

**Land Use Committee Meeting  
May 22, 2013  
NIRPC Auditorium**

Members & Visitors: Richard Murphy, Maria Becerra, David Wright, Bob Thompson, George Malis, Anne Anderson

NIRPC Staff: Eman Ibrahim, Sara Geinosky, Gabrielle Biciunas, Belinda Petrosky, Meredith Stilwell, Kevin Garcia, Jack Eskin, Stephen Sostaric, Bill Brown

Chairman Murphy called the meeting to order at 10:09 a.m. with self-introductions.

Upon motion by Bob Thompson and second by George Malis the minutes of the March 20, 2013 Land Use Committee meeting were approved.

A current Land Use Committee membership list was included in the meeting packet. Ten NIRPC Commissioners were assigned to Land Use Committee. Eman noted decisions will need to be made regarding funding programs and voting members needs to be established. It was established during the discussion that Brian Poland will be the main representative for Hammond with Africa Tarver and Anne Anderson as alternates. In addition, Maria Becerra will be the East Chicago alternate for Richard Morrisroe and Sandy O'Brien will be the Sierra Club alternate for George Malis. Representatives are still needed from Gary, Lake County, Merrillville and Hobart. Dwayne Williams will most likely be the Gary representative. Eman will contact the communities who still need representation. There should be around 25 members including the Commissioners assigned.

### **Regional Land Use Planning**

#### **a. Update on Livable Centers Project – *Jack Eskin / Gabrielle Biciunas***

NIRPC's livable centers team has already met with 15 communities and has about 15 more to go. Maps reflecting the downtown centers and supporting neighborhood centers were shown for the north Lake County communities of Munster, Highland, Gary, Hammond, East Chicago, and Whiting. South Lake County communities included Schererville, Dyer, Crown Point, and Cedar Lake. Porter County communities included the Town of Porter, Chesterton, and Valparaiso. LaPorte County communities included Michigan City, and LaPorte. One large meeting may be held for all the smaller communities. The preliminary centers were established using community input and a draft will be sent to the communities for further input. Kevin Garcia reminded the group that the focus is on the urbanized areas because that is where funding for the livable centers program has been identified right now.

#### **b. 2040 Priority Development Areas – *Eman Ibrahim***

Priority Development Areas was one of the proposed strategies/tools established during the 2040 CRP process to help communities in the future. Analysis was done to determine land suitability for future development. An analysis was completed using the environmental assets components as stipulated in the 2040 Plan. From the analysis information, an environmental assets map was created dividing the area into three tiers: Tier One includes Environmental assets that should be protected and allows for no development; Tier Two includes ecological assets which will be preserved and unavailable for development; and Tier Three is comprised of soil assets that lie within urbanized areas which have already been damaged by development and adjacent land uses. The area was also divided into urban, suburban and rural areas using traffic analysis zones (TAZ). Classifications for land suitability include suitable land, which is unrestricted from any features from the three tiers of land suitability; less suitable, which is comprised of all lands classed in tier three; and unsuitable, which are those lands which lie within tier one or two. A map was created showing developed, suitable, less suitable, and not suitable land. In addition to land suitability aspects, other factors considered for the priority development areas included the 2040 Plan growth and revitalization vision; current local land use plans; transportation network connectivity; fire protection services; municipal utilities; employment/services areas; educational facilities; hospitals; public transportation and park and recreational facilities. Also considered was housing vacancy rates which are very high with 12% in LaPorte County; 6% in Porter County

and almost 10% in Lake County. 4% is the normal vacancy rate. The priority areas were classified and mapped. Very high priority areas include city/town centers and infill development and high priority includes areas with municipal services and all factors included in developable land suitability. Moderate priority areas have ongoing plans or under developed and located within the Lake Michigan Watershed area; low priority areas are in proximity to municipalities and have a conservancy district waste water packaging plan and the areas ranked very low priority are still good for development but is scattered in the unincorporated areas. The projected developable land map created using the priority ranking system was shown. Eman reviewed figures regarding acreage of developable land for LaPorte, Lake and Porter and reflects enough land to support the expected growth by 2040. Each map used in the analysis clearly explains the geographical location of the different developable land categories and presents an analysis of its distribution throughout the region and its counties. Capabilities are available using GIS to show each community the acreage available for prioritized development. The region will benefit if development is planned and implemented in a manner that makes best use of our natural resources without threatening their quality. The analysis is one of the tools available for communities to use in the preparation of local land use and development planning programs and is also one of the strategies/tools used when projects are scored for transportation funding. Chairman Murphy questioned if community decision makers understand these principals and concepts and how to educate those decision makers. Eman noted that is why it's important to have community representation at the Land Use and other Committee meetings and maybe a workshop could be hosted for planners in the future to show this and other tools. Eman will be creating an illustrated, descriptive publication which will be distributed to the communities.

