

# The Regional Cities Initiative

*Transforming our Region into a National Economic Powerhouse*

The single biggest threat to economic development in Indiana is population stagnation. To attract talent—and jobs—we need to aggressively develop our quality of place assets here in Northeast Indiana. Our goal is to leverage existing plans (trails, riverfront, etc.) in order to be chosen as one of the state’s first Regional Cities, receiving matching funds to fast track our quality of place projects.

**With an initiative like Regional Cities, Fort Wayne and Northeast Indiana can fast track our quality of place projects and become a magnet for talent attraction and business investment.**

## **What is the Regional Cities Initiative?**

The Regional Cities Initiative is a public-private partnership proposed and led by Governor Pence with support from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). The goal is to transform Indiana’s approach to economic development by creating dynamic communities that attract and retain talent.

Regional cities have been invited to submit proposals by July 1 to IEDC with a slate of game-changing quality of life enhancement projects. Pending funding approval by the State Legislature, IEDC will select one or two winning regions to support their transformation plans. Through state, local, and private sector commitments, nearly \$1 billion could potentially be leveraged over 8-10 years.

## **Why is the state pursuing this initiative?**

The single biggest threat to economic development in Indiana is population stagnation. Indiana must establish its major cities (and their supporting regions) as centers for talent attraction and retention.

## **Why is Northeast Indiana pursuing this initiative?**

Through its study of other best-practice regions nationwide, IEDC notes that community transformation is inspired by (1) a vision of a bigger and brighter future *and* (2) committed, collaborative leaders. Because of this, we believe Northeast Indiana is uniquely positioned to qualify for this initiative. Our unprecedented collaboration around Vision 2020 combined with our reputation for implementing bold plans, positions Northeast Indiana to fast track our progress in this partnership with the state. This initiative is perfectly aligned to Northeast Indiana’s efforts to develop, attract and retain talent.

## **Who is involved locally?**

The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and Greater Fort Wayne Inc. are spearheading the process. They initially assembled a working group of economic developers from the region for the purpose of hiring a consultant and assembling a formal Steering Committee to oversee the process. The Steering Committee was then assembled to:

- Ensure regional collaboration with all 10 counties
- Recognize IEDC’s focus on creating a dynamic urban core
- Garner participation from Northeast Indiana’s young professionals.

Additional stakeholders already at work building Northeast Indiana quality of place will be engaged through interviews, focus groups, and an online survey. The region’s application to the state will be posted for public comment in June.

Fourth Economy Consulting was hired to guide us through this process, offer technical advice, and provide a framework for complying with the requirements of the Regional Cities proposal. Day-to-day activities will be led by the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and Greater Fort Wayne Inc. with additional support provided by IPFW’s Community Research Institute.

### Who is serving on the Steering Committee?

**Tim Pape, co-chair**  
*Allen County-Fort Wayne  
Capital Improvement Board*

Dave Arnold  
*Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District*

Adam Bouthot  
*Millennial Leaders Alliance*

Therese Brown  
*Allen County*

Whitney Caudill  
*Manchester University*

Tim Ehlerding  
*Wells County*

Dr. Sherilyn Emberton  
*Huntington County*

Keith Gillenwater  
*Wabash County*

Scott Glaze  
*Fort Wayne Metals*

Sam Graves  
*Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana*

**Karl Bandemer, co-chair**  
*City of Fort Wayne*

**Kathy Heuer, co-chair**  
*Whitley County*

Kenneth Jones  
*Lutheran Health Network*

Nancy Jordan  
*Lincoln Financial Group*

Dr. Zubair Khan  
*40 Under 40 Award Winner*

David Koenig  
*Steuben County*

**Tom Leedy, co-chair**  
*Noble County*

Susan Mendenