



# The Countywide Land Development Plan

*Michigan City, City of La Porte  
and all LaPorte County Communities*

**LaPorte County, Indiana**

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# LAPORTE COUNTY LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

LaPorte County and the Cities of Michigan City and La Porte and other incorporated towns, working with the consulting firm Duncan Associates, in association with Rundell Ernstberger Associates and Cooper Consulting Company, have successfully created a comprehensive Countywide Land Development Plan to guide the County's land development decision-making processes through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The first step of the process involved meeting with a wide variety of local officials, groups, and citizens to identify key issues. Extensive local surveys conducted by the LaPorte County Planner also informed the early stages of the process. Identification and refinement of the issues involved multiple meetings with the Plan Steering Committee, often attended by a number of other interested citizens. The website, [www.laportecountyplan.com](http://www.laportecountyplan.com), kept Plan committee members and the general public updated on the Plan's progress and available documents.

The next step of the Plan's creation, involved collection and analysis of land use, utility service areas, the transportation network, aerial photography, development densities, farmland suitability, forested areas, topography, sensitive environmental areas, major watersheds, development trends, population trends, housing capacity and trends, public utilities, and transportation systems and plans. This also included an extensive set of maps to illustrate data collected and analyzed.

Finally, strategic goals and objectives were developed that guided the creation of land development strategy areas for the countywide Land Development Plan. To support the Plan's concepts, an Implementation Strategies Report was completed to identify the short and long range actions necessary to implement the Plan.

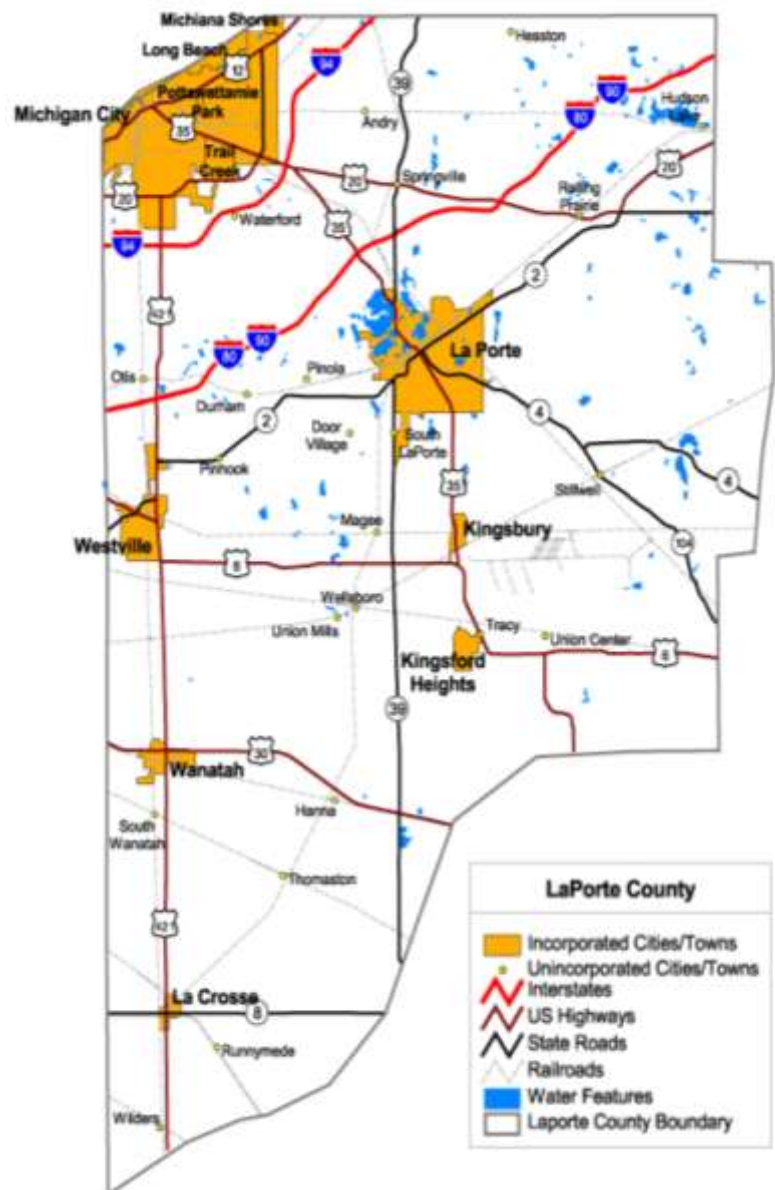


Figure 1 LaPorte County

## **EFFECT OF A LAND DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The Countywide Land Development Plan serves to guide the land development decisions of LaPorte County and its communities in accordance with Section 36-7-4-504 and other applicable provisions of the Indiana Code.

The major substantive provisions of Section 36-7-4-504 read as follows:

- (a) After the comprehensive plan is approved for a jurisdiction, each governmental entity within the territorial jurisdiction where the plan is in effect shall give consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the comprehensive plan in the:
  - (1) Authorization, acceptance, or construction of water mains, sewers, connections, facilities, or utilities;
  - (2) Authorization, construction, alteration, or abandonment of public ways, public places, public lands, public structures, or public utilities; and
  - (3) Adoption, amendment, or repeal of zoning ordinances, including zone maps and PUD district ordinances (as defined in section 1503 [IC 36-7-4-1503] of this chapter), subdivision control ordinances, historic preservation ordinances, and other land use ordinances.

Under Indiana Code Section 36-7-4-205, the adopted Comprehensive Plan will serve as the official planning policies for LaPorte County and the cities and towns by which it is adopted.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN DOCUMENT**

The Countywide Land Development Plan includes the following elements:

- An analysis of existing land use, utility service areas, the transportation network, development densities, farmland suitability, forested areas, topography, sensitive environmental areas, major watersheds, development trends, population and employment trends, and land absorption rates;
- A regional analysis of seven subregions within LaPorte County;
- Recommended goals and policies addressing the required elements of a comprehensive plan under state law, plus others of local interest;
- Recommended Land Development Strategies for Existing Urban Areas, Planned Urban Expansion Areas, Planned Growth Areas, Planned Rural Estate Areas, Planned Rural Industrial Areas, Traditional Agriculture Areas, Towns and Rural Villages, Airport Influence Areas, and Economic Opportunity Areas; and,
- Recommended Plan Implementation Techniques that include plan coordination, creation of an Area Plan Commission, an Adequate Public Facilities Program, limiting Subdivisions Served by Septic Tanks, a Capacity Allocation Program, Impact Fees, Sewer/Water Plant Investment Fees, Land Acquisition Programs, Conservation Easement Programs, Capital Improvements Programs, Priorities for Infrastructure, General Zoning Updates, Minimum Density Standards, Cluster Zoning, Overlay Zones, Update or Rewrite Zoning Ordinances and Subdivision standard and specific implementation recommendations related to the strategic planning areas.



# AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT CONDITIONS

## POPULATION

### POPULATION TRENDS

LaPorte County over the past 45 years has experienced a generally slow growth pattern. In 1960, the Census estimated there were 95,000 persons living in the County. Forty years later that number had increased by only 15,000 people. Although there has been limited gain in population, there have been substantial shifts in where people live within LaPorte County.

From 1960 to 1970, LaPorte County saw its greatest percent and numeric increase in population, with an increase in over 10,000 persons and a 10.8 percent increase. Since 1970, the County has had single digit growth and an actual decline in population from 1980 to 1990. Population projections from 2000 – 2030, completed by the Indiana Bureau of Business Research, continue to anticipate only incremental increases in the County's population (a 4265 person increase over a thirty year period (See Table 1).

**Table 1 Existing / Projected Population, La Porte County, 1960 – 2030**

	Year	Total Population	Population Change Per Decade	Percent Change Per Decade
Actual	1960	95,111		
	1970	105,342	10,231	10.76%
	1980	108,632	3,290	3.12%
	1990	107,066	-1,566	-1.44%
	2000	110,106	3,040	2.84%
Projected	2010	110,376	270	0.25%
	2020	112,278	1,902	1.72%
	2030	114,371	2,093	1.86%

**Table 2 Population in LaPorte County by Jurisdiction, 2000 and 2005**

Place	2000 Population	2005 Estimated Population
Michigan City	32,900	32,205
City of La Porte	21,631	21,092
Kingsbury	234	235
Kingsford Heights	1,453	1,407
La Crosse	565	561
Long Beach	1,559	1,554
Michiana Shores	330	334
Pottawattomie Park	300	302
Trail Creek	2,296	2,205
Wanatah	1,013	990
Westville	5,221	5,219
<b>Total in Towns and Cities</b>	<b>67,502</b>	<b>66,104</b>
<b>Unincorporated area</b>	<b>42,704</b>	<b>44,177</b>
<b>Total County Population</b>	<b>110,206</b>	<b>110,281</b>

Table 2 Population in LaPorte County by Jurisdiction, 2000 and 2005, provides the population break down for each incorporated city and town and the remainder of the County. Michigan City is the largest jurisdiction with its 32,205 population comprising almost one-half of the municipal population in the County. The City of La Porte is second with a population of 21,092. From there, the third leading municipal population contender is the town of Westville with 5,219 people; but two-thirds of the town's population is due to the inmates within the state prison. The remaining 7,500 people within municipal jurisdictions are spread among the eight other small towns. Overall population figures have either remained stagnant or fallen within cities and towns from 2000 – 2005. The surprising population issue is the percentage of persons living within the unincorporated areas of LaPorte County --- 40 percent.

Although LaPorte County experienced a 3 percent increase in population from 1990 to 2000, a number of cities and towns within the County lost population. Figure 2 Population Change, LaPorte County, Cities & Towns, 1990 – 2000 shows that Long Beach’s population fell by 24 percent; La Crosse dropped by 17 percent; Michiana Shores decreased by 13 percent; Kingsbury fell by 11 percent; and Trail Creek dropped by 7 percent. However, in contrast, Wanatah grew by 19 percent, Pottawattomie Park increased by 7 percent and the unincorporated areas of the County grew by 12 percent.

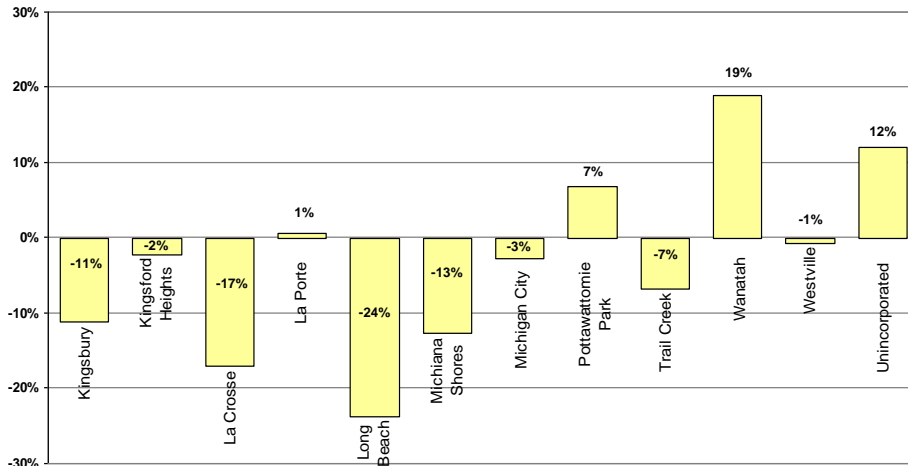


Figure 2 Population Change, LaPorte County, Cities & Towns, 1990 – 2000

Figure 3 Population Trends in the Region, shows population trends for LaPorte County and neighboring counties from 1970 to 2005. Lake County reached its peak population in 1970, but gradually lost population with the loss of industry and people moving out of Gary; however, since 1990, it has seen a modest increase in population. Stark County’s growth over the past 35 years has been fairly constant, not falling nor rising. In contrast, Porter County has had steady growth since the 1980’s, as Chicago regional jobs moved to suburbs and the growth of the metropolitan area made the commute to Valparaiso seem more reasonable. However, St. Joseph County had little growth until 1990, when population increased by 18,500 people within the decade.

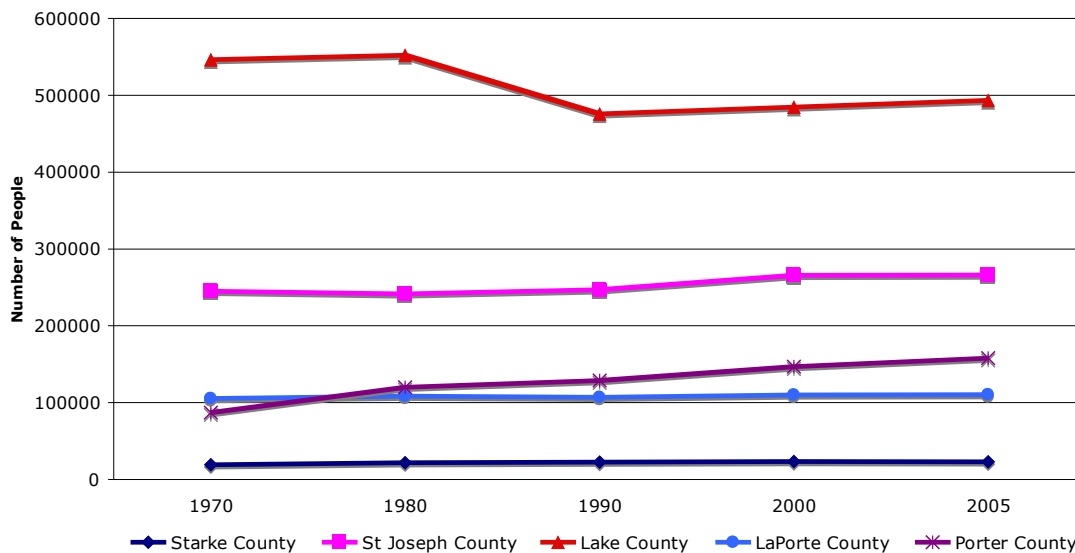


Figure 3 Population Trends in the Region, 1970 – 2005

In 2000, the U.S. Bureau of the Census determined that LaPorte County had a population of 110,106. In 2004, the Indiana University Bureau of Business Research reported that LaPorte County had experienced a population loss of 411 persons; then in 2005, the Research Center estimated there was actually a gain in population of 406 persons.

Although Figure 4 is based on 2004 population gain/loss by city, town and township, versus the revised 2005 estimate, there is no indication that the pattern is much different as a result. From 2000 to 2004, LaPorte County had a slight loss in population; however, substantial population loss was experienced within incorporated areas of the County. In contrast, significant gains in population occurred in unincorporated rural areas of the County, with the largest amount of growth occurring in the southern one-half of the County. This phenomenon will be explored in more depth in the Land Use section of the Plan.

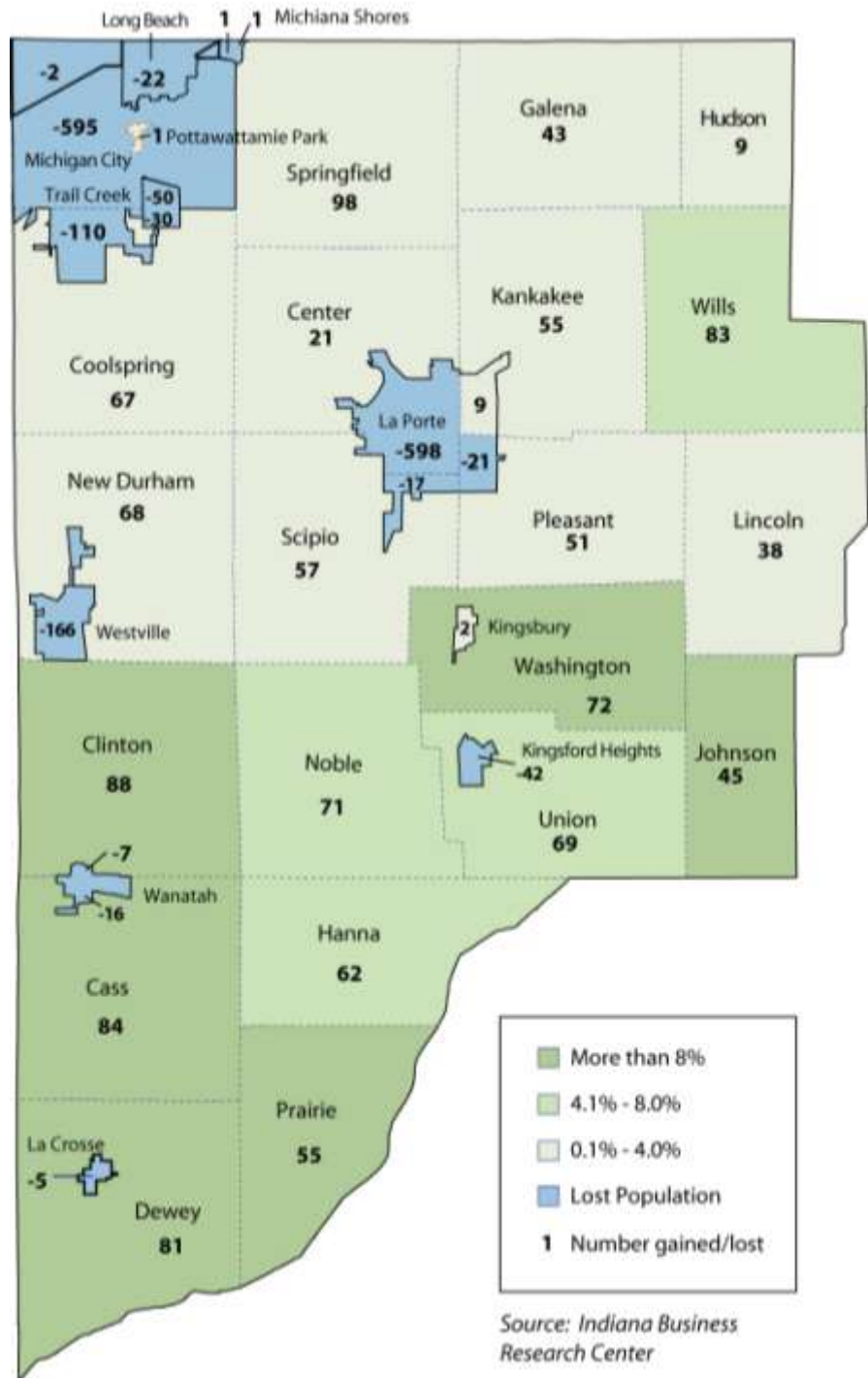


Figure 4 Population Loss/Gain, LaPorte County, 2000 – 2004

## POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Based on population projections for LaPorte County from 2000 – 2030, the County is projected to have an extremely low rate of growth (3.87 percent). Growth rates for neighboring counties and the region over this same period are much higher, as is the statewide projected population increase of 15.5 percent. (See Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5)

Regardless of projected rates of growth, LaPorte County will remain a part of the greater Chicago region and will be influenced by the smaller metropolitan regional center of South Bend. Because the regional commuting patterns are so interwoven and complex, even a large influx of new jobs to LaPorte County is unlikely to lead to a significant increase in population. But new jobs may mean that fewer LaPorte County residents have to commute out of the County for work, and it may mean that more people from neighboring counties will commute into the County.

**Table 3 Existing and Projected Population, LaPorte and Region, 2000 – 2030**

	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030	Total Increase 2000 - 2030
LaPorte County	110,106	109,886	110,376	112,278	114,371	4,265
Lake County	484,564	481,820	483,183	492,535	504,808	20,244
Porter County	146,798	152,822	156,755	161,100	164,915	18,117
NIRPC*	741,468	744,528	750,314	765,913	784,094	42,626
St. Joseph County	265,559	266,160	270,266	283,885	297,557	31,998

\*NIRPC – NW Indiana Regional Planning Comm. population figures include LaPorte, Lake, and Porter Counties

**Table 4 Projected Rates of Population Change, LaPorte County and Region, 2000 – 2030**

	% Change 2000-2005	% Change 2005-2010	% Change 2010-2020	% Change 2020-30	Total % Change 2000 - 2030
<b>LaPorte County</b>	<b>-0.20%</b>	<b>.45%</b>	<b>1.72%</b>	<b>1.86%</b>	<b>3.87%</b>
Lake County	-0.57%	.28%	1.94%	2.49%	4.18%
Porter County	4.10%	2.57%	2.77%	2.37%	12.34%
NIRPC*	0.41%	.78%	2.08%	2.37%	5.75%
St. Joseph County	0.23%	1.54%	5.04%	4.82%	12.05%
Blended**	0.32%	1.16%	3.56%	3.59%	8.90%

\*NIRPC – NW Indiana Regional Planning Comm. population figures include LaPorte, Lake, and Porter Counties.

\*\*“Blended” rate - an average of projected rates of growth for St. Joseph County and the NIRPC region.

**Table 5 Alternative Population Projections for LaPorte County, 2005 – 2030**

	2005	2010	2020	2030
LaPorte County (Indiana University)	109,886	110,376	112,278	114,371
Population Increase		490	1,902	2,093
LaPorte County (“Blended” Growth Rate)	110,512	111,794	115,774	119,930
Population Increase		1,282	3,980	4,156

\*\*“Blended” rate - an average of projected rates of growth for St. Joseph County and the NIRPC region.

It is likely that some of the sprawling growth that has affected Porter County will begin to overflow into LaPorte County. In addition, because of the attractive character and the strong school corporation in eastern LaPorte County, it seems likely that there will be continued growth in that area among people commuting to work in and around South Bend. The casino-related development at New Buffalo may also contribute to growth, particularly along S.R. 39, including the northern parts of the City of La Porte. Those are factors that suggest that the "Blended" growth rate shown in Table 4 and Table 5 may be more realistic. Using Indiana University or the "blended" rate, LaPorte County's 2030 projected population will range from 114,371 to 119,930 people.

## **KEY ISSUES**

In summary, some of the key population issues in LaPorte County are:

- Since 1960, LaPorte County's population has increased by only 15,000 people.
- With the exception of a few smaller towns, populations in cities and towns dropped significantly from 1990 to 2000.
- From 1990 – 2000, population and development have shifted to the unincorporated areas of LaPorte County has risen dramatically, particularly in the southern area of the County.
- From 2000 – 2030, LaPorte County is projected to grow by only 3.87, while projected growth rates for Porter and St. Joseph Counties and the State are much higher.
- It is likely that some of the sprawling growth that has affected Porter County will begin to overflow into LaPorte County.
- Instead of Indiana's projected 2030 population of 114,371 for LaPorte County, additional factors suggest that a "blended" growth rate may be more realistic, which would result in a 2030 population for LaPorte County of 119,930.

## ECONOMY

### ECONOMIC TRENDS

LaPorte County evolved as an agricultural and industrial economy. Early industrial activity focused along the Lake Michigan shoreline, where goods could be transported by water. As the railroads came to Indiana, the City of La Porte developed along major rail lines. Farmers settled in much of the rest of the County and cleared forests to give them access to the good farmland beneath. With the support of federal programs beginning in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, farmers installed drain tiles to drain the swamps that characterized much of the County. Different economic figures are published at different times, so the most current date used in the following analysis varies with the availability of the data.

That dual heritage continues to influence LaPorte County today, with manufacturing and agriculture constituting important parts of the County's economic base. Service sector employment has grown and is now also a significant part of the economic base, as it is in many other former manufacturing communities in the Midwest. LaPorte County's top five industry sectors based on earnings are: manufacturing, health care/social assistance, retail trade, construction, and transportation/warehousing. Not surprisingly, manufacturing ranks as the highest percent of earnings in the County. (Table 6 below)

**Table 6 Total Wages from Major Non-farm, Non-gov. Sectors in LaPorte County, 2001 – 2005**

Industry	2001	2003	2005	Percent of Nonfarm Private Wages
Manufacturing	\$478,619,000	\$464,134,000	\$511,572,000	30.64%
Health care / social assistance	\$212,820,000	\$245,988,000	\$250,706,000	15.01%
Construction	\$131,591,000	\$136,322,000	\$151,086,000	9.05%
Retail trade	\$138,462,000	\$139,823,000	\$148,801,000	8.91%
Transportation / warehousing	\$104,707,000	\$92,636,000	\$103,892,000	6.22%

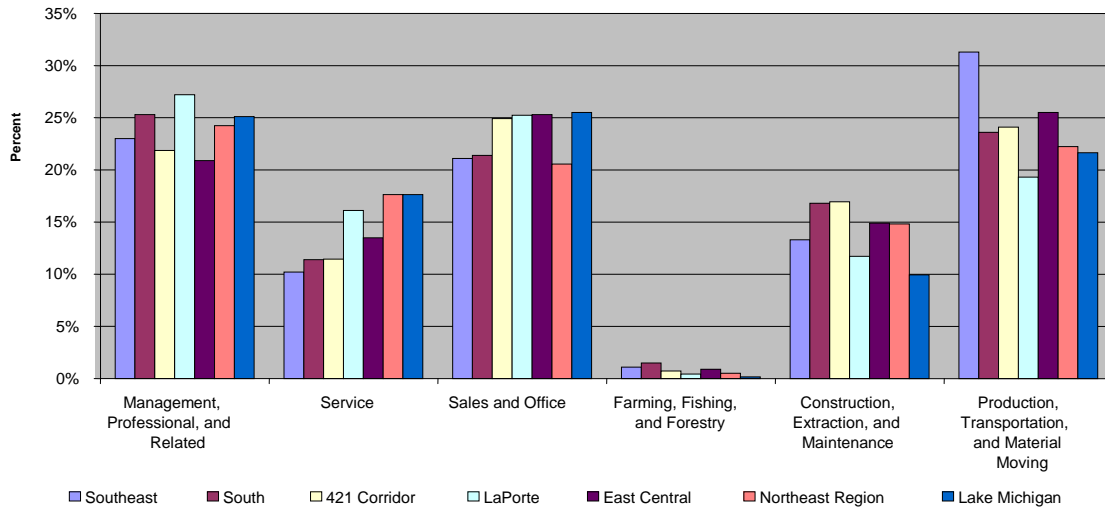
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis/STATS Indiana

**Table 7 Top Employers in LaPorte County, 2005 – 2006**

Table 7, Top Employers in LaPorte County, shows 2006 employment figures. Four of the top seven employers in LaPorte County are located in the Michigan City. The largest employer in the County is Blue Chip Casino, followed by the two regional hospitals in Michigan City and the City of La Porte. Although not shown as an industrial employer, the Michigan City and La Porte Community Schools are major employers in the County.

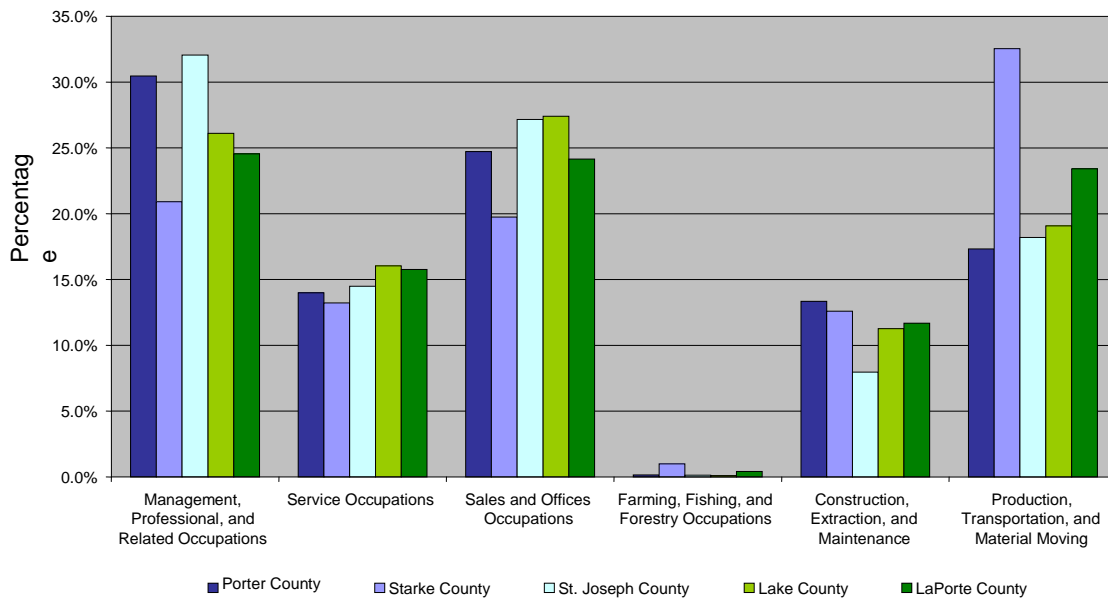
Employers	Location	Employees
Blue Chip Casino	Michigan City	2,000
La Porte Regional Health	City of La Porte	1,500
St. Anthony Memorial Health	Michigan City	1,200
Howmet Corporation	City of La Porte	630
Sullair	Michigan City	630
Aero Metals	City of La Porte	425
Federal Mogul	Michigan City	375

To better evaluate regional differences within the County, LaPorte County was divided into seven geographical areas. As shown in Figure 5 Occupations in LaPorte County, by Regions, 2000, the types of occupations within the regional areas of LaPorte County are fairly evenly distributed, except for the percentage working within the farming, fishing, and forestry occupations. Across the County, no regional area had more than 3 percent of the occupations devoted to agricultural or forestry activities, despite the fact that almost 64 percent of LaPorte County's land area is used for agriculture.



**Figure 5 Occupations in LaPorte County, by Regions, 2000**

When comparing the occupations of LaPorte County to the surrounding counties, LaPorte County appears to follow similar occupational trends as its neighboring counties. As shown in Figure 6 Occupations in LaPorte and Surrounding Counties, 2000 there are, however, a few subtle occupational differences. LaPorte has less management, professional, and related occupations, especially when compared to Porter and St. Joseph Counties. LaPorte shows a slightly higher percentage of occupations in the production and transportation sector than the surrounding counties, with the exception of Starke County.



**Figure 6 Occupations in LaPorte and Surrounding Counties, 2000**



Although not a major employer within the County, agriculture remains an important part of LaPorte County's economy and a major land use. Table 8 Agriculture in LaPorte County, 1997 – 2004, provides some very dramatic data on the agriculture economy. From 1997 to 2002, the total number of farms decreased from 857 to 817, while acreage devoted to agricultural uses dropped by 8,724 acres. However, the market value of production climbed 27 percent from 1997 to 2004. Not only has there been an increase in crop and livestock sales, but government payments have dramatically increased by 157 percent from 1997 to 2004.

**Table 8 Agriculture in LaPorte County, 1997 – 2004**

	1997	2002	2004	Percent Change
Number of farms	857	817		- 5%*
Land in farms (acres)	252,171	243,447		- 3%*
Average size of farm (acres)	294	298		+ 1%*
Market value of production	\$97,444,000	\$79,363,000	\$123,851,000	+ 27%
Market value of production, crop sales	\$68,041,000	\$55,688,000	\$87,379,000	
Market value of production, livestock sales	\$27,773,000	\$23,675,000	\$36,472,000	
Market value of production, average per farm	\$113,704	\$97,139		- 15%*
Government payments	\$3,533,000	\$4,367,000	\$9,082,000	+ 157%
Government payments, average per farm	\$7,469	\$10,972		+ 47%*

Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service

Like most economies, LaPorte County has experienced fluctuations in unemployment. As shown in Table 9 Unemployment Rate, LaPorte County, 2000 – 2007, the loss of jobs by local employers was reflected in increased rates of unemployment in 2005; however, by 2007, there was a significant drop in the number of unemployed in the County.

