

Land Use Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Members & Visitors: Kevin Breitzke, Joe Simonetto, Richard Morrisroe, Sergio Mendoza, Christopher Meyers

NIRPC Staff: Eman Ibrahim, Gabrielle Biciunas, Meredith Stilwell, Sara Geinosky, Kathy Luther

Call to Order by Chairman

Chairman Breitzke called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. with the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of November 19, 2014 Minutes

On motion by Richard Morrisroe and second by Sergio Mendoza and with no opposition, the November 19, 2014 minutes were approved as presented.

Solarize NWI Presentation – *Kathy Luther, NIRPC*

The Solar Ready II Program from which the Solarize NWI Project is an offshoot is sponsored by the US Department of Energy SunShot Initiative Rooftop Solar Challenge. The goal is to make solar energy fully cost-competitive and incentivizes regional awardee teams to make it easier and more affordable for Americans to go solar. Solar Ready II is a partnership with Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), Meister Consultants Group (MCG) and Council of State Governments (CSG) with the goals of implementing solar best management practices, training materials and methods, and other proven implementation strategies previously established by MARC's 2012 Solar Ready KC Initiative.

The first and primary goal of the project is to reduce costs through smarter zoning code and permitting process modifications and once those barriers have been lifted, increase the access to low cost financing. Once financing options are in place, the final step is to implement programs that drive local solar adoption with the hopeful outcome of 10-30 LPAs adopting or implementing a BMP.

Some of the myths facing solar adoption include not enough sun, panels are ugly and reduce property values, the technology is new and complicated and is for tree huggers. Studies show this region has a lot more sun than Germany where 7.6 GW of capacity was installed in 2012 alone and solar homes sold 20% faster and for 17% more than the equivalent non-solar homes. In addition, solar is a \$12 billion industry in the United States and a new job is created for every four residential solar installations in northwest Indiana and is a great use for landfills and vacant lands. A survey regarding solar barriers showed the largest barriers to be high upfront costs and lack of information and education. In fact, solar hardware costs are decreasing and soft costs have not changed between 2010 and 2012.

The number one best management practices from stakeholder meetings held was to create a solarize program which is group purchasing for residential solar projects to help offset the high upfront costs. The more people who participate and have installed the lower the pricing will be. Based on the tiers, the equivalent of 40 houses will need to sign-up to get the best deal. This will be a limited time offer program. Midwest Wind and Solar was the competitively procured vendor. While the four focus communities selected are Dyer, Gary, Hobart and Valparaiso, the program will be offered to all residents in the region. Statistics from solarize programs in Harvard, MA and Syracuse, NY were given as well as anticipated pricing for a solar installation that would result in a cashflow payback in a little over nine years. NIPSCO is beginning phase II of a feed-in tariff which allows them to actually pay the customer for electricity and will be awarded by lottery.

Next steps include workshops in the four focus communities, social media ads and presentations and chambers and other interested organizations. Interested parties can sign-up on line or at the workshops. Midwest Wind and solar then contacts them for a remote evaluation and then conducts an on-site evaluation, an estimate is given and a contract signed. The next Solar Advisory Group meeting is April 30, 2015 at NIRPC.

Growth/Regional Land Use Planning

a. 2040 CRP Update – Growth & Conservation Presentation *Eman Ibrahim, NIRPC*

NIRPC is currently in the process of updating the 2040 Comprehensive Regional Plan adopted in 2011. There won't be significant changes, but will update what has happened in the last four years since the Plan adoption. The Growth & Conservation element of the Plan covers the three elements of demographics and housing trends in 2013; land use and growth patterns and the local food system. The four priorities reflected in the CRP goals are livable urban, suburban and rural centers; revitalized urban core cities; managed growth that protects farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and important ecosystems; and linked land use and transportation.

Demographics reflect that when comparing the 2013 census data to the 2010 census data, while the region lost .33% of the population which is roughly 2,000 people, both south Lake and south Porter Counties reflected population gains. Additionally, both unincorporated Lake and Porter County saw population loss, while unincorporated Porter County gained population. Housing statistics reflected a continued growth in the housing supply despite the population lost. For roughly every two people the region lost in the last three years, one housing unit was added. There are still residential vacancies throughout the region and business vacancies exist more in the urban core communities.

