



Northeast Indiana Regional Opportunities Council,

As we approach the end of #ROctober I want to thank you for your time during my recent visit to Northeast Indiana. As I told John and his bar raising, top-notch team at the Partnership, it was one of the most entertaining, engaging, fulfilling trips I've had the pleasure of making in my 25-year career as an economic developer/site selector. It was my first visit to the region, and there will be many more to follow. My goal is to get a picture in front of the mural in each county and post them to social media with my observation of each county on my next trip.

As I received a letter from Delta last week notifying me that I have achieved "Million Miler Status" after 25+ years of work travel to 40 states, 2 territories and 16 countries, it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my journeys. The warmth & friendliness, diversity, vibrancy, hospitality, culture, enthusiasm, and sense of community/connectivity within the Region is so attractive and welcoming [to answer one of the follow-up questions posed] I will definitely consider a move one-day from New York to NEI and in the shorter-term setting up a satellite office as I continue to collaborate with the Partnership and other local stakeholders.

While I did not know exactly what to expect upon arrival I was enlightened and amazed during my two days driving around both Fort Wayne and surrounding counties. Brandon Noll, who was my lifelong resident expert tour guide (and a treasure trove of information/anecdotes) will take me to every county in the region when I return. He also showed me what kind of home I could live in if I relocated from New York, which blew my mind – talk about quality of life! Now, if we can work on getting a direct flight from New York to FWA that would be another game changer.

As I discussed with Kate Virag and Chad Ruston, Northeast Indiana over the next decade will become the heartland for American innovation and productivity. From agriculture/food processing to advanced manufacturing, medical devices/healthcare to logistics/supply chain, aerospace & defense and IT, and tourism/hospitality there is a strong foundation and positive momentum in so many industries throughout the region upon which to grow. The proximity to so many world class colleges, universities, research institutions as well as two-year colleges & technical/vocational schools, provide an unmatched talent pool to draw from. As the region increases its supply of desirable housing options for graduates and executes the myriad projects in the 2030 Vision Plan that will greatly expand the arts, culture, recreation, placemaking, concert venues, and other public amenities it will become an even greater magnet for STEAM talent to live/work/play in Northeast Indiana. While location, location, and location are important and NEI is incredibly well-placed for the aforementioned targeted industries, the future is about talent, talent, and talent, both home-grown/educated as well as attracting

talent from outside the region that will call Northeast Indiana home. I'll say it again, the 2030 Vision Plan and Road to One Million is brilliant in its creativity and ambition, I have never seen such a well thought out and articulated plan that comprehensively addresses the needs for an entire region accomplished through public-private sector collaboration.

The anticipated trend of large employers and foreign companies looking to expand into less densely populated areas (and lower cost regions) in the United States is real as is the opportunity to place regional talent in remote full-time positions that pay competitive/above market wages & benefits. Northeast Indiana is well-positioned to take advantage of both these trends. I also believe that the uncertainty removed after the election is resolved (hopefully on or near Election Day) will unleash a new wave of capital investment that has been sidelined for the past year in anticipation of a vaccine in 2021.

Drafting and operationally executing a well-thought out plan to address diversity/inclusion, economic, educational and health disparities in neighborhoods and specific demographic groups is top of mind with C-Suite Executives and site decision makers seeking to locate future facilities particularly in the technology industry. Fortune 500 companies and pension funds are publicly stating that executive compensation and decisions to invest capital will be tied to meeting targeted diversity hiring/employment goals. Building a sustainable pipeline of STEAM talent that attentive to increasing the supply of diverse talent will pay tremendous dividends particularly among employers of choice for regional HQ, R&D facilities, and other corporate functions.

I received a question about further improving the efficacy of the Regional Development Authority (RDA). The RDA receives funding from the Regional Cities Initiative (see funding breakdown below) and effectively leverages more than half of its project budget from the private sector. Aggressive grant writing to access additional federal funding from USDA/EDA for rural broadband connectivity, EDA/CDBG for infrastructure improvements, and New Markets Tax Credit/Opportunity Zones to attract large scale development projects are all catalysts for generating regional investment and job creation. Many of the federal programs heavily weigh and or require private sector matching funds when awarding grants, thus continued private sector fundraising and capital commitments will be critical to leveraging the capital stack available for transformative regional investment projects like those articulated in the 2030 Vision Plan. Additional resources and attention should be devoted to building out the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region including identifying venture capital, angel investors, private equity, and conventional merchant bank financing to support the growth of start-ups and scale-up businesses with extraordinary potential. Build, create, invent in NEI!

Lastly, the wave of automation and Industry 4.0 technologies is growing at an exponential pace including IoT, connected devices, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, robotics in manufacturing/warehousing/delivery, cloud & edge computing, artificial intelligence & machine learning. While there is no short-term urgency to become a "smart city/smart county" it behooves everyone to dive deeper into these technologies understanding how they will affect your current employment base. It is crucial to determine these technologies will disrupt existing

operations and entire job categories while creating new types of facilities with entirely new categories of high-skilled, high paying jobs. Identify the education/reskilling/infrastructure necessary to meet these challenges and seize the opportunities. Have a detailed plan to create a base of employers whose jobs will do more than just withstand these technological shifts, they will embrace and lead with innovation. That will be the key to unlocking long-term prosperity and a resilient economy that does not leave people behind.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have spent quality time with you and very much look forward to my next visit. If I can be of assistance in any way or you want to bounce ideas off of me don't hesitate to reach out.

Best Regards,  
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