**Table 9 Unemployment Rate, LaPorte County, 2000 – 2007**

Category	2000	2005	2007
Total Persons in Civilian Labor Force	53,431	54,363	53,142
Unemployed	2,311	3,751	2,846
Unemployed (percent)	4.3%	6.9%	5.4%
Journey to Work (minutes)	22.0	19.6	

Source: Bureau of the Census, <http://factfinder.census.gov>

## COMMUTING PATTERNS

The most dramatic illustration of the regional context for future growth for LaPorte County is an examination of commuting patterns. As shown in Table 10, in 2005, some 84 percent of LaPorte County's employed residents lived and worked in the County, while 16 percent were employed outside LaPorte County. Of those working outside the LaPorte County, more than 5 percent commuted east to St. Joseph or Elkhart County, and a little less than 12 percent commuted west to Porter or Lake County or into Illinois. (See Figure 7 and Figure 8) It should be noted that the imputed workforce figures used in analyzing commuting patterns in Table 10 are different from the employment counts that were used for determining unemployment in Table 9. Regardless, the important thing about the employment data is



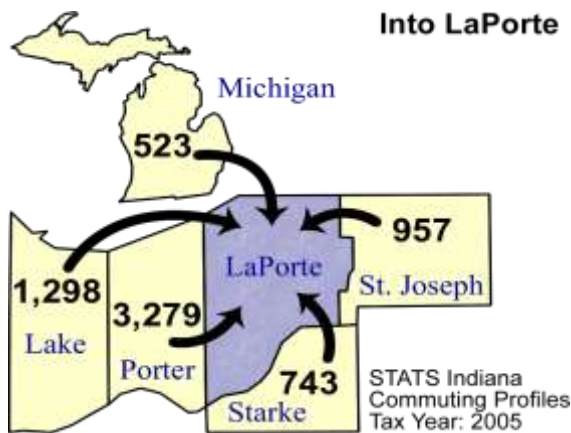
that proportion of people who commute in and out of the County, so the different bases for the two sets of figures is not important to this analysis.

**Table 10 Place of Employment, LaPorte County Residents, 2005**

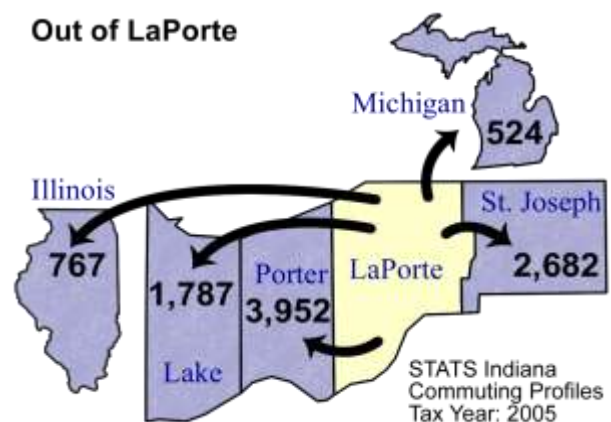
Category	Employment	Percent
LaPorte County residents who work	68,408	100.0%
Live and Work in LaPorte County	57,393	83.6 %
Commute out of LaPorte County	11,015	16.4%
Total Imputed Work Force in LaPorte County	65,146	100.0%
Live and Work in LaPorte County	57,393	88.1%
Commute into LaPorte County	7,753	11.9%

Source: Indiana University, Bureau of Business Research, <http://stats.indiana.edu/commframe.html>

As mentioned, Figure 7 and Figure 8 show graphically the data reflected in Table 10. Major commuting destinations for LaPorte residents working outside the County are the adjoining counties of Porter and St. Joseph, but a measurable number of LaPorte County residents commute to destinations in Michigan and Illinois. Not surprisingly, in-bound commuters include significant numbers from Lake County, which has suffered significant loss of industry in recent decades, and neighboring Starke County, which remains largely rural.



**Figure 7 Workers Commuting into LaPorte County, 2005**  
Source: Stats.indiana.edu



**Figure 8 Workers Commuting out of LaPorte County, 2005**  
Source: Stats.indiana.edu

## ECONOMIC FORECASTS

Although the Plan's projected population growth for the period 2005 – 2030 is anticipated to add only 9,418 new residents to the County's population (an increase of 8.5 percent over 25 years), the County's economic outlook is more promising. During this same 25-year time period, the County's employment is projected to increase by 29 percent through the addition of 17,465 new jobs. (Table 11 Economic Forecasts, LaPorte County, 2005 - 2030)

**Table 11 Economic Forecasts, LaPorte County, 2005 - 2030**

Category	2005	2030	# Change	% Change
Services	19,730	29,100	9,370	47%
Retail	9,960	11,970	2,010	20%
Manufacturing	9,560	9,490	-70	-.7%
Government	7,920	10,660	2,740	35%
Construction	3,560	4,730	1,170	33%
Financial / Insurance / Real Estate	3,010	3,640	630	21%
Transportation / Communications / Utilities	2,550	2,910	360	14%
Wholesale	1,720	2,180	460	27%
Agriculture	1,010	1,740	730	72%
Mining	130	170	40	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>61,155</b>	<b>78,620</b>	<b>17,465</b>	<b>29%</b>

**Source:** Woods & Poole employment forecasts, courtesy of the Economic Development Feasibility Study, Bernardin Lochmueller & Assocs., Inc., 2007

However, after examining the economic forecasts in more detail, it is clear that the County does not have a highly positive employment future.

The employment sector forecasted to experience the largest job growth is the “Services” sector, with 9,370 new jobs – almost equal to the number of new residents projected for the same 25-year time period. It is assumed that growth in the casino industry is the mostly likely explanation for this substantial rise in the “Service” sector. Unfortunately, this employment sector is historically one of the lower wage sectors. The “Retail” sector is also anticipated to have a healthy growth of 2,010 new jobs, but once again, a low wage employment sector. Interestingly, the “Government” sector is the second leading job creator with 2,740 new jobs forecasted over the 25-year time period.

Although some participants in the planning process have suggested that the growth of casino-related and other jobs is likely to lead to substantial population growth, the commuting data summarized earlier in this section suggest that people do not necessarily live where they work. That is particularly true for service sector jobs, which often pick up unemployed or underemployed individuals who benefit from the jobs but who are not enriched to the point that they are likely to move to a new location.

The “Manufacturing” sector, a traditionally high wage sector, is anticipated to continue to lose ground, falling by 70 jobs over the 25-year time frame; since 1990, LaPorte County’s “Manufacturing” sector has lost over 3700 jobs.

## **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES**

A critical element in any economic development strategy is to protect the existing economic base. LaPorte County has a long history as an agricultural and manufacturing center, and any economically viable future for the County will involve both of those sectors. Retail trade and health and other services will enjoy natural growth with the population; however, both could expand more rapidly if other strategies, discussed below, are successful.

## **STRATEGIC LOCATION**

LaPorte County's strategic location has attracted serious interest in the County from companies engaged in the transportation, warehousing and logistics businesses. Whether any of the specific projects under discussion on the date of completion of this Plan will reach fruition is unclear, but the factors that have attracted such interest to the County will remain. The availability of large land areas, good access to East-West and North-South Interstate highways, additional connections to four U.S. highways just in the northern part of the County, active tracks on several of the continent's largest railroads, and potential logistics access to Lake Michigan make the County appealing to warehousing companies, trucking companies and logistics companies.

It is possible that few if any new facilities in those industries may be built in the County. There are competing facilities and land areas in Illinois that serve much the same market. It is important, however, to plan for the possibility of such facilities. In many ways, the worst-case scenario for the County would be to attract a handful of large warehouses or trucking terminals at scattered locations, with limited infrastructure and little consideration of land-use impacts. To the extent that such development may take place in the future, it will be important to plan for it. A County taskforce is discussing that issue as this Plan is completed. As the work of that taskforce leads to public policy decisions, those should be considered for possible addition to this Plan as updating amendments.

## **RECREATION AND CULTURAL TOURISM**

Another potential growth opportunity for LaPorte County is recreation and cultural tourism. The Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City and the new casino at New Buffalo in Michigan just north of the County line (see discussion below), represent one form of tourism. Casinos of this type, location and scale typically attract driving customers who come for a day or several. Modestly priced hotels, RV parks and restaurants often develop near such casinos. Tourist-oriented retailers, ranging from souvenir shops to fudge and ice cream shops, are also often found in those areas.

But LaPorte County has more tourism opportunities than casinos. The Trail Creek Marina at Michigan City is a major facility, with a number of large and expensive boats. Owners and guests of owners appear to be a largely untapped market for high-end hotels, restaurants and retailers. The up-scale factory outlet center in Michigan City is one example of the type of facility that can benefit from patrons of a facility like the marina.

On the more natural side of the tourism market, LaPorte County also has a lot to offer. Two major natural resource areas, the Kingsbury and Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Areas, are located in the southern part of the County. These areas are under the jurisdiction of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

At the north end of the County adjacent and in proximity to Lake Michigan, the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission is developing the Marquette Plan for the redevelopment of the entire lakefront, with a heavy emphasis on public access and recreational use. At the County's northwestern corner lies the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. Through private efforts of Save the Dunes, a local environmental advocacy group with a separate, charitable conservation organization, some of the remnant wetlands and other important environmental features in northern LaPorte County are being preserved with private funds. All of these natural areas provide the opportunity for increased tourism of a type that is often called "cultural tourism."

As gas prices increase and air travel becomes increasingly crowded and expensive, many people look for opportunities for vacations and long weekends near home. With three major metropolitan areas (Chicago, Indianapolis and Detroit) within a half-day's drive and several other, smaller metropolitan areas, within similar or closer distances, LaPorte County has the ideal combination of location and natural resources to capture a share of the cultural tourism market. Strengthening tourism's role as part of the County's economic base is extremely important.

To ensure that such tourism remains a viable part of the County's future, it will be important to identify and begin to protect the character of critical, privately owned elements of the County's natural

environment. This could not have been stated any more clearly than in the statements provided in a July 27, 2007 letter to the consultant team submitted by Robert Boklund, Vice President of the LaPorte County Conservation Trust. The following are excerpts from this letter:

The Moraine forest is a large ribbon of semi-contiguous forest stretching from Hudson and Galena Townships southwestwardly to Coolspring and New Durham Townships and into Porter County. Even larger in area than the Indiana Dunes, the Moraine forest is profoundly important to both LaPorte and Porter counties in providing ecological/recreational values, watershed management, timber resources and much of the natural character of both counties. It also may play an important role in future carbon credits trading, relevant to global warming issues. Its disappearance would be an incalculable loss for LaPorte County and Northwest Indiana. Consequently, a number of strategies are being implemented for its long-term preservation.

The area surrounding this forest has been designated by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' (IDNR) Division of Forestry as the Northwest Moraine Forest Legacy Area. The Forest Legacy Area (FLA) encompassing the Moraine forest is one of only two designated FLA's north of Indianapolis. Because the biodiversity of this FLA is so great, forest tracts within it have much smaller acreage requirements for eligibility in the Forest Legacy Program than those within FLA's in southern Indiana. This program obtains conservation easements from private owners of forest tracts to ensure their preservation.

Within LaPorte County, a number of land trusts are actively securing the protection of sensitive lands and habitats, via acquisitions or conservation easements. These include the LaPorte County Conservation Trust, Save The Dunes Conservation Fund, Shirley Heinze Land Trust and the Woodland Savanna Land Trust. In addition, park and recreation departments play a significant role in preservation of these lands. Furthermore, programs like the IDNR's Classified Wild Lands Program provides tax incentives for landowners to keep wild land wild. Lastly, sensitive lands are being preserved by eco-friendly development practices as implemented by innovative, environmentally-conscious developers, such as Tryon Farms, Avant Gardens and others.

A number of the county's recreational trails and bike paths crisscross the Moraine forest. In doing so, they draw the attention of cyclists to its forest values. A bike path running its length from Hudson Township to New Durham Township (and potentially into Porter County) is also being considered. This bike path would provide a nearly continuous "forest experience" for cyclists—something very rare indeed in the northern half of the state.

Across LaPorte County's north border lies the now world-famous Lake Michigan Wine Country. What all too few people here today realize is that northern LaPorte County was once very much part of that Lake Michigan Wine Country—and grapes are by no means the only fruit crops grown here. Peaches, apples, pears, plums and many other kinds of consumable fruit have long attracted consumers here from all over the Greater Chicago region and beyond. Notably, the Banholzer Vineyard & Winery near Hesston produced high quality table wines a generation ago. Today, most of that vineyard has disappeared under subdivisions. The LaPorte Vineyard still exists along Highway 35 north of La Porte. Its Concord grapes are used in Welch's Grape Juice, rather than wines. But its potential to serve as a winery located very near the City of La Porte is still very great. And this would be a very big draw for tourism. The combination of the County's climate and sandy soil creates a fruit farming belt here that is unique within the state of Indiana. Incentives to preserve not only vineyards, but other fruit farms in the northern part of the County are a must.

## **CASINOS**

A factor that must be added to this regional context is the Four Winds Casino, now under construction in nearby New Buffalo, Michigan. According to a report commissioned by a taxpayers group opposed to the casino but prepared by Anderson Economic Group, a well-regarded organization that regularly performs such economic analyses, the casino is likely to attract 4,501 new workers to the region, requiring an

estimated 2,526 additional housing units.<sup>1</sup> The casino's location is about 20 miles (less than 30 minutes) from downtown Michigan City, the northern part of the City of La Porte, and other areas along S.R. 39, making LaPorte County a likely recipient of some of the growth related to the casino.

Over the long-run, changes like the loss of jobs in manufacturing in Michigan City and the new casino are simply parts of the larger trends on which population projections are based. Thus, the impact of the casino on population and housing in LaPorte County will be absorbed within the trends suggested in the Land Use section of Plan. Over the short-run, however, the new casino jobs and related construction jobs will help to absorb some of the increase in unemployment that has developed in the County in recent years, and it is likely to absorb some of the large number of vacant dwelling units now found in the County; the employment picture had begun to improve by late 2007, despite continued concerns with issues in the national economy. The development of the Four Winds Casino may have the potential to economically impact the Blue Chip Casino in Michigan City. Hoping to fend off competition, Blue Chip Casino recently installed a \$160 million new and larger riverboat.<sup>2</sup>

## KEY ISSUES

LaPorte County and its municipalities currently have strong leadership that is committed to building the economy of the County. As the leaders continue to work toward building a strong economy, they are likely to change the future of the County in many ways. Further, current commuting trends clearly show that LaPorte County has become, in part, a bedroom community for greater Chicago and South Bend. Current population projections may understate the effect of residential growth that depends on the economies of these other metropolitan areas.

In summary, some of the key economic issues in LaPorte County are:

- Need to protect existing economic base, particularly agriculture.
- Need to diversify the economic base.
- Commuting patterns are regional, so increases in population and increases in employment will not necessarily be directly related.
- Opportunities for cultural tourism.
- Need to protect natural resources to ensure that cultural tourism is viable.
- Potential spin-off opportunities from marinas and water-oriented recreation.
- Potential spin-off opportunities from two casinos.

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<sup>1</sup> The full citation to the report is Anderson Economic Group, "A Critical Review of the New Buffalo Casino Development," prepared for Taxpayers of Michigan Against Casinos, 2004; the cited figures are on page 11 of the report. Additional citations to the report will be abbreviated.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.thetimesonline.com/articles/2006/06/04/news/top\\_news/fdfd66caacb4b4ad86257182007c9d9a.txt](http://www.thetimesonline.com/articles/2006/06/04/news/top_news/fdfd66caacb4b4ad86257182007c9d9a.txt)

## PUBLIC UTILITIES

### CURRENT SYSTEMS

Water and public sewer services are important elements of any community. Public water systems not only ensure that users get drinking water that meets federal standards under the Clean Drinking Water Act, but they typically also provide adequate flow and pressure to provide for fire-fighting needs. Although residents are often less aware of the importance of wastewater treatment to them, those systems are critically important to the health, safety and welfare of the entire community. With LaPorte County's many sensitive lands, extensive surface water and high water tables, septic tanks are extremely problematic in the County; although there are some localized, low-tech alternatives to centralized wastewater systems, most of those are effective only with some form of central management.

### COMMUNITY WATER SYSTEMS

With the extensive surface waters in a County that is bounded on the north by one of the Great Lakes and on the south by the Kankakee River (a major tributary to the Illinois River), water is plentiful in the County. Thus, it is no surprise that there are 27 community water systems in the County. Those include:

- 9 municipal systems
- 12 systems that serve mobile home parks or other individual residential developments; and
- 6 systems serving individual users, including the LaPorte County Home.

About 60 percent of the current population of the County is served by public water systems. Another 5.5 percent is served by other community water systems. That still leaves more than one-third of County residents in areas without public potable water. Because some of the small public systems have limited capacity, only about 53 percent of County residents are on public systems with excellent capacity for fire-fighting.

The most significant systems for this report are the public systems, which generally can be and are expanded to meet growth-related needs of the municipalities that they serve. Municipal systems and the number of customers served include:

**Table 12 Existing Water Systems and Population Served**

System	Population Served
Kingsbury Utility Corporation	250
Kingsford Heights Water	1,500
La Crosse Water Department	547
La Porte (City of) Water Works	22,000
Long Beach Water Department	1,634
Michiana Shores	910
Michigan City Department of Water Works	36,250
Wanatah Water Utility	1,013
Westville Water Department	840
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64,944</b>

Source: Reports currently on file with the Environmental Protection Agency, 2006.

A number of public and quasi-public facilities, as well as individual industries, located in rural areas operate their own approved community water system to serve students, workers and others. In reviewing the water systems serving LaPorte County, it was interesting to note that some single-user systems



actually serve more people than some municipal systems. The Westville Correctional Center system provides service to 3500 persons and the Purdue North Central system has a capacity to serve more than 3600 people.

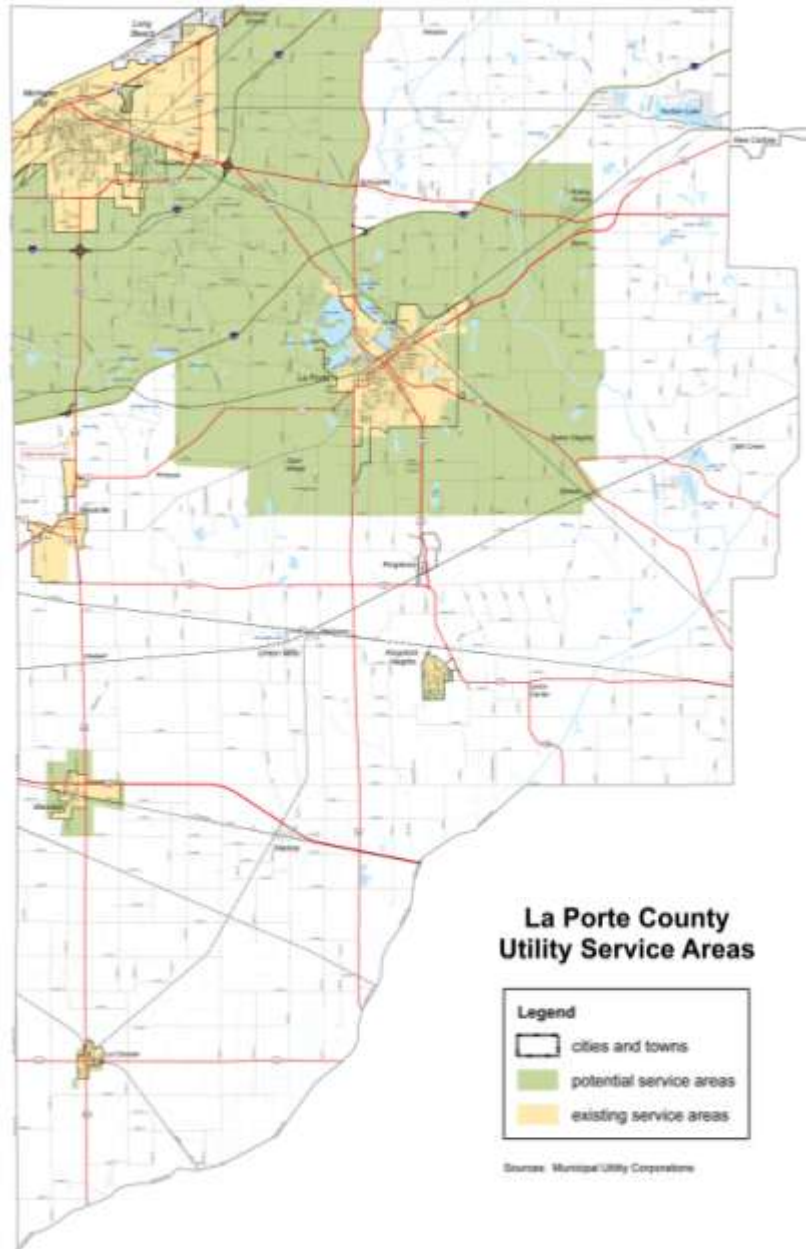
## PUBLIC SEWER

There are seven public wastewater treatment plants in the County:

1. Michigan City Sanitary District Wastewater Treatment Plant
2. Kingsbury Utility Company Treatment Plan
3. Kingsford Heights Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant
4. La Porte (City of) Wastewater Treatment Plant
5. La Crosse Municipal Wastewater Treatment Plant
6. Wanatah Municipal Sewage Treatment Plant
7. Westville Wastewater Treatment Plant

There are also four systems serving individual mobile home parks, half a dozen serving individual industries, and individual facilities serving Purdue North Central, the Westville Correctional Center, and a service plaza on the Indiana Toll Road. Service areas for these systems are shown in Figure 9.

Although both the City of La Porte and Michigan City operate large wastewater treatment systems, there is a significant difference between the two. Michigan City has formed a Sanitary District that includes everything in the northwest corner of the County, from Porter County on the west, Lake Michigan on the north, the Continental Divide on the south and roughly S.R. 39 on the east. Indiana State law allows the district to provide service to any point within five miles of the City limits, so the eastern boundary may be moved further east if the City annexes additional territory. Although all of this land is within the planned service area of the Sanitary District, much of the area cannot be served at this time. There is a regional lift station at the intersection of U.S. 20 and U.S. 35, southeast of Michigan City; it has been sized to serve an area extending to S.R. 39, although there is currently no service extending that far. The Sanitary District currently uses only about 60 percent of its treatment plant capacity on a typical day; if service were extended to Long Beach and Trail Creek, neither



**Figure 9 Existing and Planned Wastewater Treatment Service Areas**

of which have sewer service, the plant would be at 90 percent of capacity and connections would have to be limited pending a possible expansion of the plant.

The City of La Porte serves primarily areas within the city limits, although it also provides treatment services to the Pine Lake Conservancy District and the 39 North Conservancy District. In cooperation with LaPorte County, City sewer service is being extended to the area west of the City, including the County Home (now on a private system) and at least to the edge of a potential industrial sites near Pinola.

It is significant to note that residents of the Towns of Long Beach and Trail Creek currently do not have public sewer service, although both areas are densely populated and are located in the sensitive Trail Creek Watershed.

A new variable in the delivery of wastewater services is the interest of LaPorte County in creating a County-wide Sanitary District. Such a district would create a legal vehicle for the collection of wastewater in the developing areas outside municipal boundaries. Treatment would presumably be contracted to the cities that now have treatment plants – with wastewater north of the Continental Divide going to Michigan City and that south of the Divide going to the City of La Porte. Retrofitting existing developments will be problematic, however. The very low density pattern of development (typically on lots larger than one acre) will make the extension of services expensive – perhaps prohibitively so. Even where such extensions are financially feasible, district officials may face opposition from residents who oppose digging up streets and yards to provide a service that some residents may not consider important.

## **KEY ISSUES**

In summary, some of the key water and waste water issues in LaPorte County are:

- Most recent growth in County is outside the incorporated municipalities, where most public water and sewer service is unavailable.
- There is an apparent and misguided lack of concern by many individual residents with this issue – as long as wastewater leaves their homes, many residents do not worry about where it goes next.
- Development pressure is particularly intense in Springfield and Galena Townships, both of which have high water tables, multiple wetlands and other sensitive lands – and none of the current specific plans for wastewater treatment service extensions include any part of Galena or the eastern portion of Springfield Townships.
- Although in principle the Michigan City Sanitary District, the City of La Porte and the County are all willing to help to provide sewer services to new development in unserved areas, there are practical and fiscal difficulties in accomplishing that with the current scattered patterns of development.
- Existing low density patterns of growth in some areas – particularly between Michigan City and the City of La Porte, along the Continental Divide – will make it difficult and perhaps prohibitively expensive to retrofit with sewer and water service.
- A new variable in the delivery of wastewater services is the interest of LaPorte County in creating a County-wide Sanitary District. Such a district would create a legal vehicle for the collection of wastewater in the developing areas outside municipal boundaries.
- Many residences and some businesses will be served by septic tanks or other on-site systems for decades to come, and many of those are in areas that are less than ideal for such systems; plans for a County-wide district will need to include transition and/or maintenance plans for such systems.



## LAND USE

### LAND USE TRENDS

As was discussed in the preceding sections, LaPorte County is experiencing a very slow rate of growth; however, there is a substantial redistribution of population by geographical areas of the County. It appears existing and new residents, as well as second-home buyers, are opting to locate outside of incorporated communities where existing services are conveniently located into more suburban and rural areas of the County where there are significantly less services.

Figure 10 Residential Building Permits, 1996 – 2004 shows the distribution of where building permits were issued within LaPorte County from 1996 to 2004. During this time period, 4148 building permits were issued for residential dwelling units, the majority of which were issued for unincorporated areas of the County. Although Michigan City and the City of La Porte comprise almost 50 percent of the County's population, only one-quarter of the permits were issued within these two jurisdictions. In contrast, building permits for unincorporated areas of LaPorte County comprised 71 percent of the total permits issued.

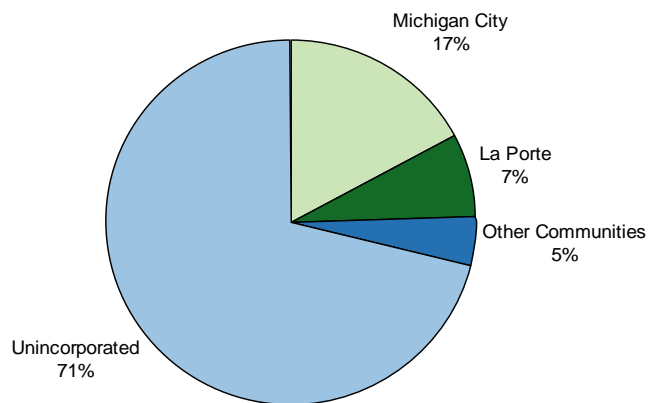


Figure 10 Residential Building Permits, 1996 – 2004

Table 13 provides more specific detail as to where the residential building permits were issued. What is particularly interesting is that from 2001 to 2004 there were 1,677 building permits issued; this was the same time period where population estimates were showing a loss in County population. It can be assumed some of the permits were issued for second-homes and vacation rentals, but not to such a degree to fully account for such a large number of residential permits.

Table 13 Residential Building Permits, by Individual Location, 1996 – 2004

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	1996-2004	%
Michigan City	68	61	91	105	72	34	97	99	93	720	17.4
City of La Porte	40	53	31	31	28	23	37	24	28	295	7.1
Unincorporated	409	325	365	391	316	337	260	261	282	2,946	71.0
Kingsbury	4	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	10	0.2
Kingsford Heights	0	0	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	10	0.2
La Crosse	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	8	0.2
Long Beach	2	3	5	1	5	9	3	16	19	63	1.5
Michiana Shores	3	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	35	0.8
Pottawattomie Park	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	0.1
Trail Creek	4	3	1	3	2	1	3	1	2	20	0.5
Wanatah	4	0	7	2	3	1	2	2	2	23	0.6
Westville	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	0.3
<b>Total County</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>4,148</b>	<b>--</b>

Source: Data for Figure 11 and Table 12 from LaPorte County Building Permit Records

Although a little more than 58 percent of County residents in 2000 lived in municipal areas with full urban services, 69 percent of residential units constructed from 2000 through 2004 were located outside municipal boundaries. It would be optimistic to project that more than 25 percent occurred in unincorporated areas within the urbanized area shown in Figure 11.

Figure 12 shows the distribution of land uses within the County. Figure 13 illustrates how population within the County is redistributing in areas outside Michigan City and the City of La Porte.

**Boundaries**  
 State  
 County  
 Place  
 Urban Area  
 Urban Area  
 UA Cen Place  
 UA Cen Place  
**Features**  
 Major Road  
 Street  
 Stream/Waterbody  
 Stream/Waterbody



Figure 11 Urbanized Areas in LaPorte County (omits Kingsford Heights, La Crosse and Wanatah)

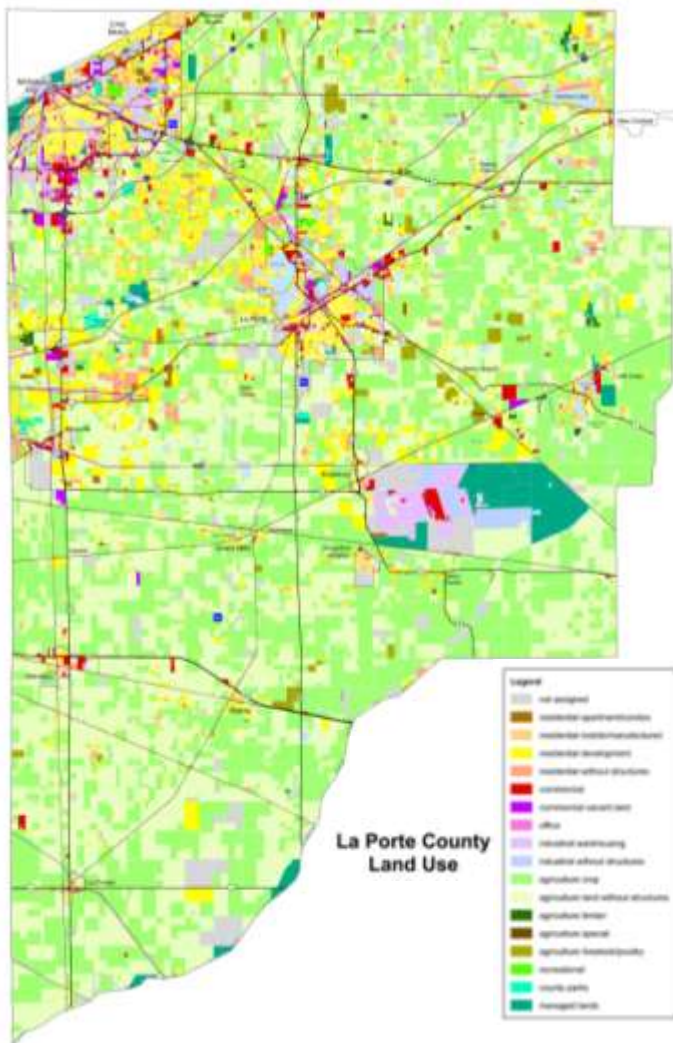


Figure 12 LaPorte County Land Uses, 2006

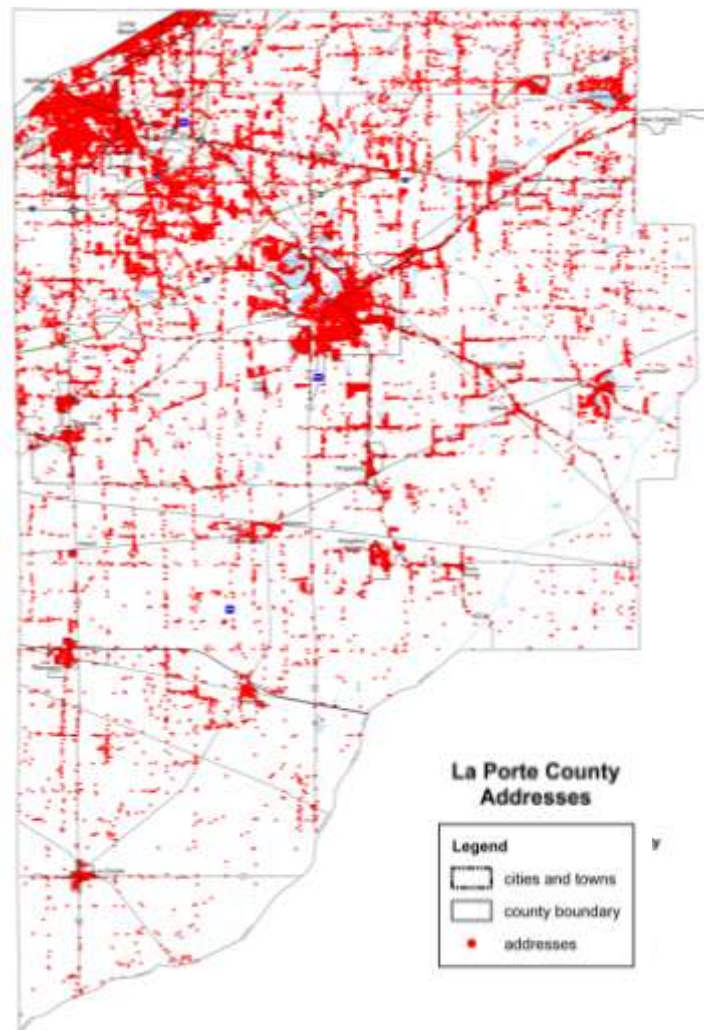


Figure 13 Addresses in LaPorte County, 2006

## PROJECTED LAND DEMAND

A key element of the Land Development Plan is determining the amount of land needed to accommodate future population growth and to what degree that population can be accommodated in areas where future public services are planned or can easily be provided.