The four growth and conservation priorities were detailed with implementation/action items that occurred between 2011 and 2015 given for each. **Livable Urban, Suburban and Rural Centers:** NIRPC's Creating Livable Communities (CLC) Initiative was followed by a grant using \$400k in STP funding and awarding seven communities to help finance a diverse array of projects. **Revitalized Urban Core Cities:** NIRPC formed an Urban Core Subcommittee and also conducted a cultural and historic inventory mapping project; and prioritized transportation funding to support centers, revitalization areas and infill and growth areas. Community projects for this priority included the Gary Northside redevelopment project; the Roxana TOD Project in East Chicago; the Lake Michigan Gateway Implementation Strategy in Michigan City; and the 2015 Marquette Plan Update. **Managed Growth that Protects Farmland, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Important Ecosystems:** development patterns were tracked between 2006 and 2010 with an additional four square miles (2,608 acres) of unincorporated land developed. Those four square miles of developed unincorporated land accounted for 25% of the region's 17 square miles (11,060 acres) of additional development. Both open space and agriculture land were lost. **Link Land Use and Transportation:** NIRPC projects include Transit Oriented Development (TOD) projects; Creating Livable Communities transit area map; and the Regional Corridors Study (RCS). Regional studies included the US 421/South Franklin Street South Gateway Corridor Plan; the Porter County: Willowcreek Extension; the NICTD Strategic Business Plan-2014; and the GPTC Livable Broadway Plan.

In conclusion, continued efforts of revitalizing and renewing the region's centers and planning for growth with livable urban, suburban and rural centers will help break the cycle of land development inconsistent with population changes. In addition, it will also aid in protecting and preserving the rural and natural areas of the region.

b. Local Food System – Gabrielle Biciunas, NIRPC

The local food system is a viable part of the 2040 Plan that touches on land use and growth as well as economic development and transportation. The grant that funded the Northwest Indiana Food Study completed in March 2012 ran out in 2012. Partners have now been identified and two recommendations have been to establish an action committee and develop an action agenda. A Regional Food Summit is being held April 24, 2015 at Valparaiso University to convene and establish relationships between farmers, producers, buyers and consumers. There will be opportunity to highlight local success stories and an opportunity to work together to create jobs and expand the economy with a goal to form a food council. This will also help to develop additional action steps.

Local Community / Agency Update

a. Current or Proposed Studies, Plans and Projects

- Christopher Meyers spoke about the Hobart Neighborhood Spotlight Program which is an initiative funded by Legacy Foundation and their Lake County Community Fund and is a collaborative effort between the City of Hobart, the Hobart YMCA, Hobart Art League and other interested groups. \$50k was secured for a year-long program to assess the northwestern side of Hobart relative to economic development, land use, work force development, etc. The first step is a one on one interview process to help capture ideas that will be distilled into the beginning of a collective impact plan. He offered to come back to Land Use to give a general overview of the program and conduct a group interview. On May 14th and May 16th the Spotlight Group will present the interviews and kick off the project. The ultimate vision is to establish various subcommittees based on the interview process information. For a one on one interview either Christopher or Sergio Mendoza can be contacted. Sergio added that the interest of the city in this program came about last year when the Comprehensive Plan public input planning sessions were held and community surveys were conducted indicating the residents were unsatisfied with the west side of the city.
- Sergio Mendoza commented that also as part of the community planning input sessions there was an outcry from the residents to not let the completed Marsh Plan sit on the shelf, but to move forward. All of the community organizations, including NIRPC, will be brought back for a summit on April 6th which will allow residents to communicate with organizations and different groups to see how they are working toward implementing the Marsh Plan. Each group will also present. Part of what the City of Hobart is doing as part of a stormwater issue on the west side in the Marsh Plan area, a stormwater system is being installed that includes road reconstruction and adding eight foot wide sidewalks as part of a connection from that neighborhood to other conservation areas.
- Joe Simonetto announced that the grade separation on 45th and Calumet Avenue is progressing well with INDOT and financing is being worked on. The cost is about \$60m currently but that is being refined through value engineering and might change different parts of the design and may be able to eliminate some traffic rerouting to save money. The first stage is on 45th Avenue and part of the 800 foot approach will take place this year. TIF funds are being used to complete part of the project. The grade separation will probably start in 2016.
- Richard Morrisroe announced that East Chicago is working hard on the Roxana Transit Oriented Development (TOD). It was dredged as part of the Grand Calumet dredging. There is hope to host activities in that area including a race this spring to help highlight it.

Announcements

- a. NIRPC is hosting 2040 Plan Update Public Meetings throughout the region.
- b. **Next Meeting:** to be determined

The meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.