

Land Use Committee Meeting
February 14, 2008
Minutes

Members

Aj Bytner, Lake County Plan Commission
Deb Chubb, Save the Dunes Council
Beth Downes, Assistant City Planner, City of Hammond
Rick Eberly, Town of Dyer
Greg Falkowski, Planner, Lake County
Howard Fink, Community Development Director, Town of Merrillville
Rich Herr, Woodland Savannah Conservancy
Todd Hutson, Porter County Plan Commission and Agricultural and Natural Resource Educator at Purdue University Cooperative Extension
Pat Jackson, Executive Director, Interfaith Federation
Ray Joseph, Porter County Planner
Christine Livingston, Save the Dunes Council
Sergio Mendoza, Planner, City of Hobart
Christopher Meyers, Planning Director, City of Gary
Susan Mihalo, Save the Dunes Council
Richard Morrisroe, Planner, City of East Chicago
Jennifer Nebe, Save the Dunes Council
Sandy O'Brien, Sierra Club
Shawn Pettit, Town of Merrillville and NIRPC Commissioner
John Pugh, Planner, City of Michigan City
Herb Read, Save the Dunes Council
Bob Thompson, Executive Director, Porter County Plan Commission
Tom Vanderwood, Urban Planning Student, University of Illinois-Chicago

NIRPC Staff

Jackie Anders, Bill Brown, Dan Gardner, Eman Ibrahim, Shannan Lefever, Kathy Luther, Belinda Petroskey, Steve Strains, Mary Thorne

Welcome, Self-Introductions and Expectations

Steve welcomed the group and said the Chairman is Chuck Oberlie, the Vice Chair is Craig Phillips, the Planning Director of Valparaiso, both of whom had previous engagements. He spoke of everyone's role in all aspects of land use planning and he invited everyone to speak of their expectations:

- John Pugh said Michigan City is very hopeful about a regional approach to planning. There was a similar joint process in LaPorte County with the cities of LaPorte, Michigan City and LaPorte County in developing a comprehensive plan.
- Bob Thompson said he had no expectations and curious to see “what NIRPC was up to.”
- Todd Hutson said he’s here to listen and learn.
- Dick Morrisroe said he didn’t have a lot of expectations.
- Sandy O’Brien said she’d like to see a plan which was good for the region and brings the region together.
- Christine Livingston said she’d like to see the work being done at Save the Dunes integrated with regional land use planning.
- Jennifer Nebe said she wanted to look at future land use scenarios in some of the watershed areas they’re working on and the impact on water quality.
- Susan Mihaló said she has an overall vision of where the region is headed and looks forward to a unified vision for land use planning.
- Debra Chubb said she has great expectations as she’d like to see land use plans become more relevant to actual development.
- Mary Thorne said she is here to record everyone’s thoughts.
- Eman Ibrahim said she’d like to outline a strategy for regional land use planning and address issues and opportunities and a regional vision.
- Steve Strains said NIRPC has no control over land use decisions and wants to bring the communities together in a forum for communication and cooperation in land use planning.
- Herb Read said he’d like to find ways to cooperate to preserve our natural assets, prevent “bad” land use, and make it possible for residents to thrive in Porter County and Northwest Indiana.
- Ray Joseph said he’s here to listen and learn.
- Greg Falkowski said he’s here to observe and learn.
- Aj Bytner said he’d like to establish communication between the different plan commissions, other government agencies and developers.
- Beth Downes said she’d like to learn more about land use projects.
- Rick Eberly said Dyer has an updated Comprehensive Plan which was revised in 2004 and they plan to revise it every five years.
- Shawn Pettit said this committee has been long overdue and looks forward to seeing what other communities are doing.
- Sergio Mendoza said he wants to establish a better understanding of other communities’ planning endeavors. The Hobart Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2003 and will be updated by 2010.
- Tom Vanderwood said he’s been working with Sergio and is here to listen and learn.
- Bill Brown said when he did the transportation modeling he used the output of land use planning as reflected by population, households and employment numbers to the traffic analysis zones. The three-county area has 455 zones and the numbers have a big impact on the output of the transportation model

which is used to analyze air quality. This committee needs to provide good input into the process of developing where the population, households and employment will be in the future.

- Dan Gardner said Michael Griffin is the current chairman of the Economic Development Committee and we want to continue to integrate economic development, transportation and environmental planning for a good framework for regional infrastructure and development.
- Pat Jackson said she wants to see the committee look at recommendations for fair and balanced development in northwest Indiana.
- Rich Herr said he's here to listen and learn.
- Howard Fink said he wants to identify the potential conflicts between the municipalities that border Merrillville whether zoning, curb cuts, intersections, etc. and Merrillville wants to create a transportation plan that benefits all communities.
- Christopher Meyers said he hopes this initiative will show that northwest Indiana has great potential for unity and benefits and opportunities.

Overview and Purpose

Steve said the purpose is to kick off the land use planning portion of the comprehensive regional plan and to discuss what NIRPC's tasks are. The annual Unified Planning Work Program is NIRPC's budgeting and narrative description of all of the planning tasks as mandated by federal regulations. The work program should show significant planning efforts of any community in the region. 95% of the work program is work that NIRPC staff does in accounting to the board but also significant planning activity in northwest Indiana.

Overview of the Land Use Program/Mission Statement

Eman said we are looking to have a unified vision for our regional land use planning to develop the region's two-year comprehensive plan which is due the end of 2010. This committee will look at analyses, land use patterns in GIS during the meetings every two to three months. NIRPC needs every community's recent comprehensive plans to develop a regional plan. Each meeting, communities will share a report on their development plans.