The first step is to convert population projections into projected households to determine the projected dwelling units needed to accommodate future growth. Two sources of population projections were used: Indiana University Bureau of Business Research's population projections and the "Blended Rate" which is an average of projected rates of growth for St. Joseph County and the NIRPC region (alternative projections). In 2005, Indiana University estimated that LaPorte County had a population of 109,886 persons. Subtracting the 6,490 persons living in group quarters divided by the estimated persons per household of 2.51, yielded 41,194 households. Indiana University projected that by 2030 LaPorte County would have a population of 114,371 and the persons per household would be 2.43, thus the total number of households is projected to be 44,395 by 2030. This is an increase of 3,202 households during the 25-year period or an addition of approximately 128 households per year.

The Blended Rate estimated the 2005 population of LaPorte County at 110,512 persons. Subtracting the 6,490 persons living in group quarters, divided by the estimated persons per household of 2.51, yielded 41,443 households. The Blended Rate projected that by 2030 LaPorte County would have a population of 119,930. Using Indiana University's 2.43 persons per household, the total number of households is projected to be 46,683 in 2030. This is an increase of 5,240 households during the 25-year period or an addition of approximately 210 households per year.

**Table 14 New Units Needed to House Increased Population.**

	2006 - 2010		2011 - 2020		2021 - 2030	
	Households*	New Units**	Households*	New Units**	Households*	New Units**
<b>Indiana Univ. Projections</b>	<b>41,654</b>	461	<b>42,968</b>	1314	<b>44,395</b>	1427
<b>"Blended" Rate Projections</b>	<b>42,223</b>	780	<b>44,388</b>	2165	<b>46,683</b>	2295

\* Figures for "Households" do not include the 6,490 persons living in group quarters (held constant)

\*\* Persons per household used to calculate new housing units for 2010 = 2.49; 2020 = 2.46; 2030 = 2.43

The next step is to determine the amount of acreage the projected additional housing units would consume based on various development scenarios. For the purpose of the Plan, the "Blended" rate projections were used. The calculations assume an urban development density of 1.5 dwelling units per acre (includes public lands, commercial services and some industrial lands) and a rural development density of 1 dwelling unit per 2 acres, a 10 percent vacancy rate and an additional 50 "replacement" dwelling units per year for those housing units torn down. Table 15 provides the projected development acreage demands based on three development scenarios.

**Table 15 Residential and Other Land Demand, Based on Blended Growth Rate Projections.**

Development Scenario	Acres Needed 2006-10	Acres Needed 2011-20	Acres Needed 2021-30	Total Rural /Urban Acres	Total Acres By 2030
70 percent rural	1829	4733	4964	10,085 / 1441	<b>11,526</b>
50 percent rural	1524	3944	4137	7204 / 2401	<b>9605</b>
30 percent rural	1220	3155	3309	4322 / 3362	<b>7684</b>



Since the primary concern is whether or not there is sufficient vacant acreage in areas within the designated future public sewer service areas served by the City of La Porte and Michigan City, the next step included an analysis of vacant land within these areas. Table 16 summarizes the available land within the cities and their planned sewer service areas. As the table indicates, there are over 39,000 acres classified as “agricultural”, but within the planned sewer service areas there are 1,198 acres vacant residential, 985 vacant commercial and 360 vacant industrial acres for a total of 2,543 acres of potential urban developable land (does not include the agriculture acreage).

**Table 16 Vacant Land in Cities and Planned Sewer Service Areas**

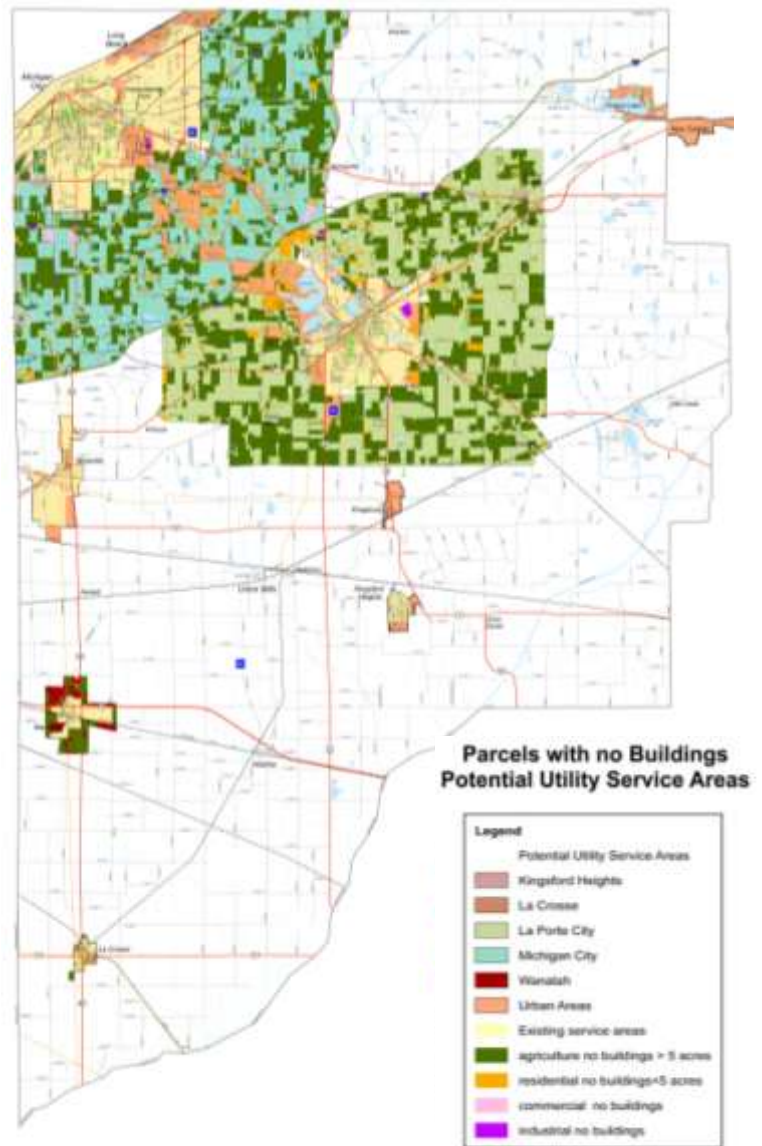
Vacant Land*	Number of Parcels**	Acres
Agriculture	1448	39,375
Commercial	135	985
Residential	653	1,198
Industrial	24	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,260</b>	<b>41,918</b>

\* Vacant land contains no building

\*\* Parcels smaller than 0.1 acre not included

Finally, combining the vacant residential land with the future residential land demand it makes it possible to project how much growth can be accommodated within a given time period. If LaPorte County were to achieve the “blended: growth rate scenario in which 30 percent of new development took place in rural areas at rural densities (one unit per two acres) and 70 percent occurred at urban densities (1.5 dwelling units per acre and includes public lands, commercial services and some industrial lands), there would be enough vacant land within the planned sewer service areas to accommodate most all of urban development (residential, commercial and industrial) projected through 2030. The more conservative projections show that there is a need for 1,577 acres of urban development land through 2030; the more aggressive growth projections show that there is a need for 2,599 acres of urban development land through 2030.

Official population projections deal with permanent residents, not second home development. When comparing the number of building permits issued to the population growth along Lake Michigan, it is clear that there is significant growth in second homes along the lakefront. Second homes do not impose the same burdens on a community as primary homes – they generate only seasonal traffic and they typically use water and wastewater services at a reduced rate. But community services must be sized to meet peak demands during the peak season. Thus, particularly along the lakeshore, the population projections may be inadequate to reflect probable demand for services and land in that area.



**Figure 14 Vacant Parcels**

It should be kept in mind that the above tables tend to overstate the land demand under even a rudimentary program of growth management. There are a substantial number of vacant lots in Michigan City and La Porte, and there is vacant but developable land in and near both cities, within their urban service areas and in areas that could easily be served by a new County system. Development of that land would accommodate housing and other needs with little additional disruption of the land stock within the County's rural areas. These figures also assume that all new residential development will be single-family and will consume land at single-family rates; actually, there are multi-family units in several parts of the County, and some future housing needs will undoubtedly be met with such units.

## **KEY ISSUES**

There are several important conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis provided above:

- Recent trends show most new residential units in LaPorte County going into rural areas, in most of which there is no sewer or water service available.
- Substantial amounts of vacant land are available in existing cities and towns and in nearby urbanized or urbanizing areas, where it will be easier than in rural areas to provide sewer service, improved roads and other services and facilities.
- Using land-use regulations and public service policies to encourage growth in urbanized areas instead of in the rural areas can significantly reduce the total amount of land needed to accommodate new development.
- Development scenarios where 70 percent is rural development (1 unit per 2 acres) consume rural lands at almost three times the rate as development scenarios where only 30 percent of the development occurs in the rural area at rural densities.
- Although the scenario showing the highest amount of additional land needed to accommodate new development represents a little over 2 percent of LaPorte County's total land area, future growth patterns that are primarily low density rural development are extremely costly for city and County governments to provide public services such as water, sewer, roads and fire protection.
- Costs of growth are as much a function of location and density of the new development as they are functions of the amount of new development – the recent development patterns are ones that will prove expensive over the long-run.

## NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

### LAND

Like most of Indiana, two hundred years ago LaPorte County consisted largely of forests and wetlands. Today, remnants of both remain, but most of the County is characterized by urbanization and suburbanization in the northwest and central parts of the County, and large expanses of agricultural uses in the southern one-half of the County, with increasing amounts of scattered suburban/rural sprawl throughout the County. Most of the significant wetlands and stands of forest that remain in LaPorte County lie in the area north of Interstate 80, which is also the part of the County that is subject to the most development pressure.

### WATERSHEDS

The major geographic boundaries in the natural environment are defined by watersheds. LaPorte County is divided into two major watersheds by the Valparaiso Moraine, and its ridge top, which is the Continental Divide between the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. The Little Calumet-Galien Watershed drains generally northwest from the Continental Divide and flows into Lake Michigan; and the Kankakee River Watershed drains south into the Kankakee River and is part of the Upper Illinois River Basin. There are a total of ten sub-watersheds that fall partly or wholly in the County (see Figure 15); of those, the Trail Creek Watershed, which is part of the Little Calumet-Galien Watershed, has been the subject of extensive study.

More than half the land in the County is gently sloping, with slopes of four percent or less. Not surprisingly, most of the steeper slopes in the County are found along the Continental Divide, where there are areas that have slopes of more than 40 percent. Gently sloping land is generally good for both agriculture and development. Steeper slopes make land generally unsuitable for agriculture, although steep slopes may still be suitable for forestry. Development on steeper slopes is possible, but such development is more expensive than similar projects on flatter land, and the drainage and road maintenance issues in steeply sloping areas are complex and often expensive.

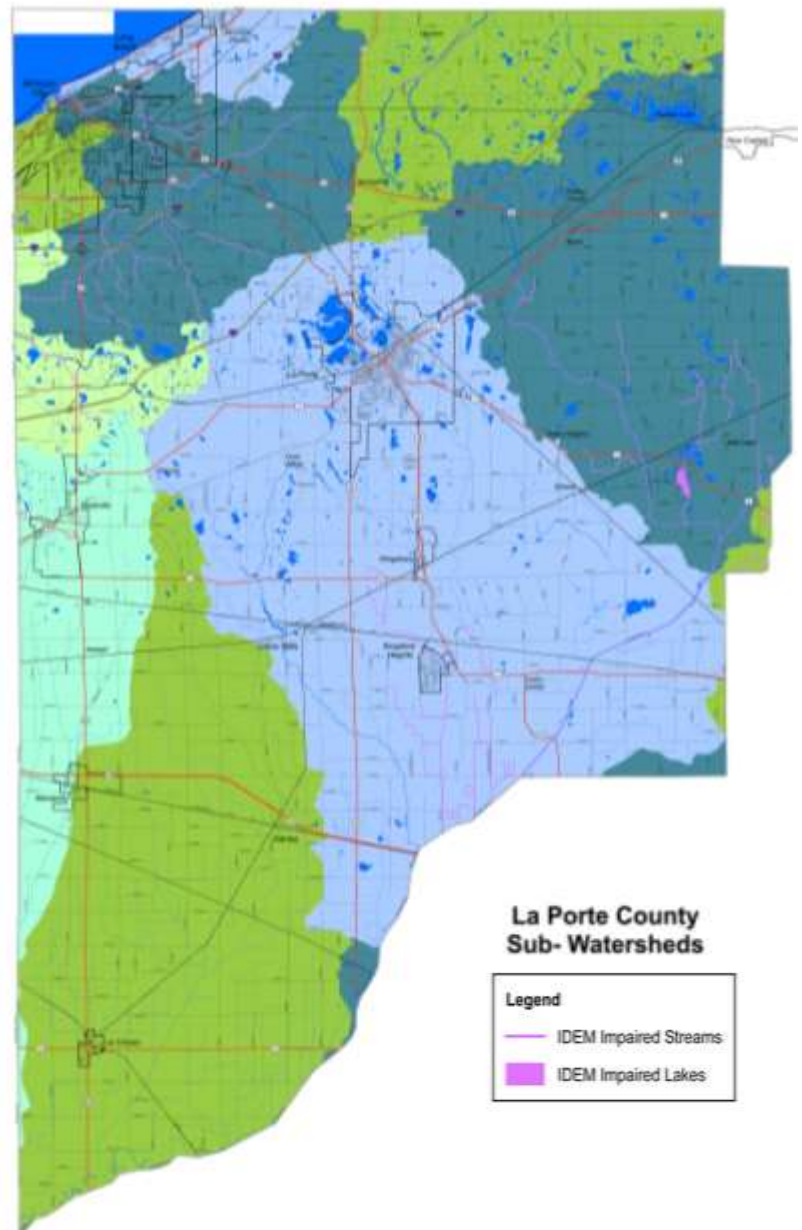


Figure 15 Sub-Watersheds in LaPorte County



**FARMLAND**

Most of the land in the County is considered prime farmland, as illustrated in Figure 16. There is also a significant amount of farmland of statewide importance, generally in the east-central part of the County. Soils in the southern part of the County are suitable for farming only if properly drained – but early settlers installed drain tiles under most of those lands more than a century ago, and today’s farmers maintain those drainage systems. Some other soils in the southern part of the County are suitable for agriculture but subject to flooding. Northern LaPorte County, especially in the western corner, has little prime farmland.

Although most of the land in the urbanized areas is technically considered prime agricultural land, once land has been developed, it loses its effective suitability for farmland. In addition, there are several areas of the County where there has been significant contamination of land from earlier industrial activities; the largest area of such lands is around the old munitions plant at Kingsbury.

The gradual expansion of an existing urban area into agricultural lands is different from leapfrog or scattered sprawl, where small developments pop up in otherwise rural or agricultural areas – a pattern of development that is occurring with great frequency in LaPorte County. Around an urban area, farmers have adapted to coexisting with neighbors; a 20-acre development in such an area will take that 20 acres out of production but may not have significant additional impacts on the land-use patterns. In contrast, in predominantly rural agricultural areas, scattered patterns of urban sprawl not only take the development sites out of agricultural production, but they also impair the suitability of land areas for agriculture. The presence of non-farm residences in an agricultural area creates increased liability risks for farmers using agricultural chemicals, and neighbors sometimes raise formal or informal complaints about the noise, dust and other normal impacts of large-scale farming operations. Further, exurban residents driving their children around in mini-vans on the rural roads may make those roads less useful for farmers, who have traditionally used them to move heavy equipment and to haul farm products in large trucks.

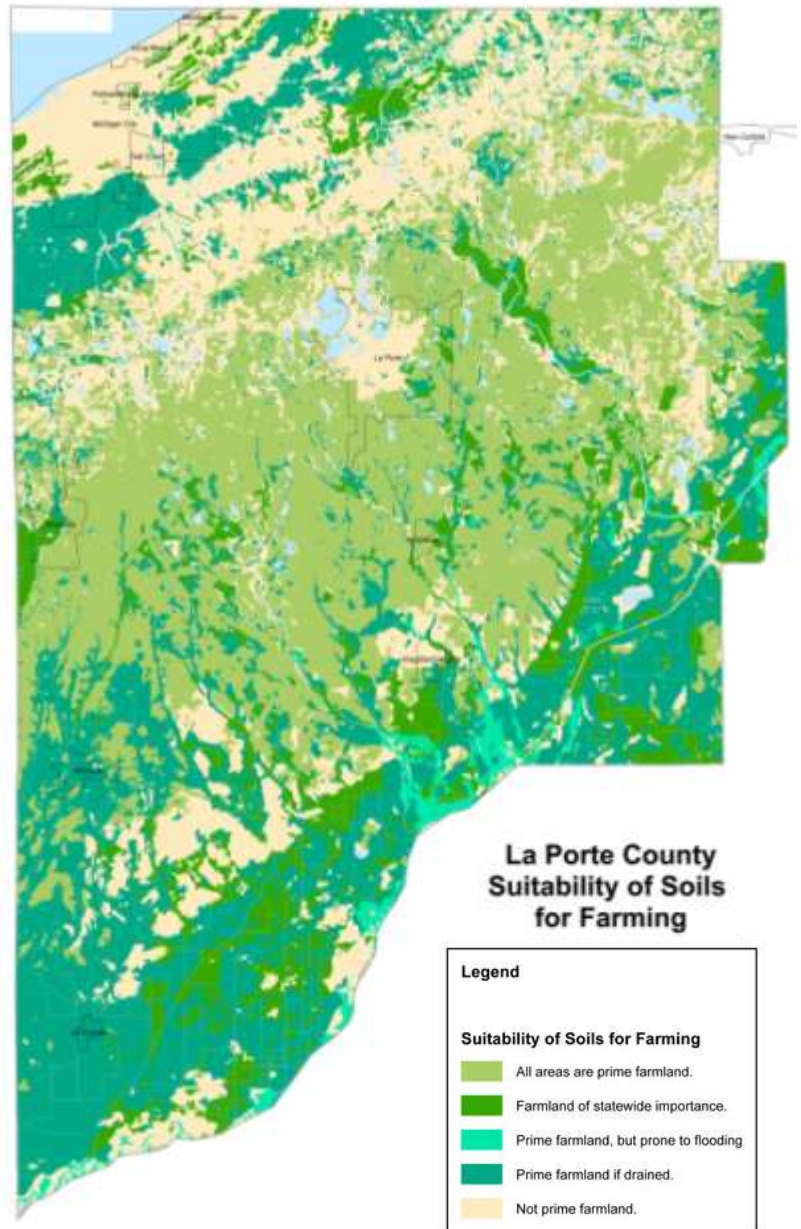


Figure 16 Suitability of Soils for Farming

As development increases, the amount of stormwater runoff also increases, posing significant management challenges. See discussion under next sub-heading, "Water".

## WATER

Water in many ways defines LaPorte County. It is bounded on the North and South by two of Indiana's most important water bodies – Lake Michigan and the Kankakee River. Much of the County once consisted of wetlands, and there remain significant numbers of wetlands, particularly in the northeast part of the County. (See Figure 17) There are a number of small and midsized freshwater lakes providing significant recreational opportunities in LaPorte County. Two of the more prominent ones, Pine Lake and Stone Lake, are found within the City of La Porte; while other prominent lakes, Hudson Lake and Upper and Lower Fish Lakes, are found within the eastern unincorporated areas of the County. Many other lakes and ponds in other parts of the County add to its aesthetic appeal and offer fishing and other recreational opportunities for residents.

As local governments deal with water supplies and manage wastewater and stormwater, they are constrained by the East-West Continental Divide. Water that exists or falls north of the Divide must flow to Lake Michigan, and water that exists or falls south of the Divide must flow to the Kankakee River.

## CONTAMINATION

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) conducts periodic studies of water quality, as required under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. In 2006, the IDEM found that 13 waterbodies in LaPorte County were impaired, meaning that they "do not or are not expected to meet applicable water quality standards with federal technology based standards alone." One of those, Trail Creek, is the major waterbody in the LaPorte County portion of the Little Calumet-Galien Watershed. The other 12 impaired waterbodies in the County drain into the Kankakee River. The types of impairment within these waterbodies include cyanide, oil and grease, E. coli, PCBs, ammonia and general impairment of the ecosystem.

Continuing water quality problems in most areas come from what are called "non-point" sources. These include

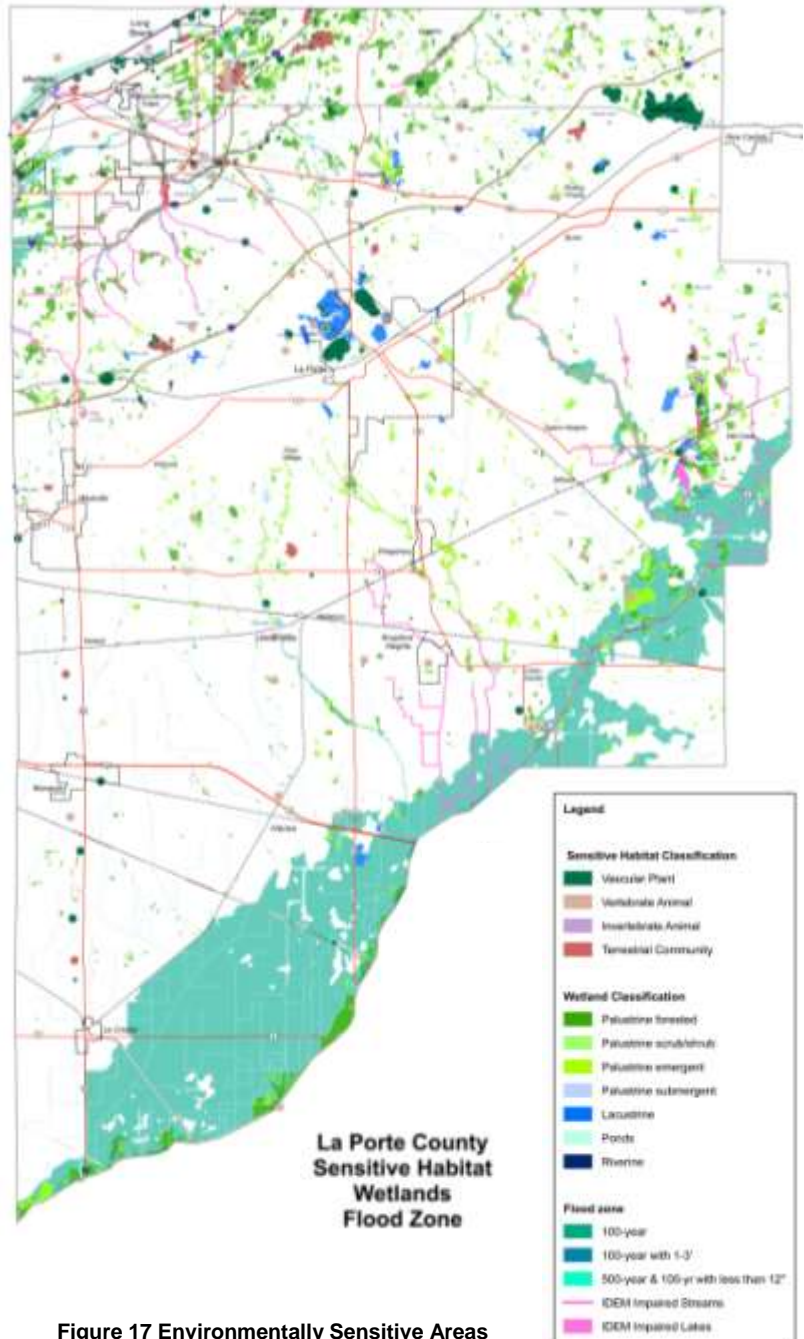


Figure 17 Environmentally Sensitive Areas in LaPorte County



urban stormwater runoff, failing or ineffective septic tanks, wild animals and livestock, and lawn and agricultural management practices that deposit chemicals on the land and ultimately make their way into the streams. Oil and grease in the water typically result from runoff from urban streets and parking lots. E. coli bacteria can come from human waste and/or from farm animals and wild animals. It is likely that in many parts of the County, and in most cases north of the Continental Divide, the major source of e coli in the water is from septic tanks.

Within the County, there are large numbers of dwelling units on septic tanks in densely populated areas. There has been a significant increase in development dependent on septic tanks in the northeast quadrant of the County, and growth pressures are likely to remain strong along the S.R. 39 corridor leading to the new casino at New Buffalo. At this time, very little of that area has centralized wastewater treatment available. Compounding the problem is the large amount of wetlands in this part of the County (high water table). Existing and new septic tanks in the area are likely to cause continued water quality problems, as effluent, untreated except for the settling of solids into septic tanks, flows into the ground and, in many cases, into the surrounding water table.

### **STORMWATER**

Both Michigan City and the City of La Porte have sewer systems that were built as combined systems, handling both stormwater and wastewater. Historically, in urban areas the major goal for managing stormwater runoff was to discharge it into as quickly as possible into the nearest waterway to reduce the flooding of homes, businesses, and roads during heavy rain events.

As cities began to treat wastewater, such systems were problematic, because the large flows after a storm would often exceed the capacity of the treatment plant, and the result would be a discharge from a combined sewer overflow. The City of La Porte and Michigan City have both made significant progress in separating their systems and in adopting improved management methods for the overflows, reducing the incidence of overflow events in each city to about one per year over the last several years.

As major point sources of water pollution were eliminated, it became clear that significant water quality issues remained as a result of stormwater runoff. Urban stormwater runoff carries grease and oil from roadways and parking lots, excess nutrients from the application of fertilizers to lawn and gardens, animal droppings, and anything else that is dropped on the ground and that is small enough or light enough to be washed into a river or stream.

Beginning in 1990, the Environmental Protection Agency began to regulate stormwater runoff in urbanized areas, with much progress being made within municipal areas. However, one of the challenges facing LaPorte County is that the only major, central stormwater management systems are in the City of La Porte and the Michigan City Sanitary District. Those entities can use a combination of public management and simple treatment systems together with regulations to require on-site stormwater management to ensure that runoff from new development does not further impair waterways. There are, however, large developed areas outside the cities where there are no stormwater management systems in place; stormwater simply follows roads and ditches to the nearest stream. Outside the city and the sanitary district, where new development takes place, the County must depend on the design and maintenance of effective on-site management and treatment systems. Although on-site management to eliminate the flooding that can result from peak flows is relatively easy to design, on-site management techniques to improve water quality are somewhat more complex and typically require more maintenance.

### **CONCENTRATED ANIMAL FEEDING OPERATIONS**

Large livestock operations can have environmental implications if they are managed improperly. Proper management techniques ensure the livestock are confined to an area located away from any stream, bank, lake, or other natural aquatic habitat. Not only is it important for the animals to be contained, but also for the manure. The manure from animals can contaminate streams and lakes with E. coli, making them unsuitable for swimming or fishing. E. coli is most likely to appear in waterways when livestock is concentrated.

Potential discharges from large-scale animal agriculture are regulated by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management; the County has recently adopted a supplemental local ordinance to address issues with these facilities.

### **HYDROMODIFICATION**

There are also significant impairments to water quality and to historic wetlands from what water quality analysis and planners call “hydromodification,” or the impairment of water flows by human intervention. In LaPorte County the most prevalent forms are stream channelization, dams, filling of wetlands, and erosion of streambanks and shorelines.

### **AIR**

Since the adoption of the Clean Air Act in 1970, the Environmental Protection Agency and state agencies like the Indiana Department of Environmental Management have implemented a comprehensive program for regulating the discharge of air pollution from point sources such as factories. Many non-point sources, such as the use of home incinerators to burn trash, have been eliminated through state laws and regulations. The major air quality problems that remain in urbanized areas are typically those resulting from automobiles, which are collectively considered to be non-point sources.

The air quality in LaPorte County is generally good and conforms to air quality standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Northwestern Regional Planning Commission regularly reports on and analyzes air quality as parts of its transportation planning process. Its most current report includes this statement about LaPorte County:

La Porte County is designated as marginal non-attainment of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for “8-hour” ozone. Both non-attainment areas are being considered for redesignation as maintenance areas because air quality monitor data indicate that these areas are meeting the NAAQS.<sup>3</sup>

It concludes with this analysis of the impact of the most recent agency transportation plans on LaPorte County:

The Summer day emissions of the precursors of ozone ... [and the annual direct PM2.5 and nitrogen oxide emissions in the bi-state PM2.5 nonattainment area] ... that result from the implementation of the projects in the Connections 2030 Regional Transportation Plan and Fiscal Year 2008 to 2011 Transportation Improvement Program, as defined by the action scenarios in La Porte County for 2010, 2020 and 2030 are no greater than the 2002 emissions. Therefore, the Connections 2030 Regional Transportation Plan and Fiscal Year 2008 to 2011 Transportation Improvement Program have been found to conform to the requirements of section 176(c) of the Clean Air Act ...<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note that the NIRPC projections regarding air quality are based on the assumption that various traffic improvements will be implemented as part of its transportation plan. Vehicles generate the most pollution when they are operating the least efficiently, which is typically when they are idling or moving very slowly. Thus, the implementation of planned traffic improvements will be essential not only to keep traffic moving, but also to ensure that vehicles operate efficiently and that the generation of air pollution from them is thus minimized.

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<sup>3</sup> “DRAFT Air Quality Conformity Determination between the *Connections 2030 Regional Transportation Plan*, the *Fiscal Year 2008 to 2011 Transportation Improvement Program*, and the *Indiana State Implementation Plan for Air Quality*,” Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, June 21, 2007, available at <http://www.nirpc.org/pdf/Conformity%20Determination%20Amend.pdf> (accessed May 2007 [June 21 date was on it at that time]), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> “DRAFT Air Quality Conformity Determination between the *Connections 2030 Regional Transportation Plan*, the *Fiscal Year 2008 to 2011 Transportation Improvement Program*, and the *Indiana State Implementation Plan for Air Quality*,” Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, June 21, 2007, available at <http://www.nirpc.org/pdf/Conformity%20Determination%20Amend.pdf> (accessed May 2007 [June 21 date was on it at that time]), p. 17.

The NIRPC projections do not account for the impact of major industrial facilities locating within the County.

