified in the Participant Guide. With the aid of theme team synthesis, participants created this vision.

### In 2040...

High quality education for all that prepares all our children to be productive citizens (28%)

We have “whole communities” – vibrant neighborhoods, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use urban areas linked by transit (26%)

We are a leader in environmental stewardship, green economy & jobs, green technology, and green infrastructure, which drives our region's economy (25%)

Our local government is regional, accountable, honest and effective (23%)

Racial, ethnic, and cultural barriers are overcome leading to true regional cooperation, collaboration, and opportunity (20%)

Lake Michigan is fully utilized for its recreational and economic potential (19%)

Rail and bus transportation is efficient and conveniently connects communities with economic, cultural, and recreational opportunity (18%)

Everyone who wants to work is gainfully employed (16%)

NWI's farming communities are thriving and valued – “Food is important. We need soil to grow it.” (9%)

The region is becoming a residence of choice “of the Chicago region” (5%)

## Sample Individual Vision Statements

*Northwest Indiana has become the standard... which other industrialized communities in the nation look to as a model of economic transformation, environmental sustainability, educational reform and governmental cooperation.*

- Garry Traynham

*...Urban and municipal centers are restored and rejuvenated... and all are connected to safe, efficient and affordable public mass transit. NW IN is a major national center for green technology and manufacturing.*

- Dale Engquist

*...local governments have fully embraced high ethical standards and have become totally transparent in their actions.*

- Paul A. Myers

*...we have overcome the power of the invisible fence with social and economic equality, preservation of our natural resources in a clean environment, with a better educated population that has grown intellectually and welcomes change for the better of the region as a whole, and lastly that we have improved the lives of all of our children.*

- Janet Moran



*[I see] A region without political/economic borders, with planned developments where people work and live in neighborhoods (walk to work), good community schools where graduates want to come back and raise their own families generation after generation. A region with an airport connected to by bus and rail transportation connecting the world into and out of it. A place people are proud to call home.*

- Jim Jaksa

*Seniors can safely age in their communities.*


- Resident

*We will have grown to be globally competitive. Our communities will be multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Neighborhoods and main street will be engaged and thriving places to live and work... Our communities will be open, viable, accessible...*

- Kameli Dogruyol

*...the vision shall not be realized through dependence on local officials, but by every member of their respective community accepting individual responsibility and accountability for leading the region...*

- Tammi Davis



## Our Priorities for Northwest Indiana

### Social Equity:

#### Promoting Equal Opportunity and Environmental Justice

Social equity continues to concern the residents of Northwest Indiana: Nearly a quarter of participants selected it one of their top regional issues of interest. It is also the issue that generated the highest number of different priorities.

Chief among the priorities were cooperation and communication. It is imperative, many said, that Northwest Indiana works together, particularly on the issues of transportation and education, pointing out that regional unity requires give-and-take. Participants identified actions for:

Local governments – eliminate exclusionary zoning and allow mixed-income housing, invest in public transportation and support regional open-space initiatives

Business – act as stewards of the environment and responsible members of the community;

Individuals – take responsibility for their own behavior

In order for this to happen, participants said, the communities of Northwest Indiana must communicate with each other. Different cultural and socio-economic communities must bridge their differences and learn to interact as well. Participants considered communication particularly important for political matters and issued a call for government to provide venues for meaningful public participation and to maintain transparency in decision making.

### PRIORITIES

- Encourage individual and organizational responsibility for their actions (e.g. parents need to get involved, businesses need to clean up) (26%)
- Spend equal dollars on our children's schooling to bridge the gap between social justice and education (25%)
- Invest in public transportation to ensure people of all incomes can get to school and work (23%)
- Provide more opportunities for interaction across cultural and socio-economic boundaries (23%)
- Balance 'good' and 'bad' land use (e.g. open space and land fills) in a way that equalize impacts on wealthy and poor communities (21%)
- Foster open and transparent decision making in government (18%)
- Provide opportunities for all people to have an equal voice in decisions that affect their quality of life (16%)
- Invest in Gary's success through revitalization and public image campaign (15%)
- Reform government to ensure equal enforcement of the law and clear accountability (14%)
- Develop more mixed income housing so that subsidized options are available throughout the region (9%)