**c. Creating Livable Communities (CLC) Program – Eman Ibrahim**

Work is being done to refine eligibility and criteria for the funding program and should be ready for discussion at the July Land Use meeting. Membership needs to be finalized for voting and proceed for fall release of the application. \$400k has been allocated for two years using STP funding and will be awarded on a competitive basis for planning projects within livable centers or around corridor or transit stations. NIRPC would like to offer training on best practices for redeveloping downtown areas and are planning a one day workshop. The hope is to feature national speakers with successful examples highlighting tools and how the redevelopment was accomplished. A small portion of the allocated funding will be used for the workshop, but local match is still needed.

**Local Communities Update**

**a. Presentation on Redevelopment in East Chicago – Maria C. Becerra**

A main focus in the City is to reverse the high rental and increase home ownership especially concentrating in the north harbor area. This is a main thoroughfare and includes a subdivision that has been existence for 10 years but has never been completed. Beginning in July 2012 neighborhood revitalization funding was used to finish the subdivision. Six brand new homes have been constructed and two are under contract currently. As an entitlement city home funds are received annually through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development which allowed for the construction of two of the houses. Closing on one of the houses occurred two weeks ago. Incentives being offered to home buyers include a \$10k grant, which is forgivable after 5 years, for existing home purchases and for new construction homes a \$25k grant which is forgivable after 10 years. Both grants are prorated if the homeowner moves before the ownership time limits are met. An additional \$5k from city gaming funds is available to homebuyers who work for the city or school. 31 homes were purchased in the period from July to December 31, 2012 with the majority of them existing and vacant. To date 14 homebuyers have used the incentive program. An 8 hour Saturday class educating buyers on the home buying process must be attended to receive the incentives. One-on-one counseling is also offered for those just beginning the process and not quite ready to buy. An RDA grant was received that allows acquisition and demolition to improve main routes to the lake. 25 mostly abandoned commercial structures have been demolished. A matching business façade grant for exterior improvements is available to business owners. One new challenge is income limits which became a problem in the Sunnyside neighborhood which is made up of townhomes and would sometimes result in help to one neighbor, but not the other. In order to be able to help both owners a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area Plan (NRSA), which has to be applied for and justified to HUD has been established with approval received in April. This plan helps to lift income limits in order to help everyone with home improvements using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) federal

dollars; \$1.5m annually. An annual action plan has to be submitted to HUD and is created using input received from the communities at public meetings. Maps of the areas were reviewed by Maria and she noted that Cline would be reopened as a toll. A government lease to purchase program available for homes that are sitting longer than 6 months is also being used by the City. A strategic plan is being developed to look at tax sale properties in their third cycle that no one is purchasing block by block to make an impact on those streets that have a lot of boarded up properties. There is potential for this program to work in conjunction with East Chicago's green infrastructure initiative for weatherization and improvement of buildings in the harbor area. Park areas have been expanded and a lot of the older areas of the city are going to be made green for now with possible future development. The possibility of local large businesses assisting with home ownership efforts was discussed and Maria noted the casino used to have this type of program, but no longer offer it and the idea needs to be revisited. Chairman Murphy commended Maria and those in charge for the strategies being implemented. George Malis congratulated East Chicago on their success and commented on his concern and disappointment at the State of Indiana over the reopening of Cline Avenue and taxpayers and users in the bind of ultimately paying for the project. He read that 45<sup>th</sup> avenue and Calumet intersection rehab project in Munster is receiving a lot of money from the State and wanted to voice his concern over the equity of the two projects and how they are funded or not funded.

#### **b. Current or Proposed Studies, Plans and Projects**

- David Wright announced GPTC is still awaiting word from DNR and NOAA on the Broadway Corridor Study project.
- Chairman Murphy announced Michigan City released an RPF for the Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy which is to enhance access from downtown to Lake Michigan. Local and national teams are assembling to put together responses. The source of funding is the Redevelopment Commission.
- Belinda Petrosky announced a high speed multi-state rail initiative study, spearheaded by the state of Michigan is currently looking at the Chicago through Porter/Michigan City corridor. She noted it is something that needs to be paid attention to when discussions are held for Michigan City's RFP to make sure responders are aware of the study and local implications. Chairman Murphy noted Michigan City is tracking the study and understand they are up to Porter County with routing and have not moved on with any proposals or alternatives beyond east of there yet.

#### **Announcements**

- a. Pathway to 2040 Implementation Committee 9:00 a.m. Thursday, July 11, 2013
- b. Next Land Use Committee Meeting – July 17, 2013, 10:00 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at 11:17 a.m.