## **KEY ISSUES**

There are several important conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis provided above:

- Direct loss of agricultural land through suburban development
- Additional effects of scattered sprawl on agricultural land uses
- Continued development on steep slopes and other environmentally sensitive lands, particularly along the Continental Divide
- Continued loss of small wetlands and impairment of water quality in others
- Failing and ineffective septic systems in non-rural areas and in developing areas of the County
- Impaired water quality in 13 bodies of water in the County
- Contributions of stormwater runoff from developed areas to impairment of water quality
- Continued suburban and exurban development on septic tanks in areas with high water tables
- Need to rely on NIRPC to monitor vehicle-related air quality issues as additional development occurs

## TRANSPORTATION

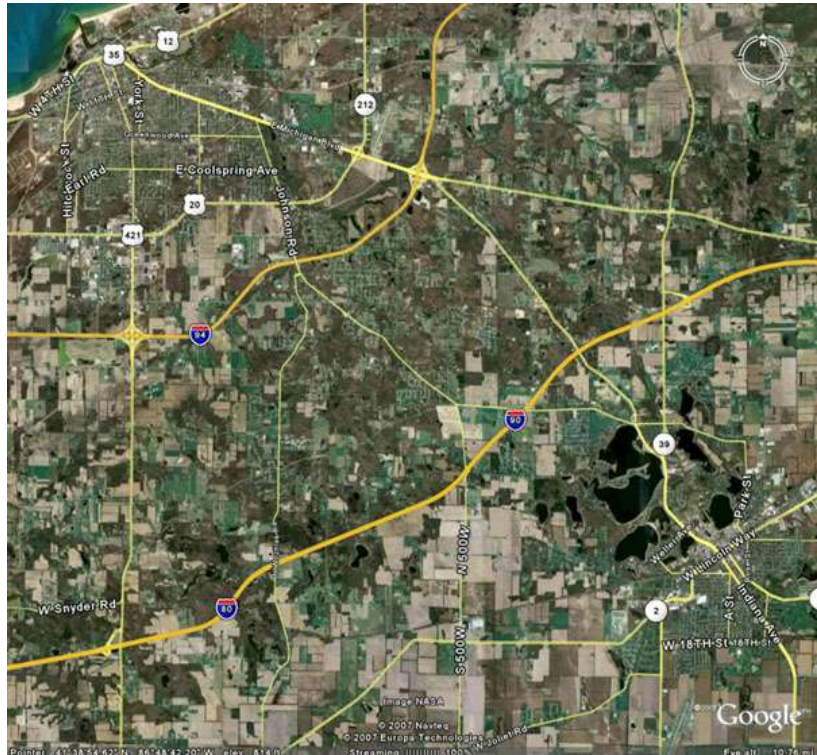
LaPorte County's strategic location on Lake Michigan and along the route of rail lines provided the basis for its early development. Although many trips now occur by road rather than by rail or water, LaPorte County continues to enjoy a strategic location in relationship to multiple modes of transportation.

### ROADWAYS

#### MAJOR ROADWAYS

The two most important roads in LaPorte County are the Interstate Highways,

- I-80/90, also known as the Indiana Toll Road, which enters the County from the West about ten miles south of Lake Michigan and leaves it on the East just a mile or so south of the Michigan State Line. LaPorte County has two entrances to this limited-access roadway: Exit 39 at U.S. 421 and Exit 49 at S.R. 39. I-80/90 provides connections to Chicago and points west; eastward to Cleveland where the routes split and I-90 goes north to Albany and Boston and I-80 continues to Philadelphia and New Jersey.
- I-94 enters the County from the west just south of Michigan City and exits to the north into Michigan. LaPorte County has two entrances to I-94: Exit 34 at U.S. 421 and Exit 40 at U.S. 20. Exit 1 in Michigan connects I-94 to S.R. 39 just north of the Michigan State Line. I-94 to the West merges with I-90 and continues through Wisconsin to the Twin Cities and West through North Dakota; to the East, I-94 goes to Detroit and connects to Canada.



Five U.S. Highways also serve LaPorte County:

- U.S. 421 was the major north-south artery in Western Indiana before the construction of I-65. Today it continues to serve as a major north-south link to and from the exits from I-94 and I-80/90. It is the major transportation link for the entire western half of the County.
- U.S. 30 crosses LaPorte County from east to west well south of the major population centers in the County. It provides good east-west access south of the Interstate highways.
- U.S. 6 crosses LaPorte County from east to west about seven miles north of U.S. 30. It passes near the old munitions plant at Kingsbury and near Westville. It is an important cross-county connector and potentially an important link for mid-county industrial development.
- U.S. 20 is the third east-west U.S. highway in the County. It links Michigan City to South Bend and, serves, primarily via designated city streets, as an alternate route to Chicago.



- U.S. 35 is one of three major north-south arteries in the County. It enters the County from Starke County; it joins U.S. 6 for about five miles, where it jogs to the north through Kingsbury and then goes north into the City of La Porte and then continues northwest to a junction with U.S. 20 near Michigan City; U.S. 35 ends at that point. U.S. 35 is a critical link in the County because it is the only major arterial that links City of La Porte and Michigan City; it is also the best connection from the City of La Porte to U.S. 30 to the south.

Two major state highways serve LaPorte County:

- S.R. 39 runs straight north and south through the center of the County, paralleling U.S. 421 but on a course about 8 miles east. To the North, it links La Porte to both Interstate highways and continues to New Buffalo, Michigan, which is the site of a major new gaming development.
- S.R. 2 is a major east-west connector running diagonally southwest to northeast from Valparaiso, through the City of La Porte to New Carlisle and South Bend. West of La Porte is a mixture of two and four lanes and east it is a four-lane highway.

A network of local County roads crisscrosses the County providing key connections to the transportation network for agricultural and suburban development.

**ROADWAY IMPROVEMENTS**

A major issue that the LaPorte County urbanized area faces is the need for a greatly improved effective arterial roadway between the City of La Porte and Michigan City. Not only is a fully-improved major arterial needed between the two cities, there is also a need to plan for a series of collector roadways within this area. This area has developed as a series of individual subdivisions, each of which feeds onto a minor or major arterial. The limited network of County roads function by default as the collector system in the area. Thus, U.S. 35, Johnson Road, Wozniak Road and N500W not only move traffic into and through the area, but they provide the only connections between neighborhoods within the area. Better interconnections between neighborhoods and a planned system of collector roads would not only facilitate local trips within the area but would prolong the period during which the existing County roads can provide satisfactory levels of service by reducing the number of local trips along them.

In Michigan City there are long-range plans to move the South Shore Line off 11<sup>th</sup> Street to address some local traffic issues.

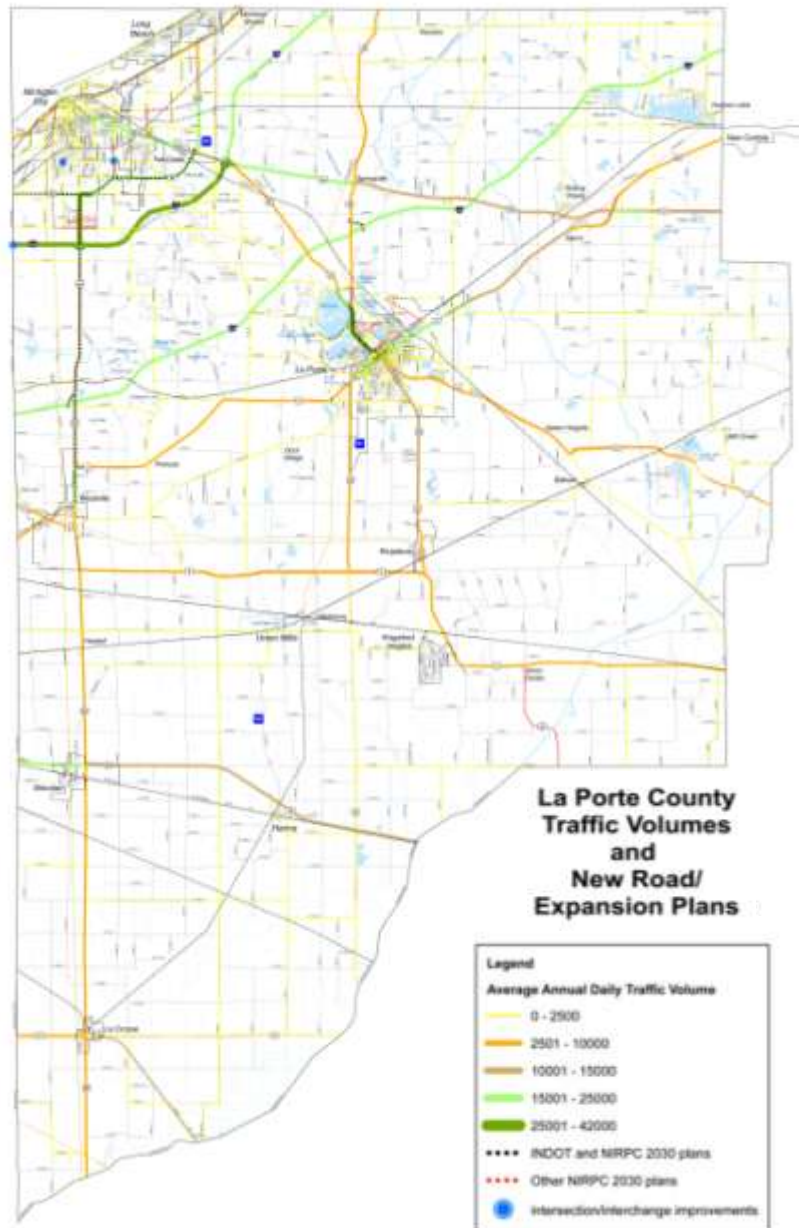


Figure 18 LaPorte County Traffic Volumes and Roadway Improvements

### ***Economic Development Corridor Feasibility Study – City of La Porte***

In the City of La Porte, its major north-south (U.S. 35/Indiana Avenue and Pine Lake Avenue) and east-west (S.R. 2/Lincoln Way) arteries are severely impaired because they function in a dual capacity as the City's "Main Streets" and major throughways. Solutions to this traffic dilemma date back 40 years when Mayor Tom Boyd's suggested a bypass around La Porte to alleviate traffic congestion and enhance industrial development. In 2004, \$250,000 was earmarked by Congress to undertake a feasibility study of an economic development corridor for re-routing through-traffic from the downtown area of the City of La Porte. The adopted project goals were to:

- Reduce congestion in the La Porte's downtown, especially by facilitating the movement of trucks.
- Improve vehicular and pedestrian safety.
- Enhance access to City of LaPorte industrial and commercial locations.
- Facilitate access to new sites for industrial and commercial development.
- Enhance regional transportation development, including improved connectivity between La Porte and Michigan City.

The relation of the new economic development corridor to the possible eastward extension of the proposed Illiana Expressway (planned to connect I-57 to I-65) through Valparaiso, around the south side of La Porte finally connecting to I-94 northeast of that City, was a consideration. Traffic impacts on the City of LaPorte with and without one or more intermodal facilities (rail-to-truck transfer facilities with associated industrial parks) were also examined.

The consulting firm of Bernardin-Lochmueller & Associates was hired to complete the Economic Development Corridor Feasibility Study. Completed in 2007, the study made the following findings, recommendations and observations:

- The Inner Loop alternative best addresses the project goals, is economically justified, is preferable from an environmental and social perspective, and can be financed and managed (project estimated at \$163 million) if built in phases;
- The Inner Loop diverts significant traffic from key intersections in downtown La Porte, but does not remove sufficient traffic in La Porte's central business district to eliminate all downtown congestion problems;
- When the transportation improvements advances into further environmental studies, there is a need to examine adjustments to Inner Loop alignment to avoid and minimize adverse impacts on built and natural environment and to re-examine in greater depth the possible extension of Boyd Boulevard northward from SR 2 (Lincolnway) over the Norfolk & Southern Railroad to Severs Road as an option to the Fail Road alignment for the Inner Loop corridor;
- Include the phased development of the Inner Loop in Northwest Indiana Long Range Transportation Plan -- Connections 2030 Plan -- and include at least one of the phases in the Northwest Indiana Transportation Improvement Program thus enabling programming of funds to proceed with Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for the entire Inner Loop.
- Include the Inner Loop corridor in the Land Development Plan to facilitate right-of-way preservation
- The widening of SR 2 to six lanes through the city fails to meet any of the five project goals, fails to relieve downtown congestion or to divert external traffic, displaces about 50 businesses and homes, adversely impacts historic structures and districts, adversely affects downtown businesses through the loss of on-street parking, makes pedestrian circulation more difficult, and is opposed by the community;
- The Lincolnway/Washington One-Way Pair option achieves an acceptable LOS at key downtown intersections, but it fails to reduce truck traffic or traffic flow impediments, fails to achieve any of the other four project goals, increases traffic in historic districts, makes pedestrian circulation more difficult, and is considered environmentally and socially unacceptable by the community;

- More extreme traffic flow improvements to SR 2 (Lincolnway) within the downtown should be examined such as the prohibition of left-turns on SR 2 at Michigan Avenue and Madison Street or the removal of traffic signals within a block of the SR 2/US 35 intersection and limiting cross-street traffic to right-in/right-out only movement;
- Widen US 421 to four lanes from SR 2 to I-94;
- Avoid adding travel lanes to Johnson Road and prohibit trucks; and,
- The potential impacts to wetlands, historic structures, wildlife habitats and prime agricultural land, subsequent engineering and environmental assessment studies should lead to a full environmental impact statement to further examine alignment adjustments within the corridor to avoid, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts on the community and environment.

Figure 19 La Porte Economic Development Corridor





## RAIL

### PASSENGER RAIL

The Northwestern Indiana Commuter Transportation District operates the South Shore Line, providing passenger service from South Bend to Chicago's Randolph Street Station, with three stops in LaPorte County – one on 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Michigan City, another on Carroll Avenue in Michigan City and the third at the east end of the County, at Hudson Lake; Hudson Lake is a flag stop, where trains stop only when a passenger signals a desire to depart or a waiting passenger flags the train. The South Shore Line provides excellent weekday and weekend rail service to LaPorte County, with service every hour or two hours depending on the day of the week.

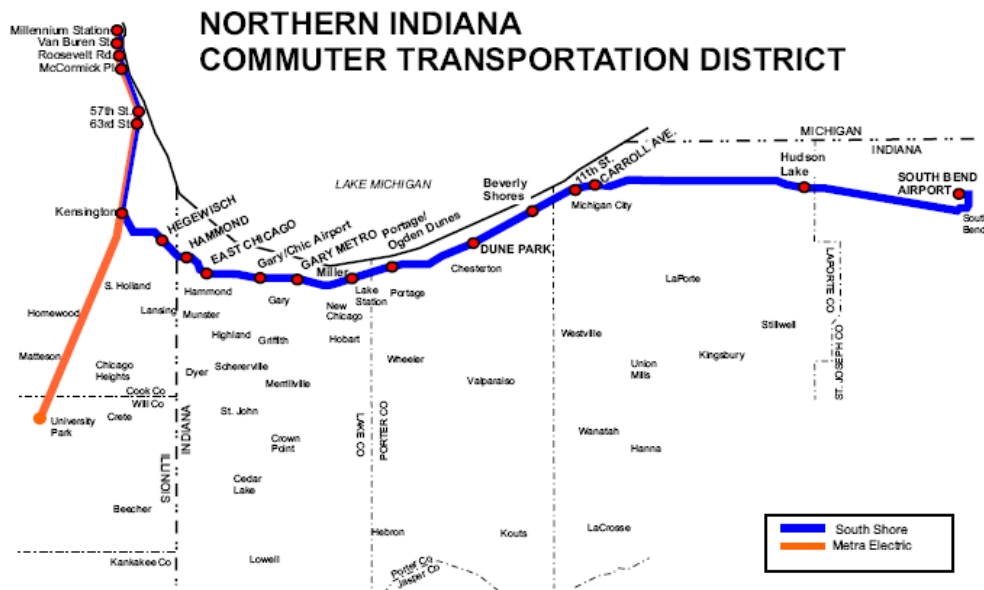


Figure 20 Northern Indian Passenger Rail

The South Shore Line runs through some of LaPorte County's most rapidly developing area on the east side of the County, but there is a nearly 20-mile gap between the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Station in Michigan City and the flag station at Hudson Lake. Planning for one or two additional flag or scheduled stops between the two – with good commuter parking at one of them – would serve the County and its residents well over the long run. There have been discussions about moving the South Shore Line from 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Michigan City, but no source of funding for this proposed project has been identified and plans are not specific. Amtrak also provides daily passenger service connections between Chicago and cities in Michigan with a stop in Michigan City.

### FREIGHT RAIL

LaPorte County has excellent service on several railroads that carry freight:

- **Chicago, South Shore and South Bend Railroad (CSSB).** CSSB line provides freight service along a rail line that runs parallel to the South Shore Line. It links South Bend and Chicago through Michigan City, with interconnections to many other rail lines in Chicago and South Bend. It provides the primary service to deliver fuel to the Northern Indiana Public Service Company power plant at Michigan City, as well as to another plant at Burns Harbor. The CSSB also has a branch line that goes from Michigan City southeast, passing through the City of La Porte.
- **Norfolk and Southern.** Norfolk and Southern has a line running through LaPorte County. It comes from Chicago entering the County at Otis, and swings north, passing through Pinola into



the City of La Porte, then goes northeast through Hudson Lake. Norfolk and Southern has an unused line running from Kingsbury/Stillwell southward to connect to the Old Nickel Plate line at Argos.

- **CSX.** A mainline of the CSX Railroad crosses LaPorte County diagonally, originating in Chicago and entering the County just south of Westville and crossing through Union Mills and Wellsboro before it continues east through Marshall and Kosciusko Counties. A Chesapeake and Indiana short-line serving grain elevators branches south from the mainline at Wellsboro and connects through La Crosse to Malden. CSX also has a line running across Michigan City.
- **Canadian National.** A mainline of the Canadian National Railroad runs from Chicago through the north edge of Valparaiso and enters LaPorte County north of Wanatah. Like the CSX, it passes through Union Mills and Wellsboro. It then continues northeast through Kingsbury and the old munitions plant and on to South Bend, Lansing and on to Canada.
- **Chicago, Fort Wayne and Eastern.** The CFER runs from Gary southeast to Fort Wayne passing through Wanatah and Hannah in southern LaPorte County.

## AIR TRANSPORT

LaPorte County has two public airports that serve general aviation traffic:

- The La Porte Municipal Airport is located at 2341 State Road 39 South. It has two runways, one 5000 feet and the other 2800 feet. There is no tower, but night lighting is available and can be activated by pilots by clicking a microphone on a designated frequency.
- The Michigan City Municipal Airport is located at 1300 North Highway 212, east of Michigan City, just north of U.S. 20. It has one runway of 4100 feet and another of 1250 feet. Air traffic information and field lighting is handled through communication with airport personnel when the field is open.

Both municipal airports are in developing areas of the County. Development exists so close to both airports that it is difficult for them to make significant additional land acquisitions. It is important, however, that land-use regulations and their implementation ensure that the development that occurs does not add to the obstructions to flight patterns near both airports.

## TRAILS, BIKEWAYS & PEDESTRIAN PATHS

Michigan City adopted a Trails Master Plan in 2005. The plan calls for routes throughout the City which will connect neighborhoods with destinations such as schools, parks, and the YMCA. The new trail system will have seven trails which will combine for a total of 27 miles. There will be five spurs to connect the trail system to the County's bikeway system and to greenways located within Michigan City. Most of the trails are located along the Lake Michigan lake front and Washington Park; however the trails also go as far west as U.S. 12, south as U.S. 20, and east to almost IN 12.

LaPorte County currently has 20 different bike loops which cover the entire County and allow for 420 miles of biking on over 40 different routes. The bike trails allow for connection between different parks, cities and towns throughout the County; however, many of these bikeways share the travelway with motor vehicles.

The Marquette Plan will have an impact on Michigan City and LaPorte County. The Plan calls for a trail connection to Chicago from Michigan City. A connection from Michigan City to Porter County is expected to take place during Phase II of the construction.

A trail network, if effectively planned, can be powerful tool to influence economic development of the greater community, contribute to downtown revitalization and address community health concerns. These benefits are evidenced in many Indiana communities.

### PEDESTRIAN / BICYCLE CONNECTIONS

There are good pedestrian connections through the cities and towns, and there is a region-wide trails plan, primarily for recreational bicycle and pedestrian use. However, 70 percent of recent development is located within suburban areas outside cities and towns. This has created a gap in the connection of pedestrian and bicycle facilities to the existing systems. Particularly in the area between the City of La Porte and Michigan City and in the area north of the City of La Porte and east of Michigan City, there has been substantial exurban and suburban development that mostly lacks any sort of pedestrian or bicycle connections to anything. Thus, residents of those areas are almost entirely dependent on automobiles for even the shortest trips.

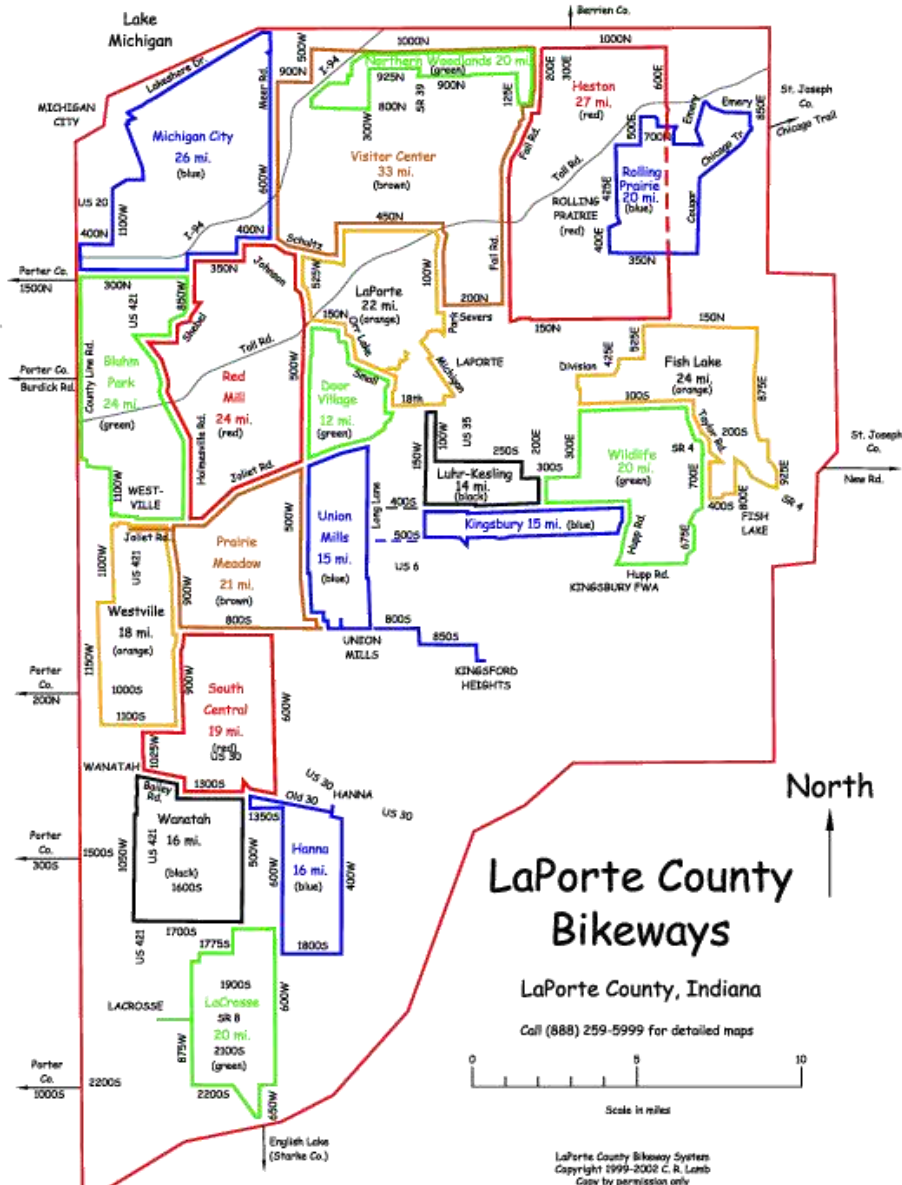


Figure 21 LaPorte County Bikeways

## KEY ISSUES

- Although many trips now occur by road rather than by rail or water, LaPorte County continues to enjoy a strategic location in relationship to multiple modes of transportation.
- The two most important roads in LaPorte County are the two Interstate Highways, the five U.S. highways and the two state routes the crisscross the County.
- This is a major need for a real road network between the City of La Porte and Michigan City as well as a developed system of collector roadways in the rapidly urbanizing area between these two cities.
- Michigan City has long-range plans to move the South Shore Line off 11<sup>th</sup> Street to address some local traffic issues.
- The City of La Porte's major north-south and east-west arteries are severely impaired because they function in a dual capacity as the City's "Main Streets" and major throughways
- The proposed Inner Loop around the south side of the City of La Porte would help to solve the City of La Porte's east-west traffic issues.
- The South Shore Line provides excellent weekday and weekend rail service to LaPorte County, with service every hour or two hours depending on the day of the week.
- Provision of additional South Shore Line stops within the 20-mile gap from 11<sup>th</sup> Street Station in Michigan City to Hudson Lakes would provide an additional mode of travel in this rapidly developing area of the County.
- Development exists so close to both the Michigan City airport and the La Porte airport that it is difficult for them to make significant additional land acquisition; it is important that land-use regulations and their implementation strategies ensure that the development that occurs does not add to the obstructions to flight patterns near both airports.
- LaPorte County currently has 20 different bike loops which cover the entire County and allow for 420 miles of biking on over 40 different routes.
- There is a gap in the provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities to connect the 70 percent of recent suburban development that has occurred outside cities and towns to the existing systems.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION**

When asked about the strengths of LaPorte County, many people refer to its natural environment and open space. Through multiple systems of parks and open space, residents of and visitors to LaPorte County have multiple opportunities to interact directly with nature and to engage in a variety of outdoor activities, ranging from walking and picnicking to participating in organized sports.

### **INDIANA DUNES**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The Indiana Dunes, along the shore of Lake Michigan, is a major natural feature and a major draw for tourists and local visitors. Stretching west from Michigan City to Burns Harbor, in Porter County, the public areas of the dunes occupy about 15 miles of lakeshore. Although only the eastern-most portion of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is in LaPorte County, it is an important part of the future of LaPorte County. Phase II of the Marquette Plan, under preparation by the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission, includes the eastern part of the Indiana Dunes. The public portions of the Indiana Dunes are interrupted by the small residential communities of Beverly Shores and Dune Acres, both in Porter County, and by Burns Harbor, another small town but one that also includes a significant industrial base. The public portions of the Indiana Dunes are actually managed by two separate entities.

#### **INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE**

The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore was created in 1966, although the idea of protecting the lakeshore dates to the end of the nineteenth century. The National Lakeshore, which extends into LaPorte County, consists of more than 15,000 acres of land and attracts more than 2,000,000 visitors annually. Swimming is allowed along the beach and many people visit to camp or to hike. The primary activities there, however, focus on studying and enjoying the natural environment. The National Park Services provides this description of that environment:

Immediately inland from the beaches, sand dunes rise to almost 200 feet in a series of ridges, blowouts, and valleys. Extensive wetlands fill many depressions between the dune ridges. The national lakeshore preserves an important remnant of a once vast and unique environment, resulting from the retreat of the last great continental glacier some 14,000 years ago. The park landscape represents at least four major successive stages of historic Lake Michigan shorelines, making it one of the most extensive geologic records of one of the world's largest, fresh water bodies.

The biological diversity within the national lakeshore is amongst the highest per unit area of all our national parks. Over 1,100 flowering plant species and ferns make their homes here. From predacious bog plants to native prairie grasses and from towering white pines to rare algal species, the plant diversity is rich.

The wildlife is also diverse. A wide variety of habitats coupled with the moderating effects of Lake Michigan make the region an ideal home for hundreds of animal species. The park is renowned for its bird life; more than 350 species have been observed here. Located on the southern tip of Lake Michigan, the national lakeshore is an especially important feeding and resting area for migrating land and water birds. One area within the national lakeshore has been set aside especially for its value as a great blue heron rookery.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> National Park Service, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore website,  
<http://www.nps.gov/indu/naturescience/index.htm> (accessed June 2007).

The Indiana Dunes provides a variety of habitat for animals and vegetation. Currently the Dunes support over 1,000 different plant species, 30 percent of which are endangered species.<sup>6</sup>

The Dunes can cause a variety of environmental problems, as they are still changing, growing and shifting. The National Park Service along with other allies in LaPorte County have come together to solve the problems and maintain the beauty and environment of the Indiana Dunes. One problem occurring to the Dunes is erosion. The natural erosion and deposition of sand is westward, however there are currently barriers preventing the natural erosion from occurring properly.<sup>7</sup> The National Park Service is dealing with this problem through a nourishment program, which manually replenishes the sand lost to erosion.

### **INDIANA DUNES STATE PARK**

Indiana Dunes State Park occupies three miles of lakeshore and about 2,100 acres in the middle of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, just north of Chesterton, in Porter County. Like the National Lakeshore, the State Park emphasizes passive activities, such as hiking and enjoying nature. There is a Nature Center, featuring both permanent and changing exhibits. The Park also includes a campground and swimming beaches. County Parks and Trails

## **LAPORTE COUNTY PARKS AND TRAILS**

### **LAPORTE COUNTY - EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS**

Currently in LaPorte County there are seven County-managed areas of parks and open space. Four of those provide passive and active recreational activities.

<b>PARK</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>TOWNSHIP</b>
BLUHM PARK	96	NEW DURHAM
LUHR PARK	74	SCIPIO
CREEK RIDGE	112	COOLSPRING
RED MILL	160	COOLSPRING, NEW DURHAM
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>442</b>	

#### ***Bluhm Park***

Bluhm Park was donated in 1992 and is currently 96 acres. The park is located just north of the town of Westville in the township of New Durham. Bluhm Park is off of CR 1100W just north of CR 400S, which offers the park a direct connection to US 421. Activities available for at Bluhm Park include: a large area of spring wild flowers, upland forests, wetlands, prairie land, a pond, nature trails, paved trails, picnic shelter rentals, picnic tables, playground, restrooms, and a dog exercise park. CR 1100W divides the park and activities into two different sections. The east side of the park hosts hiking and walking trails through wetlands, with maintenance facilities, a playground, volleyball court, picnic shelter and dog park being located closer to the road. Across the road in the west side of the park is a larger array of trails that are available for a variety of uses such as walking, biking, cross country skiing, and horseback riding. In 2000 the park was unable to track the number of visitors because it was still in development; however in 2005 the park attracted 19,539 visitors.



<sup>6</sup> National Park Service Website – [www.nps.gov/indu/naturescience/plants.htm](http://www.nps.gov/indu/naturescience/plants.htm)

<sup>7</sup> National Park Service Website – [www.nps.gov/indu/naturescience/environmentalfactor.htm](http://www.nps.gov/indu/naturescience/environmentalfactor.htm)



***Luhr Park***

Luhr Park is 74 acres in size with four different ecosystems available for experience: upland forest, wetlands, prairie, and a stocked pond. The park is located in Scipio Township just south of the City of La Porte and north of CR 400S on CR 150W. Luhr Park also has multiple recreational opportunities, such as:



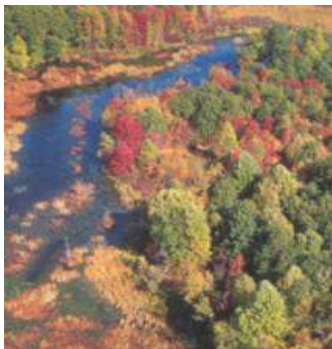
a gift shop, paved trails, picnic shelter rentals, picnic tables, restrooms, a fishing pier, a playground, boardwalks and an observation tower. The uniqueness of the park falls in the gift shop and the stocked pond. The gift shop offers a hands-on environmental display and exhibits that are available as an educational opportunity. The stocked pond is the only one within the County. Fishing poles are available for use, and fish can be caught and kept if they met the Indiana Department of Natural Resources regulations. In 2000 the park attracted 3,094 visitors. Since then the number of visitors has increased significantly to 29,736 in 2005.

***Creek Ridge County Park***

Creek Ridge County Park is located in Coolspring Township, south of Michigan City, on CR400N. Creek Ridge Park is different from the other parks in the County because it is not owned by LaPorte County. Instead the park is leased from the state. The lease began in 1992 for the 112 acres that the park consists of. The park is home to deer, foxes, raccoons, and rabbits in the wildlife settings of open field prairies, wetlands, and hardwood forests. Creek Ridge offers more opportunities than just the exposure to wildlife as there are also picnic shelter rentals, playground equipment, volleyball nets, horseshoe pits and nodes along trails which are available for fishing. The trails that exist are nature trails and total more than 1.64 miles. In 2000 Creek Ridge Park attracted 89,785 visitors. Since 2000 the number of visitors has decreased, although it still remains high at 59,409 in 2005.



***Red Mill County Park***



Red Mill County Park is located in New Durham and Coolspring Township, south of Michigan City on Hommersville Road. The park has good access to US 421. Red Hill is the largest of the County Parks, although only 20 of the 160 acres are currently owned by the County Parks Department. The rest of the acreage is owned by LaPorte County Parks Foundation. The 20 acres are being used for the development of multi-use trails, fishing, picnic areas, restrooms and playgrounds. Red Mill County Park did not start counting the visitors until 2002. That year 18,102 visitors used the park. The park has seen a steady increase since then, reaching 25,279 visitors in 2005.