*[In 2040] we will ...Recognize and respect the interests and needs of the various groups and individuals that make up Northwest Indiana. Enable and encourage everyone to become involved to make this a better place to live. And to empower all... to understand and realize the importance of inclusiveness, sharing and pride in the development of a strong, caring region.*

- Dr. Jose Arredondo



## Transportation: Improving the Movement of People and Goods

During the time allotted to transportation, the most widespread discussion concerned the issues of public and mass transit. In light of recent cuts in municipal bus service and talks of the expansion of South Shore commuter rail, these conversations were especially timely. Participants strongly endorsed the bolstering of existing public transit service as well as the expansion of bus and rail to fill in the current gaps and create a seamless and integrated system.

They put forward a number of interesting suggestions for implementing these goals. These included the creation of a Regional Transportation Authority to oversee and coordinate all modes of transit, the full integration of the Gary-Chicago Airport into our mass transit system and the creation of a public outreach program to educate Northwest Indiana about the benefits of mass transit.

The need to relieve congestion on our highways was a major concern as well. In addition to improved mass transit, participants supported congestion management practices such as separate truck or carpool lanes. Expansion of the expressway network also received limited support, with 17% of participants advocating the construction of a new east-west route.

A strong environmentalist current ran through much of the discussion. Many participants highlighted the impact of daily transportation choices on the condition of our natural environment. This was seen most prominently in the reasons cited for public transit, but it was also evident in the support for expanded bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

## PRIORITIES

- Build and fund a regional interconnected public transit system “serving job centers, the Gary airport, and education facilities” (47%)
- Create a regional transportation authority for all public transit, including bus, rail, taxi, monorail, airport, waterways, and roads (45%)
- Create bike and pedestrian-friendly options to increase safety and environmental friendliness (29%)
- Expand Gary Airport, attract new carriers, and create connections to trains and buses (22%)
- Reduce congestion by creating truck-only highway, promoting car pooling, and educating the public about the benefits of using public transit (20%)
- Develop a south Lake county expressway to relieve Borman Highway congestion (17%)
- Improve frequency and speed of South Shore commuter rail (9%)
- Rename Gary Airport to reflect its regional service area (e.g. Gary Lakeshore Airport) (2%)

*I see ...a region where the focus is on people, not cars. Communities are walkable or at least bikeable, and more dense... Longer distance travel is reduced and done with renewable-electrified passenger rail.*

- Kevin Crawford

*[In 2040] The communities of Lake Michigan are interconnected with green modes of transportation - bike paths, monorail, bus, hybrid.*

- Nancy Knightly



## Economic Development: Transforming our Economy and Creating Opportunity

After months of watching the global economy struggle and the national recession deepen, participants spoke eagerly about economic priorities for Northwest Indiana. Indeed, 63% of participants placed economic development as one of their top regional issues of interest, making it the only issue to garner over half of the votes.

Many participants highlighted the role that government can play in economic development, that of laying a sturdy foundation. High on this list was strategic investment of public dollars in areas like education and infrastructure. The need to deepen the relationship between schools and employers was frequently cited: participants saw value in developing university programs tailored to the cultivation and maintenance of a strong and able workforce. Equally important to a strong economy, though, according to participants, is honesty and transparency in local government.

The goal of green technology and green-collar jobs showed up in these discussions as well. Wind energy, in particular, was often singled out as a promising possibility.

## PRIORITIES

- Meet the workforce needs of employers with job-focused education and training that improves performance and skills (45%)
- Invest in infrastructure required for economic development e.g. transportation, water, broadband Internet (42%)
- Create and support green technology jobs and industries, particularly alternative energy production (36%)
- Increase government transparency and accountability (35%)
- Collaborate across sectors and regions to increase competitiveness and prosperity (17%)
- Offer targeted tax incentives to encourage new business and retain existing enterprises (13%)

*[In 2040, I] see windmills and the whole community powered by wind and sun energy... high tech innovative jobs that sustain clean air and efficient homes and transportation... We have community gardens and tasks that are assigned to everyone as community help.*