Steve took suggestions from the committee for a mission statement:

- Integration of existing vision plans, i.e., Marquette, Blueways & Greenways, etc.
- A green plan for smarter use of energy
- Plan for a sustainable future
- Plan for protecting the region's natural assets for the purpose of creating a desirable and worthwhile living condition and the merging of these objectives

Overview of the Land Use Inventory Project

Dan said this will assist communities as well as NIRPC. The Economic Development Committee has a lot of energy but not a lot of money. The EDC is

looking at resources in the region to get a current land use inventory of all our communities and put it on an interactive CD to share with all the communities to update land use plans to reflect current and future development to help regional infrastructure. Valparaiso University President Dr. Harre was on the committee and offered to send NIRPC a grad student to help out. Shannan Lefever was brought in and is now a permanent lead person on this to get the inventory. Northwest Indiana Forum has local economic development organizations as well as private sector developers and we want good communication regarding opportunities in northwest Indiana. Dan said the EDC wants to portray current plans, provide tools to help make good decisions and encourage thinking for the future strategically. Shannan Lefever showed the current snapshot which will be constantly changing and updating. Shannan has been collecting existing land use plans in map form and digitizing them. We will also be collecting future land use data in GIS. Eman Ibrahim added that we're trying to get most of the data in GIS and some communities don't have land use in GIS. We will also use the 2005 aerial photography. Eman was in a GIS workshop in Indianapolis and they announced that they will fly the state again in April and the 2008 aerial photography will be available which will help compare development from 2005 to 2008.

Steve asked for ideas on how to fill in the blank communities on the map. Chris Meyers said the City of Gary has an existing land use inventory and they are working on updating their comprehensive plan and anticipate completion in December or January. Dan said dates and forms of plans would be noted as well, as to whether it's adopted or in progress. Ray said the Porter County zoning map would be completed in about a week and the GIS layered. Steve asked for an explanation of the brown "unassigned" section in LaPorte. Shawn said it was part of the Kingsford Heights ordinance plan from World War II. Shannan added that was how it was labeled and she kept the same format. Eman said one of the activities for this committee is to have a regional classification system. Shawn said the MS4 requirements and mandates for flooding. In Merrillville, the Town Council, Plan Commission, Redevelopment Commission and Stormwater Management board, drainage is the number one priority. Compliance must be achieved in two years which will affect land use decisions and this committee may have to tie into the Environmental Committee. Dan said the various committees have access to state officials. Tom Easterly gave a state of the environmental area of the region and other agencies can be available for workshops. In addition to highway corridors there are rail corridors, intermodal, river corridors like the Little Calumet corridor which must be considered in these major regional opportunities.

Herb Read said Porter County has overlay districts regarding scenic highways, riverways, etc. How is that handled visually in a computer system? Bob Thompson said it's in AutoCAD format and will be switched over to GIS format.

Census

Eman said census information will help. If you have any special census data, that will be helpful prior to the next U.S. Census in 2010. Any future development information and demographic information is needed as well. NIRPC will do the projections. Howard Fink said Merrillville is participating in LUCA, and that might be an opportunity for a municipality to identify new development which has occurred within the last five years. Sue Mihalo said we should acknowledge the obstacle that big development plans are often kept secret until the very last minute. Also, some elected officials may know about a project but can't talk about it.

Local and Regional Land Use Update

Steve said this map needs more information, but this is the status of the information that we currently have. We will get more recent information to update the map and list.

Eman said to show how the region will grow, we must look first at the development patterns and she is going back 10 years using GIS to look at development patterns and what changed between 1992 and 2001 and to see if we want to keep the same patterns or if they need to be changed and also vacancy rates, annexation, rate of urbanization and sprawl. This information will be available at the next meeting.

Herb said he looks at "growth" as a maturity, an expectation and desirability of our communities and he regards protecting natural resources as part of that growth. The Porter County Master Plan encourages what growth occurs to be close to the existing urban centers and discourages some growth in other areas.

Fink said in a comprehensive land use initiative from a regional planning organization there needs to be a focus of identifying where infrastructure is centered and needed and how new growth will impact that. We need to define where we're focusing in each of the different municipalities and does that match up with our ability to provide new infrastructure and new services to those areas.

Steve said where growth matches up with resources, to be specific about some resources that NIRPC controls, like where federal money for transportation projects is spent in the three-county areas. The largest spender is the Indiana Department of Transportation. We control little of that, however, our long range plan does list major projects and some of those are state projects. We receive about \$15-\$20 million by an allocation formula to the three counties for local highway projects and about the same amount for local and regional public transportation projects. Shawn has been on both sides of the table and he knows when a project is needed, it is necessary to be at the table. Projects need to be selected, implemented in the regional transportation plan. Shawn added that it goes to Economic Development and the secrecy of the development. They are doing their due diligence and they are coming to the officials in confidentiality looking for tax incentives. In Hobart, a developer wants to acquire

land on the Merrillville side and Merrillville has done some zoning and land use decisions due to the impact they had on their quadrant and the two communities worked together. Merrillville wants federal money to expand south on Mississippi Avenue in anticipation of future growth with the Purdue Incubator, the learning center and the Ameriplex at the Crossroads coming in. Herb added if people want to influence land use around access ways whether roadways or railroads, they must get involved with their local government.

Other Business

After discussion, Steve said the next Land Use Committee meeting will be Wednesday, April 9, 2008 at 11:00 a.m.

Eman said the Sensible Tools Handbook Workshop will be held on Tuesday, February 26, 2007 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at NIRPC.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Thorne