***Kankakee Park***

Kankakee Park is one of the three County Parks which is not available for human access and instead serves as a wildlife habitat. Kankakee is just south of CR 2200S and west of CR 800W is Southern LaPorte County.

***Mekes Nature Preserve and Sebert Property***

Mekes Nature Preserve is located on CR 900N between CR 300E and 500E. The park is preserved as a wildlife habitat only. Sebert Property also is for wildlife habitat only and is located on the east side of Michigan City on CR 925N.

### ***Kingsbury Fish and Wildlife Area***

Kingsbury Fish and Wildlife Area is located mostly in Washington Township southeast of the town of Kingsbury. The Kankakee River is the southern border of the area. Kingsbury is 5,198 acres of grassland, crop fields, thick brush marsh and a 20 acre lake. The area was created to provide quality hunting and fishing opportunities. There are other recreational opportunities also available in Kingsbury such as: wildlife watching, camping, hiking, picnicking, shooting range, nuts and berry gathering and photography. The Wildlife Area is not supported by the County parks system, but provides another great recreational opportunity for surrounding residents.



### **LAPORTE COUNTY – PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS**

Two County Parks are scheduled to receive improvements.

- The County Parks Department has received a \$150,000 grant to develop the Lincoln Memorial Trail within Bluhm Park. The new multiple-use trail will be 1.5 miles long with unpaved and paved trails. Included in the creation of the trail will also be new parking, benches, picnic tables, hitching post, water fountain, bike racks, bathrooms, landscape plantings, and trail gates.
- The County Parks Department has also received a \$200,000 grant which will be used for the expansion of Red Mill Park. The grant money will be used to acquire a former Girl Scout Camp. About 80 acres will be acquired by the County for the new development, which will include an environmental education center, trails, a group campfire, a fishing node, a playground and restrooms.

LaPorte County has planned 19 potential trails. The plans came as part of the American Discovery Trail Charrette held in November of 2005. The 19 trail pathways are described below and can also be seen on the included map:

1. A trail along the Lake Michigan shoreline and waterfront.
2. A trail along US 12, through all of LaPorte County.
3. South Shore Trail follows the CSS Passenger Rail from Michigan City eastward from Michigan City and is intended to extend to South Bend.
4. The trail starts in Jackson Township in Illinois, goes eastward through Westville and passes just north of Kingsbury, continues straight across to North Liberty in St. Joseph County.
5. The trail starts in Michigan Township in Illinois and enters La Crosse, continues to follow a rail spur southeast, connecting with trail number 6.
6. A rails-to-trails trail, it starts along State Road 8 in Illinois and moves through La Crosse, where it turns southeast moving out of LaPorte County and into Starke County.
7. A trail that moves through the southern tip of LaPorte County from Pleasant Township in Illinois to Starke County.
8. This trail runs along US 421 until just north of Interstate 94.
9. A small trail which comes off of US 421 to Mill County Park.
10. A trail that connects Michigan City to the City of La Porte, that runs mainly along Johnson Road between the two cities.
11. This trail circles around Clear Lake in LaPorte County.
12. A trail across southern LaPorte County which follows US 30, Old US 30, and an old rail line across the County.



13. A trail that enters LaPorte County just north of CR W 1800 S, follows a straight line diagonally through LaPorte County, leaving just south of US 30.
14. A trail that starts in the Kingsbury Fish and Wildlife area and goes south along CR 600E through the County.
15. A trail that goes southeast out of from US 35 just south of Michigan City. The trail passes just north of the City of La Porte and continues until it reaches Walkerton in St. Joseph County.
16. A trail that spurs off of Trail 15 and follows State Road 2 out of the County.
17. This trail is located south of the City of La Porte and travels south along CR S 150W between CR W 250S and CR W 500S.
18. A trail that starts in the City of La Porte to Wellsboro where it connects with the planned trail to La Crosse.
19. The trail starts at Soldier Park in the City of La Porte and runs north along State Road 39 into Michigan.

Figure 22 Potential Trails for LaPorte County, 2005



## MICHIGAN CITY PARKS

### MICHIGAN CITY – EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS

Michigan City has 21 city parks. The parks are located throughout the City with a large amount located near or with access to Lake Michigan. The City also provides a variety of activities in the parks, as well as a variety of sizes. Some of the parks were created to be used by neighborhoods, while others are meant for regional use. Below is a list of the parks and the services which are offered to local community members and tourist at each one.

**Table 17 Recreation Facilities in Michigan City**

Name	Location	Acres	Facilities
Adams Park	307 Village Road	12	playground, 2 ball fields, picnic shelter
Beachwalk Park	Lake Shore Drive Stop #7	1	wooden walkway to beach
Canada (Sox) Park	300 Center Street	1	playground
Cleveland Park	300 Cleveland Avenue	6	playground, ball field
Gardena Park	900 Gardena Street	12	2 ball fields, 3 basketball courts, 3 picnic shelters, walking trail, a playground
Hansen Park	100 East Street	17.5	basketball courts, playground, picnic shelter, pedestrian trails, observation deck, fishing pads, and canoe launch
Henry Lake Area	630 Southwind	6	Undeveloped - storm-water retention area
Jerrigan's Hill Park	801 East 8 <sup>th</sup> Street	1	Undeveloped - hillside property
Joe Hawkins Memorial Park	1501 West 8 <sup>th</sup> Street	1	playground equipment and a picnic shelter
Karwick Nature Park	700 South Karwick Road	23.5	Nature Park
Krueger Memorial Park	801 Liberty Trail	37	hall seating 300 people, basketball court, multiple trails
Millennium Plaza - Washington Park	Along Trail Creek	35	benches for fishing and visitors, picnic tables
Mott's Woods	2000 Johnrue	35	undeveloped wooded area
Municipal Golf Course – N	675 Warnke Road	66	picnic shelter, 18-hole executive golf course
Municipal Golf Course – S	4000 East Michigan Blvd.	90	picnic shelter, 18-hole regulation golf course
Oak Hills Park	716 Martin Luther King Dr.	5	playground, ball field, basketball court, and picnic shelter
Patriot Park	2224 North 950 West	120	playground, 4 ball fields, 3 picnic shelters, 11 practice/game soccer fields
Pinewood Avenue Triangle	700 Pinewood	1	undeveloped parcel
Pullman Park (Skate Park)	550 West 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	10	playground, 2 ball fields, 2 full and 2 half basketball courts, a picnic shelter, and a skate park
Ridgeland Park	620 Ridgeland Avenue	1	playground
Ruby Woods	Intersection of Franklin and Barker Road	35	pedestrian trails
Tall Timbers Park	300 Springland Avenue	30	playground, basketball court
Walker Street Park	900 Walker Street	1	playground, basketball court, picnic shelter
Washington Park	6 on the Lake	99	playground, 7 picnic shelters, lighthouse, catwalk, fitness trails, tennis courts, historic monuments, swimming beach, marina and boat launch, fishing, outdoor skating rink, amphitheater, gazebo and historic rock garden
Water Tower Park	301 Broadway	5.3	playground, 2 ball fields, a basketball court, tennis courts
Winding Creek Cove	8 <sup>th</sup> and Dickson Street	6.7	native passive park with trails, observation deck, fishing pad, and canoe launch
Zilla Square Park		3	playground, ball field, basketball courts, picnic shelter
	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>661</b>	

## MICHIGAN CITY – PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

### ***Planned Parks***

- There is a future nature preserved planned along the CSS passenger railroad in Western Michigan City. Trail Creek also runs through the nature preserve.
- A passive park is planned along 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Trail Creek, just to the west of Krueger Memorial Park.

### ***Waterfront Improvements***

Phase II of the Marquette Plan will extend across the Lake Michigan shoreline in LaPorte County. The Marquette Plan is a plan to restore the waterfront of Lake Michigan across Illinois and Indiana, Michigan City will be directly affected by the plan. The plan calls for the creation of a livable lakefront where people come to live, work, play, and stay. The planned development and preservation along the Lake Front should attract more tourist and permanent citizens to the area, which will affect Michigan City.

### ***Planned Trail System***

Michigan City created a Master Plan for a trail system in 2005. The master plan has a list of proposed trails, some from the Singing Sands Plan discussed below; these are trails proposed in the 2005 Master Plan but were not included in the Singing Sands Plan.

- South Shoreline Trail starts at the planned nature preserve and follows the CSS Passenger Rail.
- NIPSCO Greenway starts on Sheridan Avenue just south of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and runs east through southern Michigan City. Once the trail goes through the majority of the city it starts turning north to end at the planned nature preserve.
- Monon Trail runs along the old Monon Rail Line on the west side of Michigan City. The trail starts outside of the city and runs north until it reaches Lake Michigan.
- Peanut Trail spurs off of the Singing Sands Trail in north Michigan City; the trail is short in length and runs to the planned passive park.
- Trail Creek Greenway starts at the planned nature preserve and goes north up to Martin Luther King Jr. Center, then moves westward through Pottawattomie Park, Krueger Memorial Park (the future passive park) and ends at Hansen Park.
- Michigan City/La Porte Trail starts at Gardena Playground and runs south along Woodland Avenue until ending at Michigan City High School.
- Community Connection Trail includes three trails: The first trail starts at Oak Hills Park and runs north in to the State of Michigan. The second trail will run along the CSX Railroad and connect the Martin T Krueger Middle School and Nieman Elementary School. The third trail connects the Singing Sands Trail with the Trail Creek Greenway, just to the west of Krueger Memorial Park.

The Singing Sands Lighthouse Trail and Inner City Bike Loop Plan is a series of proposed trail loops throughout Michigan City. The plan was developed by the Parks and Recreation Department of Michigan City in 2003. There are ten trail loops planned. The trails are proposed to be developed in three different stages. The first stage will develop the western loops of the city and some of the trails in the center of town. The second phase will be the remaining trails of the center loops that were not developed during the first phase, and the third phase will develop the eastern end of Michigan City. When the trail system is complete, one will be able to travel throughout Michigan City.



## CITY OF LA PORTE PARKS

### CITY OF LA PORTE – EXISTING PARKS

The City of La Porte has 18 parks. The parks vary in size, location, and activities available. Over half of the parks are larger than five acres. All of the parks lie within the city limits and are located in areas which allow easy service and access to the entire community. Activities which can be found at most of the parks are ball fields and playgrounds, though some parks have more activities to offer. Please see the listing of parks and activities below for more information.

**Table 18 Recreation Facilities in the City of La Porte**

Name	Location	Acres	Facilities
Allesee Park	South side of city	6	Activities: ball field, basketball half-court, volleyball, playground, fitness trail, and shelter
Beechwood Golf Course	2222 Woodlawn Dr.	167	18-hole Bent grass course with water in play
Ben Rees	near the Civic Auditorium	1.5	playground, gazebo
Clarke Field		6	2 ball fields, shelter, volleyball, basketball half-court, playground
Fox Memorial	North end of Clear Lake	170	3 ball fields, playgrounds, picnic shelters, fishing, boating, tennis court, basketball court, amphitheater, trails, picnic facilities
Kesling Park	A and 18 <sup>th</sup> Street	90	4 ball fields, 2 outdoor racquetball courts, playgrounds, a volleyball court, basketball court, tubing hill, soccer field, fitness trail, picnic facilities, walking trail, and nature trail
Kiwanis-Teledyne Park	US 35 and State Road 39	4.5	picnic shelter, walkway to the lake, floating piers
Koomler Park	Southern La Porte	4	ball field, basketball, volleyball, playground
Larson-Danielson Field	Central Avenue		t-ball field
Lindewald Memorial Park	On Lower Lake	9.4	picnic shelters, playground, ball field, volleyball courts, and horseshoe pits
Monroe Tot Lot	Monroe Manor	1	playground
Rumely Park		4	basketball, tennis, playground, picnic facilities, fishing
Scott Field		5	None
Soldiers Memorial	Stone Lake	556	swimming, playgrounds, a ball field, volleyball, cross country skiing, fishing and boating
Warsaw Tot Lot		<1	playground
	<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>1026.4</b>	

### CITY OF LA PORTE – PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

The City of La Porte has multiple park and recreation improvements planned. Some of the improvements are planned for the next five years while other will not take place for up to 20 years.

- Allesee Park -- renovate basketball court and pave the parking lot and drive within the next five years; long term plans include creating a mini-splash park.
- Ben Rees Park -- walkway, drinking fountain, and basketball court in the planning for the neighborhood park; long-term plans include landscape enhancements, new concrete bench pads, and restrooms.
- Clarke Field -- updating drinking fountains and bleachers within the next five years; long term plans include constructing new sidewalks and upgrading the baseball diamonds.
- Fox Memorial Park -- six updates to take place in the next five years including: renovation to parking lots, trail development around Clear Lake, new drinking fountains, erosion control along roads and restroom construction. There are also seven improvements planned for the next 20 years including improvements to the amphitheater, parking lots, walking trails, ball fields, walking paths, and fish accessibility to Clear Lake.

- Kiwanis-Teledyne Park -- two improvements planned, both of which will take place in the next five years; the plan is to renovate the north shelter on the property and to complete renovation plans.
- Koomler Park-- remove or convert the current building, install security lights, and install additional trash cans within the next five years; long term plans include resealing the play courts and constructing a mini-splash park.
- Kelsing Park -- three updates are planned for the next five years, including: new restrooms, improve site lighting, install lighting on ball diamonds. There are 13 long term improvements planned which vary from new construction to making renovations to current features.
- Lindewald Memorial Park (City Park) -- additional security lighting in the next five years; long term plans include paving the parking lot and drive and the construction of a mini-splash park.
- Rumely Park -- remove tennis court fencing and clean up the landscaping in the next five years; in the long term the park plans on resealing and stripping the basketball court.
- Scott Field -- install security lighting to Scott Field in the next five years and construct a small parking lot within the next 20 years.
- Soldiers Memorial Park -- seven improvements planned to occur in the next five years. These improvements include: restoration of the shoreline of Stone Lake, develop a trail through the park, remove the existing trail, new parking lot, improve street parking, renovate the current beach, and mountain bike trail improvements. The long term improvements vary from new construction to renovation of existing features.
- Warsaw Park -- two improvements planned for the next 20 years; these include repairing the perimeter fence and adding new play equipment.
- Beechwood Golf Course -- five projects planned over next five years. These improvements include clubhouse renovations, controlling the current goose problems, sand trap and tee renovations, and pond edge shaping. Additional improvements over a 20-year period include new construction and signage or renovating current features.

## KEY ISSUES

- Total public park and recreational space in LaPorte County exceeds 2,100 acres, or about 2 acres per thousand persons. Although the National Recreation and Park Association no longer recommends specific ratios, common planning guidelines suggest a need for 4 to 6 acres per thousand persons – or more.
- With about 5 acres per 1,000 residents, the City of La Porte has the most recreational land resources per capita; Michigan City, with about 2 acres per 1,000, matches the over-all County ratios.
- Suburban and exurban development outside the cities and towns has significant implications for County officials. Only 20 percent of the publicly controlled park and recreation lands is in the unincorporated parts of the County, but 40 percent of current residents and 70 percent of new residential units are in the unincorporated areas.
- Historically, many rural residents have worked for a living in their fields and thus have had far less interest in public open space to provide for recreational opportunities. Many of the new rural and exurban residents in LaPorte County, however, are demographically suburbanites who will, over a period of time, expect and perhaps demand typical suburban services, including substantially more park lands.
- Although the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore protects some of the most sensitive land in LaPorte County, there is significant local interest in protecting other environmentally sensitive areas, include remaining wetlands, streams and old-growth forests. Although LaPorte County has acquired three small sites for habitat and Save the Dunes has been able to preserve some lands along Trail Creek, the current efforts to preserve such lands fall far short of the opportunities and potential demands for such preservation.



# REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF LAPORTE COUNTY

## OVERVIEW

LaPorte County is a large and complex geography, with more than 613 square miles of total area and more than 598 square miles of land area. This section of the plan breaks the geography down into seven subregions and analyzes each of those separately. The areas were delineated based on a combination of factors: existing land use, development trends, availability of infrastructure (particularly major roads and public sewer), soil and other natural characteristics.

## PLANS AND STUDIES

There are a number of studies that have examined LaPorte County public facilities and services countywide and within many of the subregions discussed within this section of the Plan; listed below are some of the more significant ones:

- Economic Development Corridor Study (underway)
- Marquette Plan Phase II (underway)
- Blueways-Greenways Plan (underway)
- Cost of Community Services Study (completed draft)
- Possible future County study of expansion of sewer service areas
- Watershed Management Framework Development Plan for Lake, Porter and La Porte Counties
- Regional Watershed Management Plan for Lake, Porter and La Porte Counties
- Trail Creek Watershed Study
- NIRPC 2030 Connections
- U.S. 421 corridor expansion
- U.S. 20 corridor expansion from County line to "Y" with 212
- U.S. 35 corridor expansion from S.R. 2 to "Y" with U.S. 39
- Air Quality Conformity for Regional Transportation Plan
- Indiana Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program
- Michigan City Greenways Master Plan
- 2006-2010 Master Plan for La Porte County Parks
- Northwest Indiana Regional Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan

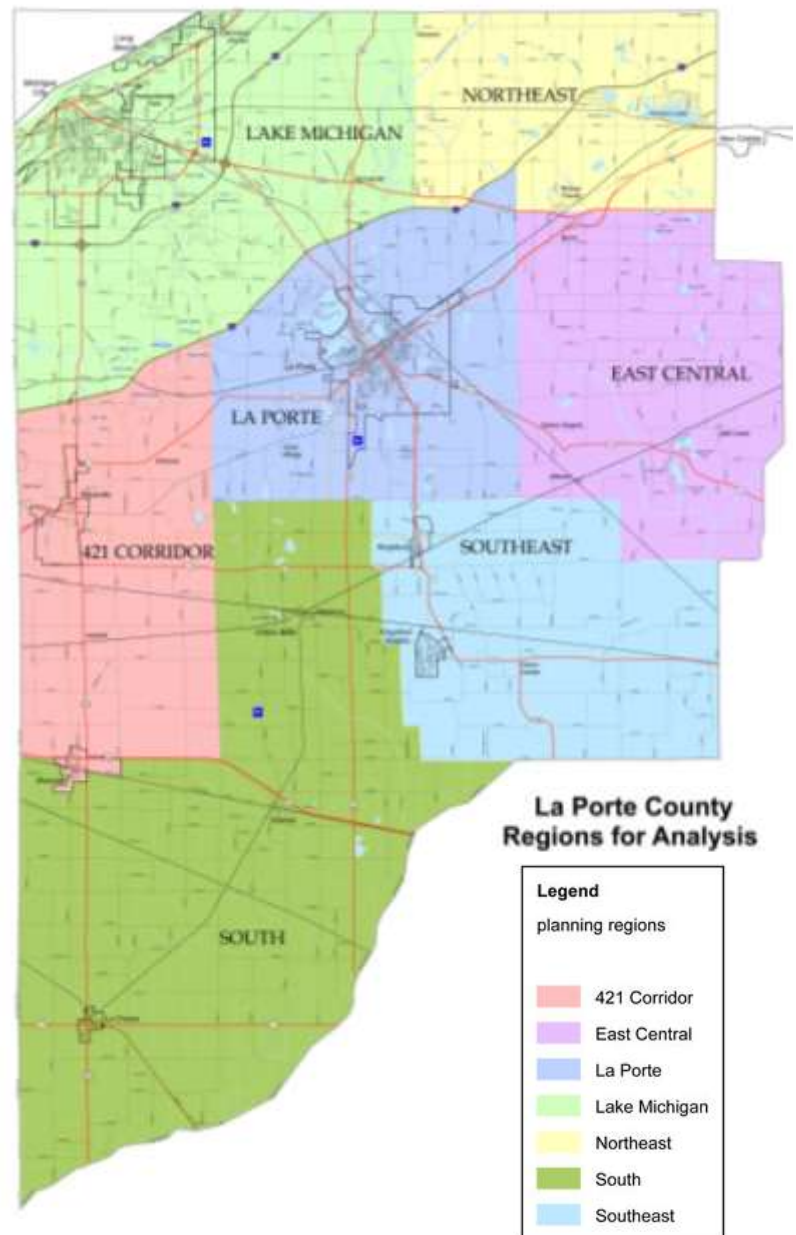


Figure 23 Regional Analysis Map, LaPorte County, 2005

## LAKE MICHIGAN SUBREGION

### COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

- Long Beach
- Michigan City
- Michiana Shores
- Pottawattamie Park
- Coolspring Township
- Michigan Township
- Springfield Township
- Center Township – (included all unincorporated Center Twp for population)

### POPULATION

- 2005 Estimate 55,095 (-0.8% since 2000)

### ZONING

- Typical urban zoning in incorporated cities
- County zoning includes concentrated general business zoning adjacent to U.S. 421 and Interstate I-94, with a mixture of industrial and residential zoning in other areas



### STRENGTHS

- Lakefront
- Additional tourism draw with riverboat casino gambling
- Access to South Shore Line
- Direct access to I-94 and good access to I-80/90 and other major regional roads via U.S. 421
- Excellent public utilities available, with good capacity
- No remaining combined sewer overflows in Michigan City
- Good mixture of land uses, allowing residents to satisfy most retail and service needs in region
- Extensive outdoor recreation facilities, including excellent public park system in Michigan City, county parks, and access to Indiana Dunes

### ISSUES

#### *Environmental*

- Surface water quality issues (Trail Creek Watershed study includes recommendations)
- Multiple industrial waste sites
- Multiple leaking underground storage tanks
- IDEM-identified septage waste sites in the town of Trail Creek and along 421 south of I-94
- Significant development outside Michigan City without public sewer and not ideal for septic systems
- Air quality – within a non-attainment area
- Significant areas of wetlands, woods and natural habitat with few guidelines for protecting them
- Brownfields

#### *Infrastructure*

- Lack of collector roads in developing area outside Michigan City
- Lack of regional stormwater management program outside Michigan City
- Potential environmental implications of multiple on-site stormwater detention and retention facilities
- South Shore Line routing and future station locations



**Land Use**

- Need for continued revitalization of urban neighborhoods
- Displacement of existing housing stock for second homes
- Revitalization of downtown Michigan City
- Vacancy rates and continued strong construction trends suggest growth in second-homes, confirmed by observations of development along lake front
- Brownfields – need to reuse
- Inefficient development on large lots outside city
- Riverboat and related development in Michigan may increase development pressures in Springfield Township, where there is currently no sewer service

**OBJECTIVES**

- Create 20-year expansion plans for Michigan City wastewater system into developing areas
- Adopt regional stormwater management plans – could be funded as utility and/or through impact fees
- Amend subdivision regulations to include strong connectivity policy for new subdivisions
- Adopt interim County zoning tools to encourage more efficient use of land that does not currently have access to sewer but that can easily be served in the foreseeable future
- Adopt cluster zoning tools to encourage developers to “Design with Nature” and work around sensitive lands and natural resources

**NORTHEAST SUBREGION**

**COMMUNITIES INCLUDED**

- Galena Township
- Hudson Township
- Note: Population data only included Galena and Hudson Townships, but probably should include portions of Kankakee and Wills Townships north of U.S. 20



**POPULATION**

- Estimate 2005 3,708 (+2.46% from 2005)

**ZONING**

- Mile-wide strip of industrial zoning along railroad and southeast of Hudson Lake
- Residential and some business zoning at Hudson Lake
- Rest agricultural

**STRENGTHS**

- Access to South Shore Line
- Direct access to I-94
- Good access to I-80/90 and other major regional roads via U.S. 20
- Attractive rolling terrain with many wooded areas remaining

## **ISSUES**

### ***Environmental***

- Surface and ground water quality issues, in Lake Michigan and Little Calumet-Galien Watersheds
- Degradation and loss of environmentally sensitive lands
- IDEM-identified septage waste sites on C.R. 1000 North in central Galena Township and on County Road 800 East, south of Hudson Lake
- Scattered residential development on septic tanks in sensitive environmental areas with soils that are generally poorly suited for them
- Significant areas of wetlands, woods and natural habitat interspersed with development, with few guidelines to protect the natural resources
- Density of development at Hudson Lake likely to lead to water quality issues over the long run
- Loss of environmentally sensitive lands

### ***Infrastructure***

- Lack of wastewater treatment system – existing or planned
- County may create Countywide Sanitary District, and this area should be a priority for service
- Subdivisions along existing county roads may gradually impair the function of those roads
- South Shore Line location and stations

### ***Land Use***

- Inefficient patterns of scattered, large-lot development inconsistent with possible future efforts to provide infrastructure
- Land ownership is fragmented, making it unlikely that much of the land will be used for agriculture over the long run
- Riverboat and related development in Michigan may increase development pressures in area

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Consider new approach to wastewater management for area where some continued development is likely
- Possible negotiations to connect Hudson Lake to New Carlisle system
- If County forms Countywide Sanitary District, consider including mandatory management service for septic and other individual treatment systems in this area (could include East Central area, also, and possibly Southeast area); such service should be funded with user fees
- Establish county standards and goals for constructed wetlands as alternative treatment system in this area – to be managed by regional district
- Amend zoning to limit density outside Hudson Lake area, because of character of area and improbability of wastewater service
- Implement cluster zoning tools to encourage developers to “Design with Nature” and work around sensitive lands and natural resources in developing areas southeast of city
- Improve subdivision regulations to prevent/discourage using county arterial and collector roads as local roads, with direct driveway access
- Identify ways to supplement efforts of Save the Dunes to identify and protect most important environmentally sensitive lands

## EAST CENTRAL SUBREGION

### COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

- Kankakee Township (east half, south of U.S. 20)
- Wills Township
- Pleasant Township (east half)
- Lincoln Township

Note: Population figures for Kankakee and Pleasant Townships were divided evenly between this area and La Porte area

### POPULATION

- 2005 Estimate 6,423 (+4.12% since 2000)

### ZONING

- Largely agricultural with some industrial between S.R. 2 and U.S. 20 and mixture of small-town zoning at Rolling Prairie and R-2 and R-3 at Fish Lake

### STRENGTHS

- Access to South Shore Line
- Good access to I-80/90 and other major regional roads via U.S. 20
- Excellent agricultural area with good access to markets

### ISSUES

#### *Environmental*

- Small number of leaking underground storage tanks
- Several livestock feeding operations, three of them near the Little Kankakee River
- IDEM impaired waterways and lake (Fish Lake)

#### *Infrastructure*

- Lack of wastewater treatment system – existing or planned
- Subdivisions along existing county roads may gradually impair the function of those roads
- South Shore Line location and stations

#### *Land Use*

- Density of development at Fish Lake likely to lead to water quality issues over the long run
- Residential, second-home development around Fish Lake, with no long-range prospects of public wastewater service
- Potential conflicts between animal agriculture and scattered residential development in area

### OBJECTIVES

- Consider new exclusive agricultural zoning districts in areas with intensive animal and other agricultural
- Consider limitations on future subdivisions in areas designated for exclusive agricultural use
- Possible County limitations on smaller livestock operations, not subject to IDEM permits



- Stream setbacks
- Waste handling
- Adopt improved zoning tools for probable continued development pressure around Upper and Lower Fish Lake
- New approach to wastewater management for area, where some continued development is likely
- Consider using proposed Countywide Sanitary District to manage septic and other individual treatment systems in this area (could include East Central area, also, and possibly Southeast area)
- Establish county standards and goals for constructed wetlands as alternative treatment system in this area – to be managed by regional district
- Amend subdivision regulations to prevent/discourage using county arterial and collector roads as local roads, with direct driveway access
- Identify ways to supplement efforts of Save the Dunes to identify and protect most important environmentally sensitive lands

## LA PORTE AREA SUBREGION

### COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

- La Porte
- Scipio Township
- Kankakee Township (west half)
- Pleasant Township (west half)

Note: For population purposes, Kankakee and Pleasant Townships were divided evenly between this and La Porte region

### POPULATION

- 2005 Estimate 26,663 (-1.33% since 2000)

### ZONING

- Typical urban zoning in incorporated cities
- Large areas of R-2 residential zoning on all sides of the City of La Porte, with additional R1 to the northeast
- Scattered industrial and commercial zoning on all sides of the City of La Porte
- Southern part of Scipio is mostly agricultural

### STRENGTHS

- Good access to I-80/90 via U.S. 39
- Good access to 421 and other regional roads via S.R. 2
- Public wastewater treatment system in La Porte, with expansion plans
- Excellent public utilities available, with good capacity
- Good mixture of land uses, allowing residents to satisfy most retail and service needs in region
- Extensive outdoor recreation facilities, including excellent public park system in LaPorte County parks, and access to Indiana Dunes



## **ISSUES**

### ***Environmental***

- Surface water quality issues
- Multiple industrial waste sites
- Multiple leaking underground storage tanks
- Significant development outside the City of La Porte without public sewer in less than ideal conditions for septic systems
- Traffic-related air quality issues
- Significant areas of wetlands, woods and natural habitat interspersed with development, with few guidelines to protect the natural resources
- Numerous brownfields

### ***Infrastructure***

- Lack of collector roads in developing area northwest of the City of La Porte
- Function and appearance of S.R. 2 Corridor
- Lack of regional stormwater management program outside City of La Porte
- Issues with truck traffic through downtown
- Need for improved truck route to link industrial areas to major regional roads
- Protection of important S.R. 2 corridor west of town from excessive curb and median cuts

### ***Land Use***

- Need for continued revitalization of urban neighborhoods
- Definition and revitalization of downtown La Porte
- Brownfields – need to reuse
- Inefficient development on large lots outside city

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Develop specific expansion plans for La Porte wastewater system into developing areas
  - Current City-County cooperative project in extending services West to County Home, toward Pinola, could serve as a model
- Establish regional stormwater management plans
  - Could be funded as utility and/or through impact fees
  - Less urgent here than in Lake Michigan Region, because this area drains away from Michigan City
- Establish strong connectivity policy for new subdivisions
- Adopt interim County zoning tools to encourage more efficient use of land that does not currently have access to sewer but that can easily be served in the foreseeable future
- Adopt cluster zoning tools to encourage developers to “Design with Nature” and work around sensitive lands and natural resources in developing areas southeast of city
- Identify ways to supplement efforts of Save the Dunes to identify and protect most important environmentally sensitive lands

## SOUTHEAST SUBREGION

### COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

- Washington Township
- Johnson Township
- Union Township
- Kingsbury
- Kingsford Heights

### POPULATION

- 2005 Estimate 4,017 (+5.49% since 2000)

### ZONING

- Substantial areas of industrial zoning around former weapons plant
- Residential zoning near Kingsbury and continuing along south edge of weapons plant
- Rest agricultural



### STRENGTHS

- Good access to regional road system via U.S. 30 and U.S. 6
- Good basis for road system within former weapons plant
- Most residential development concentrated around Kingsford Heights and Kingsbury
- Excellent rail access, particular around the weapons plant and in Union Township
- Permitted wastewater treatment systems at former weapons plant and at Kingsford Heights
- Many large parcels in landholdings

### ISSUES

#### *Environmental*

- Large floodplain area along the Kankakee River
- Multiple industrial waste sites
- Two IDEM-identified septage waste sites
- Brownfields and unknown cleanup issues

#### *Infrastructure*

- Road and utility infrastructure around weapons plant is arguably underused, while other entities are funding expansions in other areas

#### *Land Use*

- Somewhat fractured land ownership limits opportunities for major industrial development at old weapons plant
- Lack of compatibility provisions in zoning ordinance

### OBJECTIVES

- Designate portions of eastern part of this area for exclusive and intensive agricultural use
- Consider limiting future subdivisions in areas designated for exclusive agricultural use
- Consider possible county limitations on smaller livestock operations, not subject to IDEM permits



- Stream setbacks
- Waste handling
- Identify and protect corridors for collector roads in developing areas
- Amend subdivision regulations to include strong connectivity policy for new subdivisions
- Identify ways to supplement efforts of Save the Dunes to identify and protect most important environmentally sensitive lands
- Adopt new industrial overlay zoning district to allow large-scale planned industrial development at a point of confluence of major highways and railroads

## SOUTH SUBREGION

### COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

- Cass Township
- Dewey Township
- Prairie Township
- Hanna Township
- Noble Township
- La Crosse