- Marisa Alonso

*Our nation and our region need to revive manufacturing as a source of wealth...*

- Tom Eaton

*I see locally generated economies like local farmers markets, bakeries, wind turbine manufacturing plants, solar panel plants, and local news groups providing everything we need to survive...*

- Resident



## Environment:

### Protecting our Natural Resources and Enhancing our Environment

Northwest Indiana's industrial roots almost guaranteed that the natural environment would be a hot-button issue here, but the national debate on energy issues as well as the mainstreaming of the "green" movement undoubtedly contributed to these discussions. Participants were generally optimistic and practical. They said much about the connection between the quality of Northwest Indiana's natural environment and the potential for economic development.

By and large, a clean environment and a strong economy were spoken of as mutually reinforcing conditions. This was evident in the two goals deemed to be our highest priorities. Half the room agreed that green technology – specifically alternative energy production – was a priority for keeping the region clean. That this would also kick start the economy and create jobs was not far from participants' minds (see the economic development section). Some suggested that local governments should offer incentives to businesses to encourage the transition to a green economy. Meanwhile, over a third of the room agreed that the reclamation and productive reuse of brownfields (a property that has real or perceived environmental contamination) and vacant lots was a priority. This is a strategy with clear environmental and economic implications. It was also the number one land use priority.

## PRIORITIES

- Develop alternative energy resources such as wind, solar, reclaimed methane, and nuclear power (50%)
- Reclaim brownfields and vacant lots for productive reuse – commercial, parks, or other (36%)
- Educate communities and individuals about their roles in preserving the environment (28%)
- Offer incentives to new and existing businesses to adopt green technologies and practices (22%)
- Enforce existing environmental regulations and involve locals in decision-making (17%)
- Reduce landfill waste through an expanded recycling program (14%)
- Upgrade wastewater infrastructure to maintain clean water (14%)
- Clean up polluted rivers and restore aquatic ecosystems (11%)

*[In 2040] I see me standing with my friends/family on the beach (just like the lakeshore posters). I look left and right and see our industrial cities being utilized in a more efficient, cleaner and progressive way. I see cleaner water and breathe better air. There are windfarm "flowers" lining areas of the dunes.*

- Jennifer Denny

*The Northwest Indiana of 2040 is a very green and blue place. The dunes, moraine-forest, lakes, wetlands and prairies have been permanently preserved and restored.*

- Resident



## Land Use: Balancing Development and Building Sustainable Communities

The topic of land use, though an obscure issue for many outside the planning world, generated a number of interesting priorities. Participants displayed an uncommonly strong grasp of the connections between land use, development patterns and the other planning areas of transportation, economic development, social equity and the environment. The land use priorities also produced the highest levels of agreement.

All five of the priorities recommend the implementation of what are commonly called “Smart Growth” principles: building up rather than out, encouraging urban infill instead of greenfield development, creating compact developments, preserving farmland and natural areas, strengthening the public realm, and increasing public involvement.

Two priorities, “involve public in planning” and “identify a clear process for appropriate farm land conversion,” demonstrate some interesting nuance in the way participants approached the subject. In their conversations, it seems, the issue was not the specific use of the land, but more accurately how the decision was made to classify it as such. Participants identified the problem to be one of process and governance, rather than a particular development pattern.

### PRIORITIES

- Aggressively redevelop abandoned industrial sites (brownfields) to take advantage of existing infrastructure (67%)
- Concentrate development around existing areas - “Take advantage of existing downtowns” (56%)
- Involve public in planning and development process and encourage regional thinking (34%)
- Expand public access to Lake Michigan shoreline (25%)
- Identify a clear process for appropriate farm land conversion (8%)

*[I envision] A place which allows my children and grandchildren to commune with nature, work close to home in jobs that provide enough income for them to have a high quality of life which provides a healthy environment.*

- Resident

*[In 2040] Our towns and cities have chosen to grow inward (physically) rather than outwards, giving the increased senior population the chance to still be independent by having walking access to their daily destinations instead of being stranded miles from town centers in a sea of houses.*

- Resident

*My vision would include a major balance between growth and the environment. As Northwest Indiana grows in population, we need to preserve the pure nature of the lakeshore..*

