

THE MARQUETTE PLAN: A VISION FOR LAKESHORE REINVESTMENT, PHASE II

BACKGROUND

In 1985, U.S. Congressman Pete Visclosky (1st District, Indiana) issued a report entitled: *The Marquette Project*. The report took note of the changing economic conditions occurring in northwest Indiana and the opportunities for recapturing, for public use, large tracts of land along the Lake Michigan shoreline which had previously been held in private ownership for heavy manufacturing purposes.

It would be another twenty years before the Cities of Hammond, Whiting, East Chicago, Gary and Portage and the Office of Cong. Visclosky actually developed a vision plan for reinventing approximately 20 miles of shoreline area extending from the Illinois State Line to the Burns Harbor International Port in Portage, Indiana. Completed early in 2005, *The Marquette Plan* (named after an early French explorer of the region) represented a bold initiative of the five cities to reclaim unused and underused industrial properties for public purposes.

Following the completion of the first phase plan, interest was shown in preparing a vision plan for the remaining 26 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline area extending from the City of Portage eastward to the Michigan State Line. However, there were a number of critical differences present in this second study area which required exceptional regional cooperation and coordination. Among those governmental entities encompassed by the second phase of the plan were:

Indiana Department of Natural Resources: The Indiana Dunes State Park

U.S. National Park Service: The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore

Two county governments: Porter and La Porte Counties

Two cities: Portage and Michigan City

Eleven towns: Beverly Shores, Burns Harbor, Chesterton, Dune Acres, Long Beach, Michiana Shores, Ogden Dunes, Pines, Porter, Pottawattamie Park, and Trail Creek

While the two counties and two cities had both planning and economic development staff, nearly all of the towns lacked these capabilities except on the occasion when professional consulting firms were brought in from time to time.

The Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), which serves as both the council of governments and Metropolitan Planning Organization for the entire shoreline area, was deemed to be in a unique position to bring about the necessary collaboration and cooperation to prepare and help implement such a vision plan. However, an initial need was to conduct a feasibility study, which consisted in large part of interviews with key officials of each of the various governmental entities referenced above. Through these consultations, it was determined that there was a recognition of Lake

Michigan and the adjacent shoreline areas as a valued treasure for the region's communities and that the communities were supportive of the concept of developing a unified vision for the entire lakeshore.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

With funding support from the Lake Michigan Coastal Program of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Porter and Lake Counties, NIRPC was able to initiate *The Marquette Plan, Phase II*, in May 2007. A steering committee was created to guide the work on the project, which included representatives of many of the governmental entities referenced above, as well as the district directors from the offices of U.S. Senator Evan Bayh and Rep. Joe Donnelly. A multi-disciplinary consulting team was formed to supplement the NIRPC staff capabilities.

Among the initial tasks for the planning team was the conduct of a series of interviews with major stakeholders in the area, including the Port of Indiana, major manufacturing companies, convention and visitor bureaus, environmental advocacy groups and community organizations. Several large-scale public outreach meetings were held in various locations to discuss the purposes of the plan and receive citizen input. These large-scale events were then supplemented by a series of smaller group outreach events held in many of the shoreline communities. Extensive mapping was also done for purposes of identifying environmental assets and land uses in the area.

Once this information was collected, it was distilled and placed into framework plans for community investment, industry, green infrastructure, and motorized and alternative transportation. Sub-area plans were also developed for three intergovernmental clusters within the study area, so that the local governments were able to identify and respond to proposed projects being considered by neighboring communities. Each local entity was also asked to identify a "catalytic" project within their jurisdiction, which could be incorporated into a short-term plan of action for that local government. These draft plans were then presented to and reviewed by each of the municipal and county councils and/or plan commissions in the study area for further consideration and refinement. Two public and one stakeholder open houses were then held in order to secure additional public input on the drafts for the framework, sub-area and short-term plans.

Prior to adoption, the draft plan recommendations were also presented for review and recommendation to two different NIRPC policy advisory committees for transportation and environmental management. This was followed by the unanimous adoption by the full council of government membership of NIRPC on February 28, 2008.

The adopted plan provides a strategy for improving the quality of life and spurring economic diversification and growth for all of northwest Indiana through key reinvestment activity in the shoreline areas of the region. The core principles of the vision are:

1. Recapture at least 75% of the Lake Michigan lakeshore for public use;

2. Establish a minimum setback of 200 feet from the water's edge for any future development/redevelopment activity; and
3. Create a continuous trail network throughout northwest Indiana, including a trail parallel to the lakefront with frequent opportunities for public access.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

What is particularly noteworthy about the *Marquette Plan: Phase II* is the degree to which it has been strongly embraced by the residents, businesses, civic organizations, advocacy groups, and governmental entities throughout the three-county region (Lake, Porter and LaPorte) of northwest Indiana.

Federal, state, regional, local, foundation and private monies have all been forthcoming in order to help make *The Marquette Plan* vision a reality. The following is a listing of key implementation activities which have occurred since the plan's adoption:

- A poster plan is funded, developed and published by NIRPC in summer 2008 as a means of visually depicting *The Marquette Plan* and its vision, guiding principles, and various catalytic projects contained in the plan. More than 3,000 such poster plans have thus far been distributed, and copies of the plan can be found in public and private offices and buildings throughout the region.
- The first major *Marquette Plan* project is completed and opened to the public in November 2008 – the Portage Lakefront and Riverwalk, a 60 acre former brownfield site.
- Stakeholder group meetings are held in late 2008 – early 2009 for purposes of identifying the roles and responsibilities of the principal organizations charged with implementing the plan.
- The second major *Marquette Plan* project, the Lake Michigan Water Trail, is completed in June 2009; an inaugural sea kayak expedition from Burnham Harbor in Chicago, Illinois to Michigan City, Indiana is held to celebrate the completion. Implementation activities for the project were provided by the ArcelorMittal corporation.
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- An interagency cooperation agreement is executed in July 2009 between the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority and NIRPC for purposes of identifying the responsibilities and coordinating the activities of the three organizations deemed to have the most important roles in implementing the plan.
- In October 2009, NIRPC and Openlands release the Marquette Greenway National Lakeshore Connector Route Proposal, which identifies an agreed-upon 9.6 mile trail alignment traversing five municipalities, the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, and a private business park. The project is funded by the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. Work on the easternmost segment of the trail begins the following summer.

- In February 2010, a full-time Marquette Implementation Coordinator is hired by the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority, who is responsible for certain ongoing implementation activities relating to the plan.
- In mid-2010, construction work begins on the Porter Gateway Project, which is a catalytic project for the Route 49, U.S. 12 and U.S. 20 corridors leading to the Indiana Dunes State Park and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Funding is provided through grants from the Indiana Department of Transportation and the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority.
- In fall 2010 the Town of Long Beach is funded by a grant through the Indiana Coastal Management Program to redevelop its water plant site into a public park and sea kayak access point on Lake Michigan.
- In October 2010, the City of Michigan City and the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District are funded to conduct a commuter rail station consolidation and transit oriented development study in the city. Funds are provided by a federal
- Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant.
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Conclusion

From an innovative concept by a freshman congressman in 1985 to an exciting vision for northwest Indiana in 2011, *The Marquette Plan* has succeeded in bringing the public, private and civic interests of the region together as perhaps never before. All of the units of local government in the shoreline areas have embraced the plan, and a number of them have now made significant investments in order to accomplish their catalytic projects. By creating a unified vision of what our shoreline areas might become, and bringing together the disparate governmental entities and stakeholders to help develop and work toward the attainment of that vision, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission has fostered an initiative which is already having a major impact on our region.