### POPULATION

- 2005 Estimate 5,121 (+10.21% since 2000)

### ZONING

- Mixed zoning in La Crosse
- Rest mostly agricultural, with industrial sites along railroad tracks at Union Mills and Hanna and near U.S. 39 at southern end in county

### STRENGTHS

- Good road access to region via U.S. 30, which is divided, four-lane route
- Excellent agricultural soils
- Many large landholdings, consistent with long-term, viable agricultural uses

### ISSUES

#### *Environmental*

- Large floodplain area along the Kankakee River
- Multiple livestock operations
- Brownfields and unknown cleanup issues
- IDEM impaired waterways
- Agricultural runoff
- Sedimentation

#### *Infrastructure*

- Public wastewater systems available only at Wanatah and at La Crosse, and both have limited capacities



**Land Use**

- Scattered small-scale residential development, with little prospect of future infrastructure to serve it
- Inconsistency between residential development and long-term agricultural uses
- Development pressures along U.S. 30 from the west may affect this area
- Subdivisions along existing county roads may gradually impair the function of those roads

**OBJECTIVES**

- Consider amending County zoning regulations and map to designate much of this area for exclusive and intensive agricultural use
- Consider adopting limits on future subdivisions in areas designated for exclusive agricultural use
- Amend zoning to facilitate residential development around existing Towns and to discourage it in other areas
- Consider possible County limits on smaller livestock operations, not subject to IDEM permits
  - Stream setbacks
  - Waste handling

**421 CORRIDOR SUBREGION**

**COMMUNITIES INCLUDED**

- New Durham Township
- Clinton Township
- Westville
- Wanatah

**POPULATION**

- 2005 Estimate 9,446 (+2.12% since 2000)

**ZONING**

- Primarily agricultural, with a mixture of commercial, residential and industrial along U.S. 421

**STRENGTHS**

- Good road access to region via U.S. 421, U.S. 30, U.S. 6, and I-80/90
- Purdue campus located on 421
- Public wastewater systems at Wanatah and Westville

**ISSUES**

**Environmental**

- Small number of leaking underground storage tanks
- One known industrial waste site

**Infrastructure**

- Lack of comprehensive plan for wastewater treatment along much of this developing corridor
- Lack of designated corridors for minor arterials and collector roads



- US 421 from SR 2 in Westville to I-94 will become a seriously congested two-lane road if not widened to four-lanes

### ***Land Use***

- Development pressures from Valparaiso and Porter County may lead to unplanned sprawl in this area
- Possible strip commercial development along parts of corridor, particularly north of Westville

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Possible identification of corridors for minor arterials and collector roads in developing areas
- Improved zoning and subdivision controls to encourage nodal development rather than strip development along corridor
- Tools to focus new residential growth around established communities with utilities
- Need to establish areas conservation for environmentally sensitive lands

## THE PLAN: STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### POPULATION STRATEGY

#### GOAL:

*Plan for population growth that occurs in ways and patterns that maintain the quality of life for current residents and new ones and that occurs in patterns and locations in which public services can be provided cost effectively*

#### OBJECTIVES

1. Plan for growth based on the blended regional model and not on the current Indiana University projections
2. Seek updated population projections from Indiana University
3. Monitor annual population estimates and housing data against trends, to adjust planning scenarios if population change occurs more rapidly or more slowly than projected
4. Use the Plan and its background information to guide the patterns and locations of growth

#### RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:

- a. Quality of Life will be critical both to growth in population and in the Economic Base
- b. Unplanned population growth may threaten Environmental Resources that are important to Quality of Life as well as to the health of residents and others
- c. Population growth will require expansions in Transportation and Public Utilities Systems

#### IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)

- a. Plan coordination
- b. Adequate Public Facilities Program;
- c. General Zoning update
- d. Update Subdivision Ordinances
- e. Capital Improvements Programs
- f. Targeted Infrastructure Investment

### ECONOMIC BASE STRATEGY

#### GOAL:

*Diversification of the countywide economic base by building on the current base of agriculture, manufacturing and tourism*

#### OBJECTIVES:

1. Agriculture. Keep agriculture and/or forestry economically and practically viable by protecting them from unnecessary encroachment of competing land uses (see separate policy)
2. Agriculture. Support efforts to develop specialized and value-added agriculture within the County (see separate policy)
3. Agriculture. Plan for appropriate locations for animal agriculture that minimize conflicts with other uses (see separate policy)

4. Tourism. In concert with regional interests and the expanded Marquette Plan, protect the lake shore as a visual and natural resource that can be enjoyed by residents, seasonal residents and visitors (see separate policy)
5. Tourism. In concert with regional interests, protect the Indiana Dunes and the sensitive ecosystems that feed into it, recognizing that this area is a major economic and environmental resource that attracts visitors to the County (see separate policy)
6. Manufacturing. Plan reasonable areas for continued and expanded manufacturing uses, with good proximity to transportation routes
7. Logistics. Consider the implications of the County's strategic location for logistics, transportation and warehousing; to the extent that such activities expand in the County, they should be planned and coordinated with infrastructure investment.

**RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Quality of Life can significantly influence Economic Development
- b. An efficient Transportation System is important to Economic Development
- c. Agriculture is a vital Economic as well as a Natural Resource, and its protection and preservation are important

**IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. Plan coordination
- b. General Zoning Update
- c. Land Acquisition Programs
- d. Conservation Easement Programs
- e. Overlay Zoning
- f. Targeted Infrastructure Investment

## **REDEVELOPMENT AND INFILL STRATEGY**

**GOAL:**

*Encourage full use of land in established communities*

**OBJECTIVES:**

1. Eliminate unintended regulatory impediments to residential and commercial infill development that is consistent with established neighborhood patterns and character
2. Where practical, enter into public-private partnerships to facilitate major redevelopment projects
3. In Michigan City and City of La Porte, plan actively for downtown public parking to serve growing needs resulting from infill and redevelopment projects
4. In communities along the lakeshore, faced with tear-downs and intense infill, implement neighborhood preservation zoning in selected areas, to preserve traditional neighborhoods
5. Plan for brownfields, setting priorities for clean up based on a variety of factors that include the desirability and feasibility of redeveloping particular sites

**RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Redevelopment and Infill reduce the pressure on agricultural land conversion, thus contributing to efforts to preserve the County's Agricultural Economy and related Environmental Resources
- b. Redevelopment and Infill typically uses Existing Infrastructure, thus reducing the need for new capital investment and creating economies of scale in operations



### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. General Zoning Update (see Revitalization Subcategory)
- b. Plan Coordination;
- c. Community Development
- d. Targeted Infrastructure Investment

## **COMPACT, CONTIGUOUS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

### **GOAL:**

*Encourage the majority of new development to take place in and near existing cities and towns, where residents will have easy access to a range of public and private services*

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. In urbanizing areas, create walkable, user-friendly neighborhoods, in which residents have the choice to walk to schools, nearby institutions, and at least basic commercial services
2. Connect new residential developments with more than 25 units to existing public wastewater systems or design them for connections to planned systems
3. Locate new residential developments with more than 50 units in areas where residents will be able to walk along sidewalks or paths to reach at least two of the following within 15 minutes: a recreational facility; a restaurant; a grocery store; general retail uses; and/or a railroad stop
4. Locate new commercial developments with 20,000 or more square feet of building space (other than agricultural service businesses) along major thoroughfares in areas planned for commercial uses; where such a development has more than 50,000 square feet of space, the primary access should be from one or more collector roads, connected to the major thoroughfare system
5. In areas planned for public sewer systems, establish minimum development densities, as well as maximum densities
6. Ensure that ordinances provide opportunities for mixed-use development in appropriate areas
7. Work with the school systems to plan future locations of schools in areas anticipated for future growth
8. Plan for a variety of housing types, so that it is possible for the private sector and interested nonprofit and public groups to provide housing that is affordable for groups in the population who have limited choices
9. Amend zoning ordinances to discourage continued strip commercial development along the County's major corridors – particularly U.S. 20, U.S. 30, U.S. 421 and S.R. 2

### **RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Compact, Contiguous Development typically places residents closer to a variety of public and private services that contribute to Quality of Life
- b. It is generally easier and less expensive to provide Public Utilities and Transportation to Compact, Contiguous Development than to scattered or low-density development
- c. Compact, Contiguous Development reduces development pressure on Open Spaces, Agricultural Lands and Environmental Resources

### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. General Zoning Update
- b. Update Subdivision Regulations
- c. Adequate Public Facilities Program
- d. Limitations on Subdivisions with Septic Tanks
- e. Minimum Density Standards

## ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: LAND STRATEGY

### GOAL:

*Protect the County's major natural resources and agricultural lands, recognizing their long-term ecological value, as well as their economic and aesthetic value to the region*

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Protect agricultural lands in areas where agriculture remains economically, ecologically and practically viable
2. Protect forest lands in areas where forestry remains economically, ecologically and practically viable
3. Work to implement the Marquette Plan to protect the Michigan lakeshore and the Indiana Dunes as amenities to be enjoyed by current and future residents and visitors
4. Seek local, state and federal funding, partnerships with land trusts and other organizations, and partnerships with landowners to protect significant natural areas and other environmental resources
5. Identify and work to protect, through public acquisition if necessary, remnant wetlands remaining in the County
6. As the County and the cities and towns continue to develop parks and begin to implement a trail system, seek to connect open spaces along ecological corridors

### RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:

- a. Many people perceive that the protection of Agricultural Lands, Environmentally Sensitive or Scenic Open Space and other Natural Resources are important to Quality of Life
- b. Agricultural Lands, Environmentally Sensitive or Scenic Open Space and other Natural Resources are also major draws for tourism, which contributes significantly to Economic Development objectives
- c. Redevelopment and Infill and Compact, Contiguous Development reduce development pressure on Agricultural Lands, Environmentally Sensitive or Scenic Open Space and other Natural Resources

### IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)

- a. Plan Coordination
- b. General Zoning Update (County)
- c. Update Subdivision Regulations
- d. Land Acquisition Programs
- e. Targeted Infrastructure Investment
- f. Conservation Easement Programs

## ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: WATER STRATEGY

### GOAL:

*Protect and enhance water quality in all watersheds in the County*

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Establish setbacks and buffers for new developments from identified streams, lakes and wetlands
2. Develop cooperative projects, including participation in federal funding, to encourage farmers to establish stream buffers along identified streams
3. Implement urban and rural nonpoint source practices in to the extent practicable to achieve and maintain applicable water quality standards and improve quality of life

4. Implement agricultural nonpoint source practices in northwest Indiana to the extent practicable to achieve and maintain applicable water quality standards and improve quality of life
5. Ensure the protection of northwest Indiana's waterbodies from further impacts of hydromodification and wetland loss to meet and maintain applicable water quality standards

Last three objectives taken from "Watershed Management Framework Development Plan for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties in Northwest Indiana," Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, October 2005.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. Plan Coordination
- b. General Zoning Update
- c. Cluster Zoning
- d. Overlay Zoning
- e. Update Subdivision Regulations
- f. Conservation Easement Programs
- g. Community Development
- h. Targeted Infrastructure Investments
- i. Land Acquisition Programs

## **TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY**

#### **GOAL:**

*Expand and improve the County road system and connections to rail and Lake Michigan to form a transportation network that provides for the efficient movement of goods and people within the County and the rest of the state and nation*

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Plan and develop transportation systems that facilitate the movement of people and goods within the County, as well as through it
2. Cooperate with INDOT for the orderly expansion of the system of major thoroughfares in the County
3. Create pedestrian and automobile linkages among neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and schools, to reduce the need for residents to use major thoroughfares for short, local trips
4. Establish additional collector road corridors to facilitate better continuity among development
5. Establish connectivity between newly developed adjoining neighborhoods, without reliance on major thoroughfares
6. Limit strip residential and commercial development along County roads that provide access between agricultural operations and to avoid impairment of the operating level of these roads
7. Consider multi-modal transportation connections in establishing priorities for improvements to major thoroughfares
8. Seek opportunities to connect the County's transportation network with passenger rail service
9. Enhance and protect the major entrance corridors into the County and cities, particularly along U.S. 35, U.S. 20, and S.R. 2

#### **RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Redevelopment and Infill projects can often use existing roads and Transportation facilities, with little new capital or operating cost
- b. It is far less expensive to provide new roads and other Transportation for Compact, Contiguous Development than to scattered or low density development
- c. An efficient Transportation system is important to Economic Development

### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. Plan Coordination
- b. General Zoning update
- c. Update Subdivision Regulations
- d. Adequate Public Facilities Program
- e. Capital Improvements Programs
- f. Targeted Infrastructure Investments
- g. Community Development
- h. Overlay Zoning

## **PUBLIC UTILITIES STRATEGY**

### **GOALS:**

*Ensure that most new development is connected to public or community water and wastewater services, that such services meet all federal and state standards, and that such services are available at a reasonable cost*

*Develop alternative strategies for new and existing development too remote to be connected to such systems*

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Plan for and cooperate in developing financing methods for the orderly expansion of existing public water and wastewater systems to serve planned and projected growth
2. Cooperate with community water providers in the expansion of facilities to serve planned and projected growth
3. Develop criteria and implementation strategies for alternative wastewater treatment for remote development, including constructed wetlands
4. Establish policies for installation of dry lines for new subdivisions in future service areas
5. Develop Countywide management system, in cooperation with existing treatment plant operators, to provide professional operation and maintenance to small and dispersed systems
6. Consider adoption of Adequate Public Facility regulations to prohibit new developments with more than 20 lots (or some other specified size) without public or publicly-managed wastewater treatment systems
7. Require connection of major new development to water and wastewater systems
8. Plan for and develop plans to pay for adequate infrastructure – including sidewalks, storm drainage and sewers, as well as streets and roads – for all urban and suburban areas in the County

### **RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Redevelopment and Infill projects can typically be connected to existing Water and Wastewater systems, with little new capital or operating cost
- b. It is far less expensive to provide new Water and Wastewater service to Compact, Contiguous Development than to scattered or low density development

### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. Impact Fees
- b. Sewer/Water Plant Investment Fees
- c. Limitation of Subdivisions with Septic Tanks
- d. Update Subdivision Regulations
- e. Intergovernmental Agreements
- f. Capacity Allocation Program

- g. Adequate Public Facility Regulations
- h. Capital Improvement Programs

## **PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY**

### **GOAL:**

*Continued expansion of parks and open space to meet changing population needs and distribution  
Improved links among parks, schools, open space and neighborhoods through expanded trail network*

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Build on the excellent system of local and state parks in the County and continue to expand the land area and the types of facilities needed to respond to community needs and wants
2. Parkland - Acquire additional parkland to meet increased population and specific park and recreational needs
3. Open Space - Cooperate with nonprofit organizations, including land trusts, and seek funding for acquisitions of environmentally sensitive lands to preserve as part of open space system
4. Rural Character - Adopt development regulations that will protect the rural character and the perception of open space in areas designated as Rural Estate on the Growth Strategies Map; the perceived open space in these areas may be private and need not be open to the public to serve this purpose
5. Trails - Cooperate with NIRPC and with other jurisdictions within the County to expand the existing trails system to provide more recreational opportunities and to complete linkages among most parks, schools and to most residential neighborhoods
6. Recreation, Character and Open Space - Cooperate with NIRPC, the National Park Service, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and all other entities within LaPorte County to protect and enhance the value of the Indiana Dunes and to complete and implement the relevant portions of the Marquette Plan for the Lake Michigan Lakeshore

### **RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GOALS:**

- a. Parks and Recreation is critical to Quality of Life
- b. Trails also serve as a form of Transportation, particularly for short distances
- c. Some open space preservation should be targeted specifically at Natural Resource protection

### **IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES (SEE IMPLEMENTATION SECTION)**

- a. Plan Coordination
- b. General Zoning Update
- c. Cluster Zoning
- d. Update Subdivision Regulations
- e. Land Acquisition Programs
- f. Targeted Infrastructure Investment
- g. Impact fees (Financing Technique for Development-related Needs)
- h. Conservation Easement Programs
- i. Community Development



## THE PLAN: LAND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AREAS

### OVERVIEW

LaPorte County and its communities have been divided into seven Land Development Strategy Areas. The seven categories are: Urban, Planned Urban, Planned Growth, Planned Rural Industrial, Planned Rural Estate and Traditional Agriculture. These Land Development Strategy Areas provide the regional context for existing and future land development, agriculture preservation, resource conservation, and capital improvement planning.

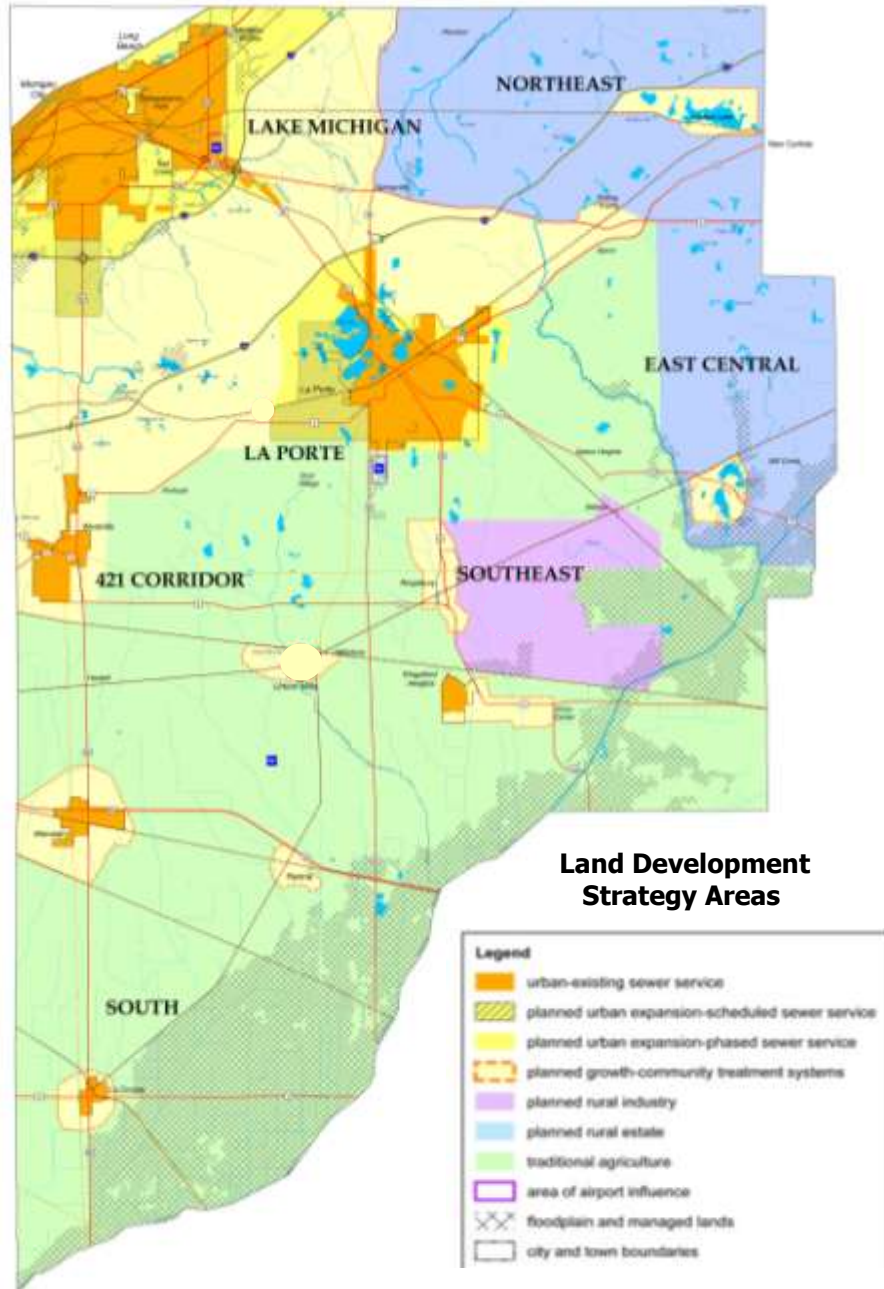


Figure 24 Development Strategy Areas

## EXISTING URBAN AREAS

### DESCRIPTION

The Urban Areas are located within the corporate boundaries of cities and towns where full municipal services available. These areas include Michigan City, the City of La Porte, Westville, Wanatah, La Crosse, and Kingsford Heights, and to some extent, Kingsbury. Road access in these areas is generally excellent, with a network of collector streets connecting local streets and roads to major arterials and then to state, federal and interstate highways.

### TRENDS AND ISSUES

With the exception of Wanatah, these areas have lost population over the last 15 years, in part due to shrinking average household size, but in part due to apparent out-migration to exurban and rural locations. These areas generally have the capacity to serve additional population, but the lack of recent residential growth, loss of industry and limitations in Indiana's state laws affecting property taxes have created serious fiscal constraints for most of the local governments serving these areas.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Encourage residential growth in areas where infrastructure is already available
- Encourage redevelopment of brownfields, particularly in Michigan City and La Porte
- Encourage revitalization of downtown areas
- Encourage other commercial development, to support existing and planned population

### *Infrastructure*

- Maintain and update existing infrastructure
- Target expansion of utilities and roads into Planned Urban Expansion and Planned Growth areas
- Require that all new development connect to public utilities and that it include roads, sidewalks, stormwater facilities and other infrastructure meeting current urban standards of the jurisdiction

### *Zoning*

- Commercial zoning downtown and at selected commercial nodes
- Mixed-use zoning to allow residences above retail in downtowns and major commercial nodes
- Neighborhood commercial zoning, with limitations on signage, lighting, drive-throughs and large parking lots, at appropriate intersections of collector streets or collector and arterial streets in otherwise residential areas
- Residential zoning ranging from low-density (2 units per acre) up to six or more units per acre in small towns and up to 12 or more units per acre in the City of La Porte and Michigan City
- Light industrial/business park zoning in designated areas
- Heavy industrial zoning, subject to site plan review and performance standards, at locations with access to highways and/or major rail lines

## PLANNED URBAN EXPANSION AREAS

### DESCRIPTION

The Planned Urban Expansion Areas are divided into two types:

- Areas in close proximity to Michigan City and/or the City of La Porte where the Michigan City Sanitary District and/or the City of La Porte Utilities Department – in some cases, in cooperation with LaPorte County – have scheduled plans to extend public sewer service; and,
- Areas in close proximity to Michigan City or the City of La Porte, and including the communities of Long Beach, Pottawatomie, and Trail Creek, where although there are no current plans for extension of public sewer, these areas are reaching urban densities and development patterns and are logical extensions of public sewer services.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Complete infrastructure expansion in these areas, including sewer line extensions
- Establish new regulatory policies to require future development in these areas to meet urban development standards, rather than suburban or rural ones
- Discourage additional residential development that does not have immediate or near-term connections to public sewer systems
- Encourage increased density of development where it is possible to extend public sewer, thus making more efficient use of land and reducing costs of public services

### *Infrastructure*

- Cities and towns, and possibly the County, should cooperate in finding ways to extend public sewer service to as many of these areas as possible
- Require all future development to connect to the public sewer service
- Require road connectivity among subdivisions for all new subdivisions
- Require stormwater management plans for all new subdivisions in area, addressing both quality and quantity
- Consider adding subdivision requirements for sidewalks and other urban amenities that residents are likely to expect

### *Zoning*

- Zoning in these areas should be tied to availability of public services
- Zoning densities for residential development in these areas should be increased to two or three units per acre or more in many locations, to provide for a fiscally sound pattern of development
- Commercial zoning regulations should discourage additional strip-commercial development along major roads by: limiting access points to major roads, requiring shared access; requiring concept master plans for entire property holdings before individual tracts are split off; providing incentives for multiple property owners to coordinate plans for commercial development
- Light industrial uses exist in some of these areas and additional such uses are likely to be appropriate, because of the excellent access. Because many of these are highly visible locations – in some cases located at the visual gateways to the two major cities – industrial zoning regulations should be updated to require landscaping and other visual improvements for new development

## PLANNED GROWTH AREAS

### DESCRIPTION

The Planned Growth Areas have experienced some of the most significant population growth in LaPorte County over the last 15 years, but they do not have the necessary services to support that growth. The Planned Growth areas are generally located in the northwestern and north central areas of LaPorte County between Michigan City and the City of La Porte. These areas have complex topography along the Continental Divide making the extension of sewer facilities challenging; however, over the long-term, if not the short-term, septic tank failures can be expected in many of these areas.

Although these areas are less intensely developed than the Urban and Planned Urban Expansion areas, many homes in these areas are located in small subdivisions that stub directly off of the County's (Johnson Road) or State's (Highway 2 or 6) road network,. The lack of connectivity among these developments increases the traffic load on these arterial roads for short "errand" type trips --- residents traveling even a short distance typically must use the arterial roads. The limitation of single access creates public safety issues --- a traffic accident or fallen tree can effectively close the neighborhood for hours. In addition, these developments have limited no facilities to manage stormwater runoff making it difficult for the County to limit flooding or to comply with stormwater quality standards. Retrofitting these areas with wastewater and stormwater facilities will, in many cases, be prohibitively expensive.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Future (may be long-term, due to cost factors) infrastructure expansion in these areas, including sewer line extensions and a network of collector and minor arterial roads
- Encourage development in these areas only as sewer service becomes available, either by public investments or through developer-funded extensions
- Establish new regulatory policies to require future development in these areas to meet suburban development standards, rather than rural ones

### *Infrastructure*

- Create transitional regulations that allow (but do not encourage) some development with private sewer services but include provisions for linking these areas to later-provided public sewer services
- Require connectivity among subdivisions for all new subdivisions in this area
- Require stormwater management plans for all new subdivisions

### *Zoning*

- Encourage increased density of development where it is possible to extend public sewer, thus making more efficient use of land and reducing costs of public services
- Because there will be demand for the development of other land in these areas, consideration should be given to a transitional zoning category that would allow limited development of part of a parcel, with shared temporary wastewater systems, then providing for a by-right increase in development intensity on the remainder of the parcel when sewer becomes available in the future
- Zoning densities for residential development in these areas should be increased to two or three units per acre or more, where and when sewer service is available
- Many of these areas lie along the sloping and sensitive topography on both sides of the Continental Divide; zoning in these areas should be amended to encourage clustering and to create variable setbacks and lot dimensions, with other requirements that limit the impact on the natural features
- With the continued growth of residential development in this area, selected intersections of major roads should be considered for zoning for neighborhood commercial uses

## PLANNED RURAL ESTATES AREAS

### DESCRIPTION

The Planned Rural Estates Area, in the Northeast and East part of LaPorte County, has some of the most environmentally sensitive lands in the County, with a rolling topography, some old-growth and other long-standing wooded tracts, a generally high water table, a number of small wetlands, several lakes, and a number of streams. It is characterized by limited agricultural activities, a significant amount of land that is not actively used, scattered subdivisions, a concentration of permanent population and schools at Rolling Prairie, and an intense cluster of largely seasonal residences around Hudson Lake and Fish Lakes. There is easy access to the area from U.S. 20 and S.R. 2; but although the Indiana Toll Road passes through the area, the nearest exit is on U.S. 39. The South Shore Line has a flag stop at Hudson Lake.

### TRENDS AND ISSUES

Because of the attractive character of the area, there is significant development pressure on it, and with the new casino at New Buffalo, development pressure will continue. Two critical areas of concern are the highly populated areas around Hudson Lake and Upper and Lower Fish Lakes and the resulting environmental issues within the lakes. Unfortunately, there are no plans to extend public sewer into this area, either from the Michigan City Sanitary District, the Town of New Carlisle, or from the City of LaPorte or the County. The lack of sewer service combined with the high water table and other environmentally sensitive characteristics make it one of the areas in LaPorte County in which additional development is least desirable in context with the goals and objectives of this Plan. Unfortunately, however, the area has already been divided into many relatively small parcels, thus, the development pressure in the area seems likely to continue, with no solution to the environmental problems in sight.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Establish new regulatory policies to manage probable continued development in the area in a way that creates the fewest environmental challenges and the lowest fiscal impacts on local governments
- Seek funding for strategic acquisitions of sensitive lands in these areas

### *Infrastructure*

- Explore with New Carlisle the possibility of providing sewer/water to Hudson Lake area
- Establish new standards and incentives for alternative wastewater treatment systems in this area, to include constructed wetlands, managed package treatment plants, and low-volume collection systems
- Establish a Sanitary District for at least this portion of the County, to manage new wastewater treatment systems and existing septic tanks, with the costs of management paid through user fees
- Require new developments to include stormwater management plans to address water quality issues; although area is outside the urbanized area that is subject to federal stormwater regulations, the sensitive character of the environment suggests the need to pursue this as a local objective
- Require connectivity among subdivisions for all new subdivisions in this area

### *Zoning*

- Zoning in this area should require clustering of residential development, to facilitate the use of shared alternative wastewater treatment systems and to preserve large areas of land in their natural state
- Zoning for existing small tracts should have variable setbacks and lot dimensions, with a requirement to develop and build in ways that limit the impact on the area's natural features
- With the continued growth of residential development in this area, it will be appropriate to designate one or two locations in this area for neighborhood commercial uses
- Zoning should include a special use permit process to allow camps and other uses that involve long-term stays to have self-contained utility systems and to preserve large tracts of land



## PLANNED RURAL INDUSTRIAL AREAS

### DESCRIPTION

The Planned Rural Industrial Area is located in the heart of the Traditional Agriculture Area. Its land use is dominated by the Kingsbury Industrial Development Park (former Kingsbury Ordinance Plant) and adjacent suburban development to the north and west of the industrial Park. It differs from other agricultural areas, however, because it has two major highways – U.S. 35 and U.S. 6 – crossing it, and it is served by two major rail lines. Because of the presence of former Ordinance Plant, much of this area has long been zoned for industrial development and the somewhat more dense R-2 residential zoning classification.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Maintain blend of light industry and planned residential
- Allow light industry primarily within the Industrial Park
- Encourage redevelopment of brownfields on former plant site near Kingsbury

### *Infrastructure*

- Encourage industry primarily where it can connect to existing sewer systems
- Allow new light industry with individual treatment systems only where there is effective long-term management plan
- Develop long-term plan for expansion of selected rural roads to serve as major collector roads
- Require new developments to include stormwater management plans to address water quality issues; although this area is outside the urbanized area and thus not subject to federal stormwater management regulations

### *Zoning*

- Zoning in this area should provide for continued use for industrial uses that are buffered from existing or planned residential development
- Heavy industry should be allowed by special use permit in this area
- Residential development should be permitted if connected to existing sewer services from the town of Kingsbury or established community treatment facilities

## **TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE AREAS**

### **DESCRIPTION**

The Traditional Agriculture Area is that area of LaPorte County that has excellent agricultural soils; although water tables are high in some areas, most of those areas have been effectively drained for agricultural use for more than a century. Road access is excellent for agricultural purposes. Three towns in the area (Kingsford Heights, La Crosse and Wanatah) and two others nearby (Westville and Kingsbury) provide a variety of commercial and farm-related service and retailers that support the area. For the most part, public sewer and water service are available in the towns.

### **TRENDS AND ISSUES**

Agriculture remains the dominant land use throughout this area. There has, however, been a significant encroachment of lot splits and other small developments allowing a stripping out of residential uses along many of the County roads. That development pattern, if continued, is likely to make those roads less and less functional for farmers moving farm equipment and trucks full of livestock and grains. The encroachment of nonfarm related development also increases the conflicts between land uses --- the feel of rural suburbia meets the smells of farming, dairies and livestock management. In addition, the increased number of scattered residential units on septic tanks is likely to lead to water quality issues affecting the Kankakee River in the mid-term.

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

- Support and encourage continued traditional agricultural activity in the area
- Encourage additional residential and commercial development only in and near the towns, where public services are available

### ***Infrastructure***

- Maintain existing County road system primarily for agricultural use
- Encourage cooperation between the towns and the County to expand sewer systems within these towns to serve additional residential and commercial development as it occurs

### ***Zoning***

- Amend subdivision and zoning regulations to limit additional residential development along County roads
- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow all forms of traditional agriculture by right
- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow intensive (animal) agriculture by special permit, subject to objective standards
- Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow subdivisions only by special use permit, to preserve larger parcels of land for continued agricultural use

## TOWNS AND RURAL VILLAGES

### DESCRIPTION

The towns and rural villages within LaPorte County play a vital role in County's future land development. These include the towns of Kingsford Heights, Kingsbury, La Crosse, Trail Creek, Wanatah and Westville and the communities of Fish Lake, Hanna, Hudson Lake, Rolling Prairie, Union Mills and a number of others. The more established towns provide the full array of city-level services, although more limited than those within the more urban areas of Michigan City and the City of La Porte. In contrast, the unincorporated communities have very limited facilities and serve primarily as enclaves of more intense rural residential and convenience commercial land uses.