- Roger Sammon

# Forum Evaluation

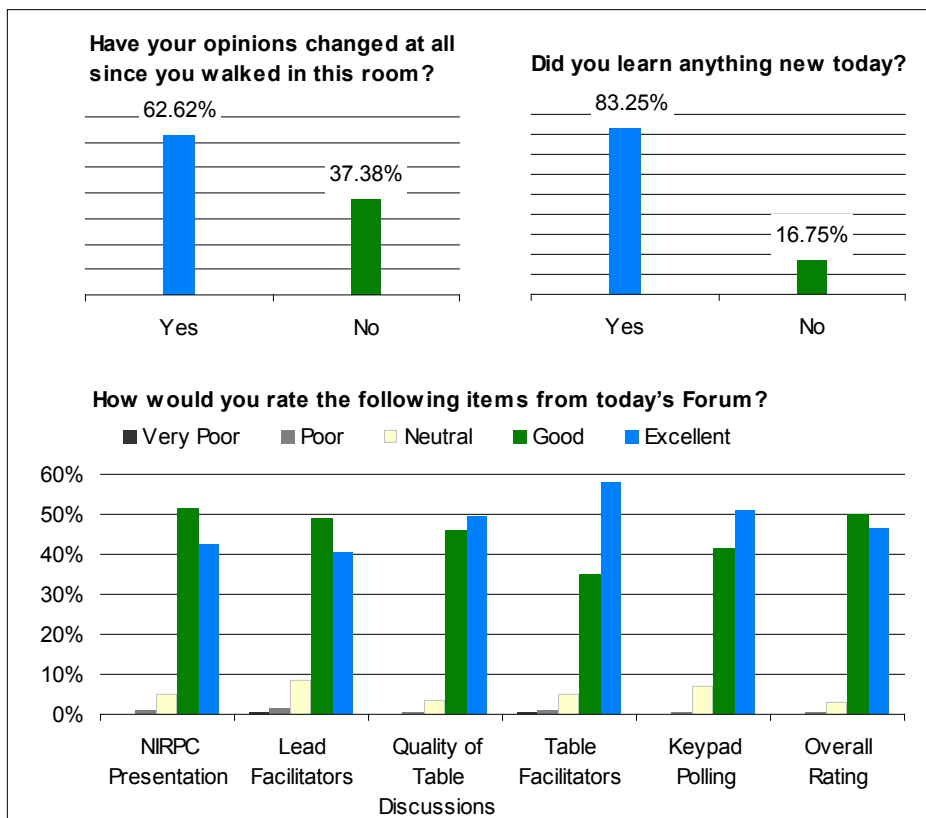
Judging by participant appraisal, the *Forum on the Future* was an unquestionable success. Consistently, over 90% of the participants rated the experience as good or excellent.

Regarding what worked well, the keypad polling was the overwhelming favorite of the participants. Said one participant, “The keypads worked extremely well. They gave us prompt and efficient feedback and made me feel as though my opinion was heard.” Most often mentioned after the keypad polling was the facilitated table discussion which was described by one person as “lots of good free flow of ideas, opinions, and especially visions.”

Among the most cited changes were more time for small group discussions, more time on the microphone for reporting out, more time for questions, eliminating plastic water bottles and providing for recycling, greater participation by local elected officials, more regional meetings of this type spread out, and more meetings

focused on specific topics with greater background information. The quality of the table facilitators drew both praise and criticism as did the length of the program. There were calls for fewer topics as well as for more, especially education. Other changes mentioned by many included having an email or mailing list to sign up for so they could stay involved.

Overall critiques, though few, were nonetheless present. Some participants urged caution about how the issues and questions are phrased to avoid “steering” or “slanting” opinions. One participant lamented “sometimes there was too much going on at once...lead facilitators were speaking while table facilitators were speaking while table participants were trying to think.” Many respondents commented favorably on the diversity of the participants while a few noted the need for more youth involvement. The absence of local elected officials and the need to involve them was also noted frequently.



# CREATING TOMORROW TODAY

## A FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF NORTHWEST INDIANA



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NORTHWESTERN INDIANA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN 46368