### TRENDS

As growth continues in LaPorte County, particularly within the Planned Rural Estates and Traditional Agriculture Areas, the role of these towns and villages will grow in importance. Unfortunately, growth trends within and nearby to these areas has occurred without public sewer and often without public water. Thus, intense development on septic tanks continues to pose the potential for severe health issues as these areas attract additional development.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- Encourage additional residential and commercial development only in and near the towns, where public services are available
- Seek solutions to the environmental issues created by the intensive residential development on septic tanks that is impacting the water quality of Hudson Lake and Fish Lakes
- Seek ways to provide adequate water and sewer services towns and villages that have significant existing or proposed future growth

### *Infrastructure*

- Encourage cooperation between the towns and the County to expand or develop sewer systems within these towns and communities to serve additional residential and commercial development as it occurs
- Establish a Sanitary District to manage new wastewater treatment systems and existing septic tanks, with the costs of management paid through user fees
- Require new developments to include stormwater management plans to address water quality issues; although area is outside the urbanized area that is subject to federal stormwater regulations, the sensitive character of the environment suggests the need to pursue this as a local objective

### *Zoning*

- Amend zoning regulations to encourage additional residential development within the towns and villages if water and sewer are provided
- Prohibit rezoning for subdivisions in areas where public water and sewer are not provided
- With the continued growth of residential development in this area, it will be appropriate to designate one or two locations in this area for neighborhood commercial uses

## **AIRPORT INFLUENCE AREAS**

### **DESCRIPTION**

The Airport Influence Areas are areas surrounding the two publicly operated general aviation airports in LaPorte County. Land holdings of the two airports are limited, so that much of the land in these areas is owned by persons not affiliated with the airports or apparently interested in aviation.

### **TRENDS AND ISSUES**

Both of the airports are in proximity to public sewer and water and generally suitable for significant additional development. One of the most critical issues is the location of residential development within the approach areas of the airports.

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

- Support efforts of both airports to acquire additional land to provide for possible future expansion and to provide a government-controlled buffer – particularly along the flight paths.
- Prohibit development in those areas that would interfere unduly with aviation, subject to the right of property owners to retain economically viable uses of their property
- Because of the modest but real risks inherent to airport operations, encourage surrounding uses that do not involve large numbers of people such as nursing homes, schools and other facilities that have large concentrations of people

### ***Infrastructure***

- Both of these areas have existing infrastructure and are likely to benefit from improved infrastructure as the urbanized areas continue to expand around them.

### ***Zoning***

- Create overlay zoning districts to provide effective implementation of the provisions of Ind. Code §8-22-2-9
- Prohibit schools, religious institutions, nursing homes and other facilities that include large concentrations of people within all parts of these areas where FAA studies suggest that there is an increased risk of hazards resulting from take-offs and landings
- Prohibit tall buildings and towers that may interfere with aviation operations
- Prohibit land uses that would attract large numbers of birds, such as garbage disposal and feed lots

## **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OVERLAY AREAS**

### **DESCRIPTION**

As this Plan was developed, there were formal and informal discussions of the possible location of major transportation-related facilities in exurban and somewhat rural parts of the County. Although the merits of those specific proposals were still under study on the date of completion of this Plan, the proposals illustrated the strategic location of LaPorte County and its attraction to warehousing, transportation and logistics industries. There are clearly County residents and leaders who believe that such facilities would add needed jobs and tax base to the County, while other County residents believe that such industry would detract from the County's natural qualities.

This Plan takes no position on the specific merits of particular proposals. Limited discussion of the proposals combined with extensive analysis of existing land-use and development patterns in the County (see discussion throughout this Plan) led to the conclusion, however, that the worst-case scenario would be to have some development of transportation and warehousing facilities occur in the sort of random manner that has characterized much of the development of the County over the last 15 years. To the extent that County officials conclude that it may be appropriate to accommodate additional industrial development of any kind in the County, it should either occur in an established industrial area or it should occur in a specific location as a carefully planned project. This section provides guidelines for one or more unmapped Economic Opportunity Overlay Areas that can be used if the County decides to consider a major industrial or warehousing project in a location that is not now developed; it is important to note that this is a tool to be used by County officials if and when they decide that it is appropriate, but equally important to note that it may not be used soon or may never be used.

### **GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

Same as for Traditional Agriculture, with this addition:

- Provide a mechanism to allow creation of a large-scale employment base at a specific location, subject to provision of public sewer, community water and improved roads to serve the area
- Avoid scattered industrial and warehousing development

### ***Infrastructure***

Same as for Traditional Agriculture and/or Planned Growth Areas, with this addition:

- Implementation of this overlay should be conditioned on the availability or firm financing arrangements for public sewer, community water and major road improvements adequate to serve the proposed development (interior and exterior improvements); financing may come from land owners, developers, proposed users, the State of Indiana, LaPorte County, one or more cities or towns, or some combination thereof
- Contract or other arrangement for public management of any utility services – either by contract with an existing city or town with such management capability or by a utility District

### ***Zoning***

Follow recommendations for Traditional Agriculture and/or Planned Growth Areas but ADD an overlay to allow implementation of a major logistics and/or warehousing facility, subject to the following conditions:

- Minimum site size of 500 acres
- Site should be reasonably compact and contiguous, to minimize impact on continued use of nearby lands for agricultural purposes or future residential



## PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TECHNIQUES

### INTRODUCTION

Implementation is an essential step in planning. Simply completing a comprehensive and attractive plan accomplishes little if the plan simply winds up on a shelf or in a file somewhere. To facilitate implementation of this plan, this section contains specific implementation recommendations.

Many people look at a land-use or development plan and immediately think of zoning. Some communities limit plan implementation to using the plan as a reference tool when public officials consider rezoning proposals. That is an appropriate use of a plan, but this section goes much farther than that. It lays out a pro-active program to implement the plan.

The recommendations in this section are those of the consulting team, based on their experience elsewhere. Local officials will undoubtedly pick and choose various implementation steps. Some are expensive, while others involve very little cost. Some recommendations will require significant political will to undertake, while others are likely to be almost universally popular. Some of these steps can be taken quickly, while others will take years to accomplish.

Realistically, this is a five-year work program. Ideally, the plan commissions and governing bodies in the adopting jurisdictions should sit down together early each year, beginning in 2008, and go through this checklist – picking out items for a reasonable work program for the year ahead. Those sessions after the first year can also serve as sessions to report progress and to update the work program as conditions change.

### PLANNING TECHNIQUES

#### PLAN COORDINATION – CONTINUATION OF LAND DEVELOPMENT STEERING COMMITTEE

##### *Description*

In LaPorte County, as in many communities, there are multiple planning efforts. The Countywide Land Development Plan represents one important and over-arching plan for the County. Another important countywide work element is the recently completed "Cost of Community Services" study. The Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission continues its work with the state on long-range transportation planning. Several entities have mid-range plans for infrastructure expansion, although none have long-range plans that even approach the planning horizon of this Plan; those entities include the Michigan City Sanitary District, Michigan City Water Works Department, City of La Porte Wastewater and Water Works Departments, and smaller providers of sewer and water services within LaPorte County. Parks departments for the City of La Porte, Michigan City and LaPorte County all have mid-range expansion plans. La Porte and Michigan City each have downtown revitalization plans that are in various stages of implementation. At least three separate economic development and business development groups are involved in seeking improved and more diverse economic activity for the County.

Achievement of the principles of the Countywide Land Development Plan and continued development of the County in a fiscally responsible way requires that there be coordination among those plans. Through the Countywide Land Development Plan planning process, local governments and their citizenry have cooperated to create a core planning group. Although it is informal in nature, this group should continue to meet at least two times per year and more frequently at any time that one of the jurisdictions is engaging in a major facilities planning project. The group should be an active participant in that planning process. The goal of its participation should be consistency among adopted plans. That may suggest in some cases that the new Plan be modified to maintain

consistency with adopted plans; in other cases, the team may recommend that principles of the new Plan be used to guide amendments to plans already in place.

### ***Purpose***

The continuation of the Countywide Plan Steering Committee would achieve a continuing, practical commitment to a form of cooperative planning on a countywide basis.

### ***Adoption***

There is no need for formal adoption of this strategy, although a joint resolution by governing bodies to continue this commitment of cooperative planning would be useful policy guidance.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

There must be some agreement about who can and will convene these periodic meetings.

### ***Administration***

Although maintaining this group will require time commitments by busy administrators, over the long-run the benefits of coordination should far outweigh that cost.

### ***Advantages***

A continued commitment to cooperative Countywide Land Development Planning is essential—not just an “advantage”—to achievement of the goals and objectives of this Plan.

### ***Disadvantages***

None known.

## **PLAN COORDINATION — CREATION OF AN AREA PLANNING COMMISSION**

### ***Description***

There has also been discussion of the possibility of creating an Area Planning Commission, to serve all entities within LaPorte County. Under Indiana law, the County, in cooperation with a municipal government, may create an area planning department.

### ***Purpose***

A more formalized continuation to achieve a continuing, practical commitment to a form of cooperative planning on a countywide basis in LaPorte County.

### ***Adoption***

The specific Indian statute reads:

There may be established in each county an area planning department in the county government, having:

- (1) an area plan commission;
- (2) an area board of zoning appeals;
- (3) an executive director; and
- (4) such staff as the area plan commission considers necessary.

Each municipality and the county desiring to participate in the establishment of a planning department may adopt an ordinance adopting the area planning law, fix a date for the

establishment of the planning department, and provide for the appointment of its representatives to the commission. When a municipality or a county adopts such an ordinance, it shall certify a copy of it to each legislative body within the county. When a county and at least one (1) municipality within the county each adopt an ordinance adopting the area planning law and fix a date for the establishment of the department, the legislative body of the county shall establish the planning department. Burns Ind. Code §36-7-4-202(b).

Under that provision of the Indiana Code, all municipalities could join the County in the initial formation of the body. Alternatively, if only some of the municipalities join in the initial effort, Indiana law allows others to join later. It provides specifically:

After the planning department is established, other municipalities within the county may adopt ordinances adopting the area planning law and provide for the appointment of their representatives to an Area Plan Commission. In such a case, the membership of the commission shall be increased according to the formula provided [citations omitted]. The composition of any such municipal board of zoning appeals, or of any such board later organized, under the advisory planning law, must conform to that law, except that those members of such a board to be appointed from the municipal plan commission shall instead be appointed from the Area Plan Commission. Burns Ind. Code §36-7-4-204.

**Implementation Strategy**

Membership in an Area Plan Commission is allocated on the basis of population of the participating entities, under a formula outlined in some detail in state law. As the consultants read Indiana law, the membership of an Area Plan Commission that included all of the municipalities in the County would consist of the following:

**County members would include:**

- One representative selected by the school corporations’ superintendents collectively
- County agricultural extension educator or county surveyor appointed by county executive
- Citizen representative - resident in the unincorporated area of the county or a county resident who is a landowner in the unincorporated area (appointed by county executive)
- Citizen representative - resident in the unincorporated area of the county or a county resident who is a landowner in the unincorporated area (appointed by county fiscal body)
- County surveyor or the county surveyor's designee if the county executive appoints the county agricultural extension educator or county agricultural extension educator if the county executive appoints the county surveyor

Entity	Number
LaPorte County	5
City of La Porte	4
Michigan City	4
Trail Creek	1
Westville	1
Other Towns	2
<b>Total Members</b>	<b>17</b>

**City of La Porte and Michigan City members would each include:**

- A member of the works board or board of sanitary commissioners, appointed by the Mayor
- A member of the city council, selected by the city council
- Two citizens, appointed by the mayor

**Trail Creek and Westville Members would each include:**

- Citizen, appointed by Town Council (law does not make this clear, but this would appear to be the intent)

**Other Small Town Members would include:**

- Representatives for towns under 2100 person; Two members of different town councils, selected from among a town "advisory council" made up of one representative from each town, each of whom must be a member of the town council that she or he represents

***Administration***

By state law, the staff for the Area Plan Commission would be part of county government. It is common practice, however, for cities and counties creating such entities to enter into intergovernmental agreements, allocating the costs of operation, committing to provide specific services to each of the local governments and, in some cases, providing for reasonable checks and balances on the county's ability to replace the Executive Director.

***Advantages***

Ideally, an Area Plan Commission would facilitate long-term cooperation in land-use planning, infrastructure planning and economic development. It would provide a tangible representation of a joint commitment to shared values.

***Disadvantages***

- Some may see a "turf" issue in cooperative planning. That may be a potential disadvantage from the perspective of elected officials, but most citizens would not consider that a significant disadvantage.
- Implementation of a countywide planning department would require detailed negotiations regarding the continued role of planners within Michigan City and La Porte governments and their relationship to the County staff.
- Michigan City and La Porte each have long experience with comprehensive planning, but under this scenario, the responsibility for this would fall to the County, which has much less experience with planning beyond the day-to-day work of zoning administration.
- The membership mandated by state law would create a 17-member body that some might consider unwieldy.

## INFRASTRUCTURE TECHNIQUES

### ADEQUATE PUBLIC FACILITIES PROGRAM

#### ***Description***

An adequate public facilities program is a basic type of growth management. Simply stated, an adequate public facilities (APF) program requires that new development be approved only when and if adequate public facilities will be available to serve it at the time of actual development. Facilities governed by an APF program may include water, sewer and stormwater services, as well as roads, libraries and even fire protection. Florida calls its sophisticated APF program a “concurrency” requirement, because it provides standards for ensuring that new facilities are available “concurrently” with the demands for those facilities created by new development. Basic APF criteria have long been part of Colorado’s Senate Bill 35, which governs county subdivision regulations; unfortunately, those criteria are often implemented only loosely.

#### ***Purposes***

The purpose is to ensure the availability of adequate public facilities for new development.

#### ***Adoption***

An adequate public facilities program would be adopted by ordinances in all implementing jurisdictions. Administrative and other policies already effectively address this issue for water and sewer service within the city limits of La Porte and Michigan City, although neither city has similar provisions for roads. LaPorte County has no ordinances or policies addressing this policy.

Simplified adoption could be accomplished through amendments to existing subdivision regulations.

#### ***Implementation Strategy***

Ideally, an adequate public facilities allocation program should apply as early in the development process as possible. To allow developers to begin work on a project and then to deny the developer public services for that project is both legally and politically problematic. It is better to encourage a developer to abandon or delay a project for which there are inadequate public services before the developer invests a significant amount in it. Traditionally, subdivision regulations have ensured that a developer provides public facilities within the subdivision; an APF ordinance requires that the off-site facilities affected by the subdivision be adequate to absorb the demands imposed by the new project. To adopt APF standards, it will be necessary to adopt minimum levels of service to define the term “adequate” for each service. Although engineering criteria typically govern the definition of “adequate” in the case of water, sewer and stormwater services, other services, such as roads, libraries and even fire protection involve an element of policy judgment in establishing minimum levels of adequacy.

#### ***Administration***

Administration of an adequate public facilities program requires a supplemental application for compliance with the program. That application can be a simple addendum to each stage of the development review process.

If public officials choose a simplified implementation program, the application can be made part of the subdivision review process. If that approach is used, it would be desirable to include an APF analysis as part of any significant proposed rezoning.

#### ***Advantages***

- APF regulations are extremely effective in ensuring that new development has adequate facilities.



- APF regulations generally encourage development in the most appropriate locations that are least costly to develop and serve.
- APF regulations are relatively easy to administer and highly defensible.
- Eliminates long-term public costs/risks associated with retrofitting substandard developments with adequate facilities.

### ***Disadvantages***

- Will be effective only if adopted by LaPorte County; if such policies are implemented only by the two cities and some towns (which is now the case regarding water and sewer connections), the effect may be to force marginal development into less restricted areas of county.

## **LIMITING SUBDIVISIONS SERVED BY SEPTIC TANKS**

### ***Description***

As part of – or separately from – an Adequate Public Facilities Program, the County must give serious consideration to limiting subdivisions that depend on septic tanks for wastewater treatment.

### ***Purposes***

The major purpose is to limit the addition of a significant number of septic systems in a county where there are few areas that are truly suitable for septic tanks. High water tables, hydric soils, and other poorly drained soils provide an environment in which liquids discharged into the soil are likely to find their way into subsurface and/or surface water systems. A secondary purpose of such a program is similar to that of an APF program – to encourage most new development to occur in areas where there is sewer service available; those are generally urban or suburban areas with other services available for new development.

### ***Adoption***

This recommendation could easily be adopted as an amendment to subdivision regulations, and a criterion for rezoning. Note that it is most important that this be adopted by the County; existing policies in La Porte and Michigan City (the other two jurisdictions that are likely to be asked to approve large subdivisions) generally address this issue. Although this issue exists in Trail Creek, Long Beach and selected other communities in the northern part of the County, most new building in those communities occurs on land that is already subdivided. If the County prepares to adopt such an ordinance, however, it would make sense for the cities and most towns to adopt a parallel ordinance.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

This program should be implemented as part of the local subdivision ordinances, and where rezoning is required, the unavailability of sewer could be included in the decision to grant the rezoning. It will be necessary to set a threshold size, so that a simple lot split to allow a farmer's child to build on the family farm will not trigger this rule. The cumulative effect of small subdivisions, however, can be greater than the impact of one larger, well-planned project. Thus, the threshold ought to be a relatively small number, like five or six lots.

### ***Administration***

The application can be made part of the subdivision and rezoning review process. There will be no new administrative costs or burdens associated with such a program.

### ***Advantages***

Such a regulation would address directly one of the major issues affecting water quality in LaPorte County.

- Such regulations will largely encourage development near existing developed areas; where development occurs in new areas, conforming to such regulations will require clustered, efficient development patterns.
- The proposed regulation would be relatively easy to administer and highly defensible.
- This program would significantly limit the long-term public costs/risks associated with retrofitting substandard developments with sewers.

### ***Disadvantages***

- Will be effective only if adopted by LaPorte County; if such policies are implemented only by the two cities and some towns (now the case regarding water and sewer connections), the effect may be to force marginal development into less restricted areas of the County.

## **CAPACITY ALLOCATION PROGRAM**

### ***Description***

A capacity allocation program is a type of growth management. Through such a program, a community allocates scarce capacity in sewer, water or other public systems to new users in accordance with policies that implement the adopted plan. Because growth has been relatively slow in LaPorte County for more than a decade, there has been little pressure on these systems. If, however, the County proceeds with efforts to provide sewer service to more areas and to contract for treatment services with the County, and/or if leaders are effective in attracting one or more major economic development projects, the wastewater treatment systems in the City of La Porte and/or Michigan City could rapidly reach capacity. Expansions of such systems are expensive and require many years of planning and regulatory approvals. Thus, the need for such a program may be greater than it might appear.

### ***Purposes***

Through a capacity allocation program, a community gives a higher priority to growth that conforms to the comprehensive plan than to growth that does not. Note that on a county level such a program is not particularly relevant; there appear to be no facilities that are so critically short that they would impair long-term development capacity. Within particular sub-parts of the LaPorte County, however, there may be periodic shortages that suggest the need for capacity allocation.

### ***Adoption***

A capacity allocation program would be adopted by ordinances by the cities, towns and the County and by board resolution of other service providers.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

Ideally, the capacity allocation program should apply as early in the development process as possible. To allow developers to begin work on a project and then to deny capacity for that project is both legally and politically problematic. It is better to encourage a developer to abandon or delay a project before investing a significant amount in it.

### ***Administration***

Administration of a capacity allocation program requires a supplemental application for compliance with the program. If the program is primarily based on geographic allocations, the application may simply involve adding a few lines to the requirements for a subdivision or other existing application process. If, however, there is likely to be an actual shortfall of supply below demand in a particular year, it may be necessary to conduct periodic, scheduled reviews of competing applications for the capacity; this would involve a significant increase in the complexity of administration.

### ***Advantages***

- Scarce capacity in utility systems represents one of the most powerful tools that a local government has to influence the timing, location and type of development.
- It is only logical that scarce capacity should be allocated in accordance with policies adopted in the Plan.
- Availability of public utilities is essential to attract major economic development activity.

### ***Disadvantages***

- The allocation program will increase the complexity and, possibly, the time involved in applying for development approvals.
- Because it has overtones of growth management, a capacity allocation program may be viewed by some as more intrusive on property rights and private initiatives than are traditional land use controls.

## **IMPACT FEES**

### ***Description***

An impact fee is an exaction that requires that a developer pay a roughly proportional share of the cost of expanding those major off-site public facilities required to absorb the impacts of the proposed development. Impact fees are commonly used for roads, water, sewer, stormwater and parks. Sewer and water connection and inspection fees that exceed the costs of physical connections are essentially impact fees, although they actually predate most impact fees and often are called something else.

### ***Purposes***

Like other fees, this technique is a method of transferring to the developer some of the community's costs of absorbing growth.

### ***Adoption***

An impact fee program would be adopted by ordinance —or, in the case of a connection fee, by resolution of the service provider.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

The implementation of an impact fee program is moderately expensive and complex. As a first step, a community must establish its needs for public facilities. It can base those needs on a projection of existing levels of service (for example, the community currently has X acres of park per resident and it wishes to maintain that ratio) or by conducting a pure needs analysis, such as a community might do with a new major thoroughfare plan. The community then must determine what existing sources of revenue will pay parts of that cost and what portion of the cost of expansion and improvement is reasonably attributable to new growth. The part of the cost on which the fee is based is the portion

that is attributable to growth but that is not covered by revenues from other sources. It then must develop a rational formula for allocating the cost among new developments. In most cases, it will be necessary or desirable to create a system of credits to award to developers who provide in kind contributions to the infrastructure system. Finally, there must be an accounting system to ensure that the funds are used for the intended purposes and in a geographic area reasonably related to the development(s) from which the fees were collected.

### ***Administration***

Impact fees typically accrue at the subdivision or site plan stage but are payable at the time of issuance of building permits, thus eliminating the need for developers to include impact fees in their development loan take-downs. Once the formulas are developed, administration of an impact fee program is relatively mechanical and can be handled largely by existing personnel in the permitting unit.

### ***Advantages***

- Properly conceived impact fees are the most fair of all exactions, because the fee is proportionate to the impact of the project on the community.
- Impact fees are the most defensible form of exactions.
- Responsible developers typically support reasonable impact fees as an effective method of ensuring that the facilities as well as the funding of those facilities will be available to accommodate growth.

### ***Disadvantages***

- Impact fees may (but do not necessarily) increase development and/or building costs.
- This technique will be most effective if adopted on a countywide basis; otherwise the imposition of a fee in one jurisdiction might simply encourage development in other areas.

## **SEWER/WATER PLANT INVESTMENT FEES**

### ***Description***

Long before local governments considered the adoption of impact fees for roads and other facilities, providers of water and wastewater service began charging connection fees that exceeded the cost of making and inspecting the connections and that thus contribute to the long-range costs of system expansion. Such fees are sometimes called Capital Investment Fees, Plant Investment Fees, System Development Fees, or simply Tap Fees. In La Porte and Michigan City, current fees appear to be set at a level that simply covers the costs of new meters (for water) and of the installation and/or inspection of new connections.

### ***Purposes***

Like other exactions, this technique is a method of transferring to the developer some of the community's costs of absorbing growth.

### ***Adoption***

Such fees are implemented by ordinance, or by board resolution of the service provider.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

The implementation of a limited purpose fee such as this is a good deal simpler than implementation of an impact fee. Because the focus is narrow, the needs analysis is relatively simple and, in this

case, is engineering driven and thus relatively firm. As with an impact fee, the community must determine what alternative sources of revenue may pay for part of the improvement and expansion of the plant, and what portion is reasonably attributable to new growth. The fee is based on the portion that is attributable to growth but that is not covered by revenues from other sources. It then must develop a rational formula for allocating the cost among new developments. Finally, there must be an accounting system to ensure that the funds are used for the intended purposes and in a geographic area reasonably related to the development(s) from which the fees were collected.

Note that the optimal implementation strategy would establish a system of coordinated fees throughout LaPorte County. Clearly those providers that offer the highest level of service would charge higher fees than those that provide a lower level of service, but it would be desirable to establish some proportionality among the fees charged by different providers.

### ***Administration***

Connection-related fees may be imposed as early as the stage of subdivision or site-plan approval or as late in the process as the date of issuance of the certificate of occupancy. Once the formulas are developed, administration of an impact fee program is relatively mechanical and can be handled largely by existing personnel in the permitting unit.

### ***Advantages***

- Properly conceived fees such as these are the most fair of all exactions, because the fee is proportionate to the impact of the project on the community.
- For exactly that reason, such fees are the most defensible form of exactions.
- The legal and administrative history of such fees actually predates impact fees.

### ***Disadvantages***

- Such fees may (but do not necessarily) increase development and/or building costs.

## **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMS: PRIORITIES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE**

### ***Description***

Because investments in infrastructure will significantly affect the future patterns of growth in the County, the major infrastructure providers – Michigan City, Michigan City Sanitary District, City of La Porte, LaPorte County, school corporations and NIRPC (state investments in roads) should begin a process of capital improvements programming with at least some coordination among jurisdictions.

At a minimum, plans and policies should place future inventory in four categories:

**High priority.** The highest priority is infrastructure that is already needed or part of a targeted infrastructure investment program such as elements on a 5-year Capital Improvements Program.

**Medium priority.** Medium priority infrastructure is that on adopted long-range plans but not in the current 5-year Capital Improvements Program. Often this is infrastructure improvements needed by local developers. Local governments should offer to enter into cost recovery agreements to encourage developers to provide such infrastructure.

**Low priority.** Low priority infrastructure is generally consistent with adopted plans but for which there is no clear need and unlikely to be a clear need within the next 10 years. A local government might elect to accept dedication of such infrastructure if it is provided but would refuse to enter into cost recovery agreements for it or otherwise encourage its construction.



**Unwanted.** Some infrastructure is simply inconsistent with the Plan and thus unwanted. This may be infrastructure that encourages growth in areas that might be environmentally sensitive such as floodplains. Local governments should not accept this infrastructure and may require records to warn purchasers that improvements would not be maintained by local government.

### ***Purposes***

Major development follows major roads and sewer lines – and, to some extent, parks and schools. Infrastructure decisions will shape growth, and it is important that such investments be planned and that the plans are coordinated and tied to the Countywide Land Development Plan.

### ***Adoption***

Such a policy should be adopted by policy resolutions of each of the governing bodies.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

The implementation strategy must involve representatives from the finance departments, engineers and other facility planners, planning staff, and whatever countywide group continues to monitor the implementation of this Plan. Ultimately, the governing bodies of towns, cities and the County, and water and sanitary boards and school boards will make the implementation decisions to follow (or not follow) the Plan – so it is essential that each be involved in the decision-making process.

### ***Advantages***

- This is one of the most important tools of plan implementation.
- As elected officials ask developers and others to follow new policies and regulations based on the Plan, this same commitment to the Plan should be demonstrated by elected officials.

### ***Disadvantages***

- None known.

## **TARGETED INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT**

### ***Description***

Local governments once actively built major roads and extended sewer and water lines in advance of needs. Today, most local governments depend on developers to take the initiative to expand infrastructure to meet growth-related needs. This proposed policy calls for the cities, County and other providers to get back into the business of providing some infrastructure in advance of need—but to do so in targeted areas, carefully coordinated with other service and facility providers.

### ***Purposes***

Major development follows major roads and sewer lines – and, to some extent, parks and schools. By investing in infrastructure in targeted growth areas, local government can guide development in those areas.

### ***Adoption***

Such a policy would be adopted through each government's normal budget and capital improvement planning process.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

There are several essential elements to effective implementation of this technique:

1. A plan that targets priority growth areas.
2. A capital improvements program based on a map and carefully ordered project priorities—not just a politically driven project list.
3. A program of impact fees, assessment districts or other financing techniques to recover some of the costs of these investments as growth occurs.
4. Intergovernmental agreements to ensure that multiple service providers are targeting the same or at least compatible areas for growth.

Optimally, such a system would include two other elements:

1. An adequate public facilities program, reinforcing the growth-influencing effect of the infrastructure investments.
2. A variable impact fee program that charges reduced fees or offers other financial incentives for development in targeted growth areas—including already developed areas with excess infrastructure capacity.

### ***Advantages***

- This is the most powerful of all plan implementation tools.
- Developers support it and are likely to cooperate with such a program—with more enthusiasm than with some other programs.
- Such a program is absolutely essential to the economic development goals of the cities and the County.

### ***Disadvantages***

- It requires expenditure of funds.

## ZONING TECHNIQUES

### GENERAL ZONING UPDATE

#### ***Description***

The new Countywide Land Development Plan calls for patterns and styles of development that differ from what has occurred over the last 30 years in LaPorte County. New development types often require new rules—not only to encourage or mandate the new types but to ensure that the rules themselves do not create obstacles to the types of development suggested by the Plan.

In that context, it is time for LaPorte County, the Cities of Michigan City and La Porte, and several of the towns in the northern part of the County to consider major updates to their zoning ordinances.

#### ***Purposes***

The over-arching purpose of the updates would be to ensure that the zoning regulations in the cities and County are consistent with the Countywide Land Development Plan. Some specific purposes of the update, suggested by principles set out in the Plan, include:

- Ensuring that most uses and structures in stable areas of the cities and the towns are “conforming” under the zoning regulations and thus can be improved and reused.
- Encouraging cluster zoning to preserve sensitive lands and natural areas in open space.
- Ensuring that parking and other standards in the downtown and other core areas are consistent with the types of development desired in those areas.
- Implementing aesthetic values established through neighborhood plans.
- Implementing pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly site plans, including requirements for secure bicycle parking.
- Encouraging mixed-use development in appropriate areas, including the historic core areas of the cities.

#### ***Adoption***

Zoning updates would be adopted as amendments to or replacements for the zoning ordinances.

#### ***Implementation Strategy***

Zoning updates of the type needed to implement the Plan are major projects that should involve significant participation by stakeholders. The work program for such updates can take from 12 to 18 months, depending on the resources available and the degree of involvement of stakeholders. Successful accomplishment of such a program usually requires the dedication of a substantial part of the time of a professional staff member and/or the hiring of consultants to assist with the process. Although much of the work is substantive and thus falls logically in the planning field, the final rules must be reviewed and approved by the City Attorneys and County Attorney, respectively.

Because this is a joint Plan and because few of the issues stop at the municipal boundaries, the two cities and the County should at least consider a joint or coordinated effort to update their regulations. Although there are certainly some differences among the three, there is also a good deal of overlap of standards and criteria in the developing areas.

#### ***Administration***

A new set of zoning regulations need not be any more complex to administer than the current ones. There are often opportunities to streamline the system and to simplify administration with a new zoning code.

### ***Advantages***

It is difficult to use the term “advantages” in referring to this technique. Some of the Plan’s goals and objectives can be implemented only through taking this step.

### ***Disadvantages***

There will be a one-time cost associated with the staff and/or consultant time necessary to prepare the updates.

## **ZONING: MINIMUM DENSITY STANDARDS**

### ***Description***

La Porte, Michigan City and LaPorte County would establish minimum densities, as well as the traditional maximum densities, in selected urban, suburban and exurban zoning districts.

### ***Purposes***

This approach ensures that urban development is sufficiently dense to be support public sewer service and to support appropriate neighborhood shopping, schools and parks; it also limits the pressure on rural land, by ensuring that more development is absorbed within the urban area.

### ***Adoption***

Like any zoning amendment, this would be adopted by ordinance, adding new minimum density standards to selected zones.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

This zoning technique should be implemented with a zoning ordinance amendment as part of a comprehensive set of amendments to the local zoning ordinances, to be adopted as soon as reasonably practicable after adoption of the Plan.

### ***Administration***

Administration of the minimum density would be identical to that for existing zoning districts.

### ***Advantages***

- This would ensure a generally more compact form of development, with sufficient development intensity in neighborhoods to support neighborhood parks, schools and shopping.
- This would reduce development pressure on some rural areas by absorbing more development in the urban area.
- This approach would facilitate utility/street planning, by establishing a relatively narrow range of probable future land use intensities, thus increasing the predictability of future facilities demand.

### ***Disadvantages***

- The only serious negative consideration with such a program is that neighbors sometimes oppose higher density in new projects.

### ***Note***

This technique should not be viewed as an attempt to eliminate all lower-density development. Clearly low-density development is desirable in some areas and the County in particular should plan accordingly. In those areas planned for urban and suburban development, however, this technique helps to ensure that the Plan is implemented effectively.

## ZONING: CLUSTER ZONING

### **Description:**

Also known as “open space subdivisions,” residential cluster zoning involves the adoption of design standards for use in certain rural and/or environmentally sensitive areas. This involves site planning designed to encourage preservation of open space particularly as they relate to flood plain, areas of high water tables and farm land protection. Cluster residential zoning “clusters” development onto smaller lots away from the “protected” areas, while leaving the remaining area in open space, thus reducing development impact. The existing permitted residential densities are maintained and can even allow density bonuses for employing the cluster technique.

### **Adoption**

Like any zoning amendment, this would be adopted by ordinance, adding a cluster option to specified residential zoning districts.

### **Implementation Strategy**

The following is an example of how cluster residential might be used in LaPorte County on 400 acres zoned to permit only one house per 2 acres. The total permitted houses on the 400 acres would thus be 200 houses. Cluster Residential would require the overall density to be maintained, but it might permit the lot size to be reduced to ½ acre IF a community waste water system were employed. This would result in the 200 houses covering only 100 acres leaving 300 acres in commonly held open space owned by the homeowners (200 lots x ½ acre = 100 acres; 400 acres - 100 acres = 300 acres of open space). The commonly held acres could not be further subdivided but would be large enough to be more useable for play areas, gardening, farming or common wastewater field lines. Likewise, because the road network would be much more limited due to a smaller amount of land being developed for home sites (100 acres versus 400), the cost to the developer, the homeowner and ultimately the County, for road maintenance would be reduced. Added benefits would be maintaining a more natural character to the land area and having less impact on wildlife habitat corridors. It is also conceivable that some housing density bonus might be permitted for employing Cluster Residential Zoning. Also, this same technique works well for development near flood prone areas and more steep terrain.

This zoning technique should be implemented with a zoning ordinance amendment as part of a comprehensive set of amendments to local zoning ordinances, to be adopted as soon as reasonably practicable after adoption of the Plan.

### **Administration**

Administration of cluster zoning is slightly more complex than administration of a standard zoning ordinance provision. The complexity, however, arises only at the time of subdivision review.

### **Advantages**

- This gives responsible developers the option to *Design with Nature* (the title of a book by landscape architect Ian McHarg). Designing around natural features not only serves public purposes of protecting those features, but it often saves a developer money and creates additional amenities in a development.
- This technique could be used as a basis for *requiring* cluster development on sites with specified characteristics.
- Providing clustered subdivisions with public services – ranging from utilities to school bus routes – is generally less expensive than providing the same services to homes on more dispersed lots.
- This may be the best hope of preserving some of the scattered sensitive lands that are threatened by development, particularly in the northeast part of the County.



### ***Disadvantages***

- There is a slight increase in the complexity of reviewing subdivision proposals, but it is not a significant burden.
- This is a technique that protects small sensitive areas that are parts of larger parcels; protecting larger natural resources requires the use of Land Acquisition and Conservation Easements; it is important for public officials and citizens alike to understand the limitations, as well as the strengths, of this technique.
- Cluster development is not an alternative to public land acquisition efforts (see above) – it is a supplement that can be used to protect additional lands.

## **ZONING: OVERLAY ZONES**

### ***Description:***

Overlay zoning is a mapped zone that imposes a set of requirements and a review process over existing zoning districts. When an overlay zone is put into place it acts as a second layer of zoning to accomplish a specific purpose while maintaining the existing underlying zoning regulations. Common overlay zones are flood hazard areas, historic districts, airport overlays, and gateway entrance overlays. In most cases the underlying zoning requirements remain the same; however there is an additional set of development guidelines or requirements that must be followed if the subject property falls within an overlay zone. In some instances overlay zones may modify the existing zoning district requirements. As an example, a central business district overlay may reduce the traditional amount of parking required by a new development.

### ***Purposes***

The purpose of overlay zoning is to provide an additional zoning tool to provide both flexibility and additional criteria for development in order to accomplish the policies of the Countywide Land Development Plan. The use of zoning overlays would be suitable for open space protection and greenway development. Other communities have developed overlay zones to protect property from development on unstable land (steep slopes); soil erosion and stream siltation; destruction of mature or unique vegetation or habitats; destruction of wetlands and prime agricultural lands; pollution of the water supply resources; or incompatible development in established residential areas.

### ***Adoption***

Like any zoning amendment, this would be adopted by ordinance.

### ***Implementation Strategy***

This zoning technique should be implemented with a zoning ordinance amendment as part of a comprehensive set of amendments to local zoning ordinances, to be adopted as soon as reasonably practicable after adoption of the Plan. The most immediate proposed uses of overlay zones are for:

- Possible economic development opportunity sites in rural areas, with the overlay zone providing development standards for large-scale future development without making any change in the current zoning or use of the property.
- Corridor enhancement standards along U.S. 20 and 421 and other key corridors in the County, establishing new standards for signage, landscaping and other features; corridor overlay zoning should be continuous among all jurisdictions along the same corridor in the County; corridor overlay zoning should be coupled with Targeted Infrastructure Investment strategies to upgrade street lighting, sidewalks and other public investments in the corridor.

### ***Administration***

Effective administration of an overlay zoning tool is more complex than traditional zoning administration. To make such a system practical, zoning maps should be tied into the County's Geographic Information System, allowing quick and accurate retrieval of all applicable zoning and other site-specific regulations affecting a site.

### ***Advantages***

- Zoning district lines do not always match geography or opportunity; through overlay zoning, it is possible to implement strategic initiatives for targeted geographic areas without the political and practical difficulty of massive rezoning.

### ***Disadvantages***

- The only disadvantage to overlay zoning is that it increases the complexity of zoning administration.

## ZONING ORDINANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

### UPDATE OR REWRITE ZONING ORDINANCES – ALL JURISDICTIONS

#### *Establish Basic Consistency Among Ordinances*

1. Create common set of definitions
2. Create common parking, landscape and signage provisions
3. Create a common corridor overlay district (see Overlay District recommendation)
4. Consider a common PUD Ordinance
5. Add a Mixed Use District
6. Create greater consistency among types of Zoning Districts – residential, commercial and industrial uses – significant dimensional differences between LaPorte County and Cities; more opportunity between the City of La Porte and Michigan City
7. Establish common flow chart for rezoning and development plan approvals – may vary based on available staffing levels
8. Provide a common percentage of “Administrative” latitude from dimensional standards

### ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – LAPORTE COUNTY

1. Create a “Rural Village” Zoning District that would apply to places such as Hudson Lake and Fish Lake --- areas currently zoned R-3 which would allow multifamily
2. Create an R-E District that requires conservation subdivisions for areas of La Porte County that are designated as Rural Conservation areas
3. Delete multifamily as a permitted use in the unincorporated area of the County (currently permitted in the R-3 Zoning District)
4. Delete the County’s Accommodations District and Shopping Center District
5. Revise the County’s IR Industrial Reserve District to “Light Industrial”

### ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – CITY OF LA PORTE

1. Create a “Main Street” or “Downtown” Zoning District using study area of the Hyett-Palma Downtown Action Agenda 2006
2. Permit residential uses within the downtown by right
3. Create a “townhome” residential classification for the City
4. Delete the unused R-1A Residential District
5. Add an R-E Residential Estate District to permit more estate-sized lots within the City (basing lot size on availability of sewer)
6. Adopt the pending parking lot landscape ordinance
7. Revise the use of PUD’s to relate to developments that are more reflective of “planned unit development”
8. Provide corridor setbacks for future major thoroughfares (i.e. Inner/Outer Loop)

## **ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – MICHIGAN CITY**

1. Revise the B-1 District to a “Main Street” or “Downtown” Zoning District
2. Delete the Para-Medical District
3. Create a “Sheridan Beach” Zoning District that recognizes the unique density, height, setback, parking and beach access issues – area currently zoned R-2 (see also Lakeshore recommendations)
4. Revise the R-E Residential Estate Zoning District to permit lots of 12,000 sq. ft. if connected to public sanitary sewer and water with required cluster development to maintain rural character (current lot size min. 30,000 sq. ft.)
5. Change the “Agricultural” Zoning District to R-E Residential Estate
6. Change definition of “single family attached or semi-detached” to “townhome”; “two family detached” to “duplex” and revisiting the Zoning Ordinance densities based on bedrooms
7. Reexamine the permitted height limits

## **ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – LAND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AREAS**

### **EXISTING URBAN AREAS**

AREAS AFFECTED: MICHIGAN CITY, LA PORTE, AND TOWNS OF WESTVILLE, WANATAH, LACROSSE AND KINGSBURY

#### ***Encourage Infill and Redevelopment***

1. Ensure infill standards that promote neighborhood-compatible, pedestrian-friendly commercial development in infill locations
2. Amend zoning to match existing development patterns except where there is a specific public policy goal of changing the character of neighborhoods
3. Eliminate unintended regulatory impediments to redevelopment and infill
4. Plan for brownfields, setting priorities for clean up based on a variety of factors that include the desirability and feasibility of redeveloping particular sites
5. Plan for a variety of housing types, so that it is possible for the private sector and interested nonprofit and public groups to provide housing that is affordable for groups in the population who have limited choices
6. Limit multifamily development to areas within cities and towns served by sewer

### **PLANNED URBAN EXPANSION AND PLANNED GROWTH AREAS**

AREAS AFFECTED: PERIPHERY OF MICHIGAN CITY AND CITY OF LA PORTE AND TOWNS OF WESTVILLE, WANATAH, LACROSSE AND KINGSFORD HEIGHTS

#### ***Encourage Greater Residential Densities***

1. Increase residential zoning densities where sewer is planned to provide for a fiscally sound pattern of development
  - Residential rezoning ranging from low-density (2 units per acre) up to six or more units per acre in small towns and up to 12 or more units per acre in Michigan City and La Porte
2. In areas planned for public sewer systems, establish minimum development densities

3. Limit multifamily development to areas within cities and towns served by sewer
4. Continue to permit traditional agriculture in the Residential Estate Zoning District, with conversion to residential subdivisions by right when public or community wastewater treatment facilities become available
5. Consider annexing multifamily and intense commercial development into cities that are better able to provide urban services – specifically the area between Michigan City and Interstate 94.

### ***Create compatible Commercial Zoning Districts***

1. Commercial zoning regulations should discourage additional strip-commercial development along major roads by:
  - limiting access points to major roads, requiring shared access;
  - requiring concept master plans for entire property holdings before individual tracts are split off;
  - providing incentives for multiple property owners to coordinate development plans
2. Selected intersections of major roads should be considered for zoning for neighborhood commercial uses
2. Neighborhood commercial zoning, with limitations on size (under 20,000 square feet); signage (under 64 square feet), lighting, drive-throughs (prohibited) and large parking lots, at appropriate intersections of collector streets
3. Locate new commercial developments with 20,000 or more square feet (other than agricultural service businesses) along commercial collector streets; where such a development has more than 50,000 square feet, primary access should be from major thoroughfares
4. Provide opportunities for mixed-use development in appropriate areas, with consideration of such design factors as shared parking
5. Ensure that new commercial development is pedestrian friendly

### ***Create compatible Light Industrial Zoning Districts***

1. Identify areas that should be zoned as appropriate for light industrial uses
2. Revise zoning provision related to light industrial uses
  - Because many of these are highly visible locations – in some cases located at the visual gateways to the two major cities – industrial zoning regulations should be updated to require landscaping and other visual improvements for new industrial development

## **PLANNED RURAL ESTATES**

AREAS AFFECTED: NORTHEAST AND EAST CENTRAL REGIONS

### ***Establish regulations that permit environmentally sensitive development***

1. Require development within this area to be rezoned to “residential cluster development” with
  - requirements that development be planned to avoid and protect wetlands, forest remnants, steep slopes and other environmentally sensitive lands up to 25 percent (or some other reasonable figure) of a total development site
  - shared alternative wastewater treatment systems
2. Encourage increased density of development where it is possible to extend public sewer, thus making more efficient use of land and reducing costs of public services

3. Consider a transitional zoning category for areas where sewer service is planned but where it is not currently available; such regulations should allow limited development of part of a parcel, with shared temporary wastewater systems, then providing for a by-right increase in development intensity on the remainder of the parcel when sewer becomes available in the future
4. Require buffering of direct visibility for subdivisions adjacent to County and State roads to maintain rural image; along interstates and toll roads, require subdivisions to provide or maintain a strong planted or natural buffer
5. Zoning for existing small tracts should have variable setbacks and lot dimensions, with a requirement to develop and build in ways that limit the impact on the area's natural features
6. With the continued growth of residential development in this area, it will be appropriate to designate one or two locations in this area for neighborhood commercial uses
7. Zoning should include a special use permit process to allow camps and other uses that involve long-term stays to have self-contained utility systems and to preserve large tracts of land

### **PLANNED RURAL INDUSTRIAL AREAS**

AREAS AFFECTED: 421 CORRIDOR, SOUTHEAST, AND LA PORTE REGIONS

1. Zoning in this area should provide for continuation of existing industrial uses
2. Because of the mixed character of these areas, all new industrial development should be required to include on-site buffers between the industry and non-industrial uses
3. Heavy industry should be allowed only by special use permit, subject to requirements for direct access to major highway(s) and appropriate performance standards
4. Encourage industry primarily where it can connect to existing sewer systems; light warehousing or other low-impact uses may be appropriate with on-site treatment systems
5. Residential development proposed within 500 feet of an existing industrial activity should be required to include on-site buffer between it and the industrial site

### **TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURAL AREAS**

AREAS AFFECTED: SOUTH, SOUTHEAST AND EAST CENTRAL REGIONS

NOTE: AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN OTHER REGIONS ARE GENERALLY ON SMALLER PARCELS

1. Create two classifications of Agriculture Districts – in areas of the most intensive agricultural uses minimum parcel sizes of 80 - 160 acres; in moderately intense agricultural areas minimum parcel sizes of 40 – 80 acres
2. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to limit additional residential development along County roads
3. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow all forms of traditional agriculture by right
4. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow intensive (animal) agriculture by special permit, subject to objective standards
5. Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow subdivisions only by special use permit, to preserve larger parcels of land for continued agricultural use
6. Require buffering of direct visibility for subdivisions adjacent to County and State roads to maintain rural image; along interstates and toll roads, require subdivisions to provide or maintain a strong planted or natural buffer



7. Redesignate areas in which agriculture is no longer viable, because of small parcel sizes or development pressures, to "Rural Estates" (see separately), "Light Industrial" or other zoning designation

### **RURAL VILLAGES**

AREAS AFFECTED: COMMUNITIES OF FISH LAKE, HANNA, HUDSON LAKE, ROLLING PRAIRIE AND UNION MILLS

1. Revise existing county zoning districts to prohibit multifamily development within these areas
2. Prohibit rezoning for subdivisions in areas where public water and sewer are not provided
3. With the continued growth of residential development in this area, it will be appropriate to designate one or two locations in this area for neighborhood commercial uses

### **AIRPORT INFLUENCE AREAS**

AREAS AFFECTED: MICHIGAN CITY AND LA PORTE AIRPORTS

#### ***Create Airport Overlay District to effectively implement provisions of Ind. Code §8-22-2-9***

1. Prohibit schools, religious institutions, nursing homes and other facilities that include large concentrations of people within all parts of these areas where FAA studies suggest that there is an increased risk of hazards resulting from take-offs and landings
2. Prohibit tall buildings and towers that may interfere with aviation operations
3. Prohibit land uses that would attract large numbers of birds, such as waste disposal and feed lots
4. Limit zoning for subdivision development within the approach zones

### **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OVERLAY AREA(S)**

AREAS AFFECTED: POSSIBLE AREAS INCLUDE UNDEVELOPED AREAS WITH GOOD RAILROAD AND MAJOR HIGHWAY ACCESS FOR POSSIBLE LIGHT INDUSTRIAL OR WAREHOUSE DEVELOPMENT

#### ***Create an Economic Opportunity Overlay District***

1. Create an Economic Opportunity Overlay District, but do not place it on land-use or zoning maps at this time
2. Underlying agricultural zoning should remain in place to allow continued agricultural use until such time as a development is approved
3. Establish basic criteria for approval of a development in this area:
  - a. Minimum site size of 500 (or more) contiguous acres
  - b. Direct access to one or more state or federal highways, or financial guarantees in place to provide such access prior to start up of operation
  - c. Fiscally viable plan for wastewater treatment (which could simply be a signed agreement for treatment with an existing provider with adequate plant capacity)
  - d. General phasing plan for the development, to show how the phasing of development will be accompanied by the phasing of necessary public improvements
  - e. Adequate buffers from adjacent residential areas
4. Provide for over-all approval of a Development Concept Plan, that would provide County, developer and other affected parties with information about types of uses, general locations of uses, access, wastewater treatment, and stormwater management

- Ordinance should then provide for review of Development Plans for individual phases of the project (see Burns Ind. Code §36-7-4-1400 for provisions regarding Development Plan review)
  - Rights to entire project should be vested as long as developer adheres generally to approved (or amended) Concept Plan – in other words, once the project concept has been approved, all future reviews would be technical, not “go” or “no go” decisions
5. Provide for general limitation of uses in overlay district, consistent with probable activities in a logistics facility
- Prohibit residential uses (limits traffic conflicts and neighbor complaints)
  - Limit uses to those that are consistent with the proposed development (limits traffic and land use conflicts)
  - Ban high-impact industrial uses, such as oil refineries, slaughterhouses, explosives manufacturing
  - Prohibit high-impact industrial uses, such as oil refineries, slaughter houses, explosives manufacturing
  - Expressly allow value-added agricultural industry that may provide economic connection between new facility and existing agricultural economy

## **ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – LAKESHORE COMMUNITIES**

AREAS AFFECTED: MICHIGAN CITY, LONG BEACH, MICHIANA SHORES, POTTAWATTAMIE PARK

### ***Create New Lakeshore Zoning District***

1. Update zoning along Lakeshore to protect neighborhoods, require development compatible with Marquette Plan
2. Create a “Sheridan Beach” Zoning District that recognizes the unique density, height, setback, parking and beach access issues – area currently zoned R-2
3. In communities along the lakeshore, faced with tear-downs and intense infill, implement neighborhood preservation zoning in selected areas, to preserve traditional neighborhoods
4. Adopt zoning and subdivision standards that encourage neighborhood-compatible, pedestrian-friendly development

## **ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – DOWNTOWNS**

AREAS AFFECTED: MICHIGAN CITY AND CITY OF LA PORTE

### ***Update Downtown Zoning Districts***

1. Review ordinances to ensure that existing buildings can be replaced with buildings of similar size, scale and design, except in locations where there is a conscious policy decision to change the character of the area
2. Review standards for off-street parking and on-site stormwater management in the context of public plans for such facilities downtown
3. Allow residential and office uses above street level, subject to applicable building codes

4. Ensure that ordinances provide opportunities for other mixed-use development in appropriate areas, with consideration of such design factors as shared parking
5. Ensure that most new commercial development is pedestrian friendly

## **ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – OVERLAY DISTRICTS**

AREAS AFFECTED: CORRIDORS WITH GREATEST DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE - U.S. 20, U.S. 421, S.R. 2, U.S. 35, U.S. 6, S.R. 39

### ***Consider Zoning Overlay for these areas***

1. Create corridor overlays for a consistent set of standards for signage, landscaping and other improvements along major corridors, particularly along U.S. 20, U.S. 30, U.S. 421 and S.R. 2
2. Create an environmental overlay for areas along sloping and sensitive topography on both sides of the Continental Divide that would require clustering and variable setbacks and lot dimensions, with other requirements to limit impact on the natural features
3. Consider a "distribution/warehousing overlay for areas along 421 south of PNC

## **SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **UPDATE OR REWRITE SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS – ALL JURISDICTIONS**

#### ***Establish Basic Consistency Among Regulations***

1. Require stormwater quality management plans, as well as management of quantity, for all new subdivisions; require pre-treatment in designated areas
2. Impose restrictions on modification of non-state waters and wetlands through the subdivision process
3. Require roadway connection or provision for future connections to adjacent subdivisions
4. Require dedication of collector roadways planned to pass through any area being subdivided
5. Require dedication of trail rights-of-way planned to pass through any area being subdivided
6. Require pedestrian and bicycle connections to trail systems where practicable for subdivisions
7. As the County and the cities and towns continue to develop parks and begin to implement a trail system, seek to connect open spaces along ecological corridors

### **SUBDIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS – PUBLIC FACILITIES STANDARDS**

1. Establish policies for new residential development to be connected to existing public wastewater systems, be connected to alternative wastewater treatment facilities or be designed with dry lines for future waste water service
2. Establish new standards and incentives for alternative wastewater treatment systems to include constructed wetlands, managed package treatment plants, and low-volume collection systems
3. Allow new light industry with individual treatment systems only where there is effective long-term management plan
4. Require all new developments to include stormwater management plans to address water quality issues
5. Require subdivisions with more than 50 units to be within a 15-minute walk via sidewalks to two of the following: a recreational facility; a restaurant; a convenience store; a general retail use; and/or a railroad or bus stop
6. Establish standards for developing a collector system of roadways between newly developed neighborhoods, thus reducing the reliance on city and county major roadways
7. Initiate parkland dedication or parkland impact fees to increase the inventory of park acreage and open space

### **SUBDIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS – DESIGN STANDARDS**

1. In all areas other than the Planned Rural Estates and Traditional Agricultural Areas, require walkable, user-friendly neighborhoods, in which residents have the choice to walk to schools, nearby institutions, and at least basic commercial services
2. Significantly limit residential subdivisions within traditional agricultural areas
3. Require Special Use Permits for new residential subdivision within the Planned Rural Estate and Traditional Agricultural areas of the Plan
4. Require development within the Planned Rural Estate area of the Plan to be developed as "residential cluster" subdivisions with

- a. requirements that development be planned to avoid and protect wetlands, forest remnants, steep slopes and other environmentally sensitive lands up to 25 percent (or some other reasonable figure) of a total development site
  - b. shared alternative wastewater treatment systems
5. Prohibit or severely limit new lot splits or small subdivisions from larger parcels so that there is more opportunity for creative cluster subdivisions and for innovative community wastewater treatment systems
  6. Increase the required minimum lot widths for parcel splits that occur along county, state and U.S. highways --- creating a hierarchy of required lot widths based on the roadway characteristics – amending the County Thoroughfare Plan to reflect the hierarchy; current ordinance sets lot widths at a minimum of 200 feet for individual parcels (not in a subdivision) accessing county roads
  7. Maintain existing County road system primarily for agricultural use by prohibiting creation of new lots along county roads

### **SUBDIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS – ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY OVERLAY**

AREAS AFFECTED: POSSIBLE AREAS INCLUDE AREA AROUND UNION MILLS AND AREA INCLUDING FORMER ARSENAL

#### ***Specific Design Requirements***

1. General development design should be shown on “Concept Plan” approved as part of zoning process; subdivision review should simply ensure implementation of that plan
2. At subdivision stage, if not earlier, ensure that all financing arrangements for public improvements are in place:
  - a. Implementation of this overlay should be conditioned on firm financing arrangements for public sewer, community water and major road improvements adequate to serve the proposed development; financing may come from land owners, developers, proposed users, the State of Indiana, LaPorte County, one or more cities or towns, or some combination thereof
  - b. Firm financing arrangements to extend public sewer service to the area or to build a new plant
  - c. Contract or other arrangement for public management of any new sewer plant – either by contract with an existing city or town with such management capability or by a County Sanitary District
  - d. Firm financing for road improvements adequate to handle projected exterior and interior traffic

### **SUBDIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS – LAKESHORE COMMUNITIES**

1. Impose new subdivision and development plan standards to provide access to and compatibility with Marquette Plan recommendations, as they become available
2. Through subdivision and development plan ordinances, impose new stormwater standards to require management of quality of stormwater discharges, as well as quantity limitations

### **SUBDIVISION RECOMMENDATIONS – ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS**

1. Establish setbacks and buffers for new developments from identified streams, lakes and wetlands
2. Restrict residential subdivisions within floodplains

3. Institute "eco-friendly" development standards for areas where the Northwestern Moraine Forest Legacy Areas are located
4. Encourage the use of "design with nature" techniques
5. Protect areas along sloping and sensitive topography on both sides of the Continental Divide by requiring clustering and to create variable setbacks and lot dimensions, with other requirements that limit the impact on the natural features
6. Require stormwater improvements that protect the water quality of surface and subsurface waters, as well as managing the quantity of runoff
7. Limit hydromodification of non-state waters (state waters are already protected)



## OTHER TECHNIQUES

### LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

#### ***Description***

The cities, towns and County, in cooperation with state agencies and nonprofit groups, would actively seek to acquire fee and less-than-fee interests in selected lands in the cities, towns and County.

#### ***Purposes***

Although LaPorte County benefits from state and federal ownership of land in the Indiana Dunes, and there is a system of city and county parks, the total amount of land owned by the public sector in LaPorte County is small. One of the recurring themes that arose in the planning process was the need to protect wetlands, greenways, forest legacy areas, floodplains, habitats, buffers and other areas from development. Although land-use controls can be used to guide and even limit development, the only certain way to prevent development of sensitive lands is for a public agency or compatible nonprofit organization to acquire the lands and set them aside for such a purpose.

#### ***Adoption***

This would be authorized by City Council or the Board of County Commissioners as a policy, with appropriate action (as advised by the city or county attorney) on each acquisition.

#### ***Implementation Strategy***

There are really three forms of acquisition that the local entities should consider: active solicitation of gifts; purchase of fee interests; and purchase of less-than-fee interests such as scenic easements or non-development easements. In addition, governmental entities may want to cooperate with interested private sector groups to reinforce the efforts of existing organizations that preserve land and to create a broad-based land trust for the LaPorte County area. Save the Dunes has been active in land acquisition in the area, as have other organizations. The Nature Conservancy remains interested in lands along the Kankakee and in selected sensitive lands in the northern part of the County. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources owns preserve land in the County, and the U.S. Department of the Interior controls the federal portion of the Indiana Dunes. Thus, there are multiple potential partner agencies for such a program.

#### ***Administration***

Both cities and the county already own land that is designated for passive recreation or that falls in some other protected status. Thus, there are existing departments within local government that have the ability to manage protected lands.

#### ***Advantages***

- Owning land is absolutely the most certain way to ensure that it remains undeveloped.
- Most communities with significant greenbelt programs have used this approach.
- This approach can supplement appropriate large-lot and cluster zoning in sensitive areas.

#### ***Disadvantages***

- Such a program costs money.

## CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAMS

### **Description**

Conservation Easement programs involve easements restricting development. Conservation easements, which are specifically authorized by Indiana law, are the legal technique used to implement programs for purchasing development rights, sometimes called "PDR." Conservation easements may be acquired by a public entity, such as a city, town or county, or by a land-trust or other nonprofit organization established for that purpose.

### **Purposes**

The conservation easement accomplishes three inter-twined goals:

1. It leaves land in private ownership and on the tax rolls;
2. It significantly or completely restricts development on the property; and
3. It provides the property owner with compensation for the restriction, thus recognizing the economic value of property rights.

Land to which the public may want access should be acquired in fee simple interest. Land that the public simply wishes to restrict from development may be acquired through the use of this technique. Note that conservation easements are sometimes given by gift to a nonprofit or governmental entity, resulting in some tax benefit to the property owner who makes the gift.

### **Adoption**

Conservation easements are already authorized under Indiana law. The cities or the County can adopt the use of this technique by policy as part of—or instead of—a land acquisition policy.

### **Implementation Strategy**

There are really two forms of acquisition that local entities should consider: active solicitation of gifts; and purchase of conservation easements. In addition, governmental entities may want to cooperate with interested private sector groups to reinforce the efforts of existing organizations that preserve land and to create a broad-based land trust for the LaPorte County area.

### **Administration**

This program could easily be tied into existing programs of ownership of open space.

### **Advantages**

- Conservation easement on property is almost as sure a way of protecting land as owning it.
- Property subject to a conservation easement can remain in productive private use in agriculture or other activity not involving development.
- Property subject to a conservation easement remains on the tax rolls, although usually at a significantly reduced value.
- Most communities with significant greenbelt programs have used this approach.
- This approach can supplement appropriate large-lot and cluster zoning in sensitive areas.

### **Disadvantages**

- Some (but not all) acquisitions will cost money.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### ***Description***

Successful revitalization of an economy, a community or a downtown requires a pro-active public role. Traditionally, "community development" has been applied to the role of local governments in helping to finance housing and providing neighborhood improvements to revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods. Today, it is important to recognize that local governments may take a role in financing infrastructure for economic development and strategic improvements in a downtown area, land acquisition for important private projects, and more traditional items like housing and neighborhood improvements. All of this falls under the general category of "community development" as the term is used in this report.

### ***Purposes***

- Revitalizing urban neighborhoods
- Providing for a diversity of housing types
- Maintaining vital downtown areas
- Expanding the economic base
- Implementing strategic plans, such as the Marquette Plan
- Coordinating transportation systems with above efforts

### ***Adoption***

Community development programs are adopted in multiple ways. Local governments that receive federal funding for community development must go through a prescribed planning and allocation process. Community development initiatives are sometimes strategic ones that arise unexpectedly and that require out-of-cycle budget allocations. Some community development initiatives simply require commitments of the time of staff and public officials. A successful community development program is an attitude and commitment on the part of local government as much as it is a specific policy or operating agenda.

### ***Implementation***

Maintaining viable downtowns in both City of La Porte and Michigan City is important to the entire County. The City of La Porte's recent "Downtown Action Agenda 2006" is a significant step toward reinvigorating the business climate of the downtown by identifying the market niche the area could possibly capture of the County's retail, office and residential uses. A healthy and appealing Downtown also serves to further stabilize and enhance the adjacent, long-established residential areas surrounding the Downtown. The Michigan City has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve its downtown, one of which is improving multi-modal transportation connections.

The NIRPC-coordinated Marquette Plan includes significant recommendations to revitalize and enhance the Lake Michigan shoreline. Successful implementation will require significant public and public-private partnerships. Local governments will need to allocate funding for acquisition of strategic parcels, development of public trails and access points, and creation of pedestrian and automobile linkages. There will be opportunities for strategic partnerships with private enterprise to create compatible private uses.

Economic development in the County will require cooperation by all major local governments. A large new job-generating project in LaPorte County might involve adjustment to NIRPC plans for transportation systems, INDOT investments in road improvements, zoning decisions by LaPorte County, an intergovernmental agreement with the City of La Porte or the Michigan City Sanitary District (depending on the location of the proposed facility) to handle wastewater treatment, and cooperative efforts to build connecting roads and other necessary facilities.

Although there is a surplus of housing in LaPorte County at this time, continued second-home development along Lake Michigan has displaced residents and is encroaching on what were once viable working-class neighborhoods. Michigan City and its neighbors must be proactive in the traditional community development role of seeking partnerships to provide housing for those for whom the private sector does not or cannot provide. Both Michigan City and the City of La Porte have on-going commitments to neighborhood revitalization – programs that must continue.

### ***Advantages***

The only way to achieve many of the goals of this Plan today involve public-private cooperation, a type of activity that falls under the broad definition of community development.

### ***Disadvantages***

Community development can be expensive. Because it may involve a significant allocation of resources to a particular geographic area or a particular cause, it may be politically contentious. Elected officials must be prepared to deal with these issues.

## **INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS**

Although included as an implementation technique, intergovernmental agreements do not represent a truly separate technique. They represent an effective way to coordinate implementation of most of the techniques listed here across jurisdictional boundaries and across substantive areas—thus coordinating actions of schools and sewer providers, city and county, special districts and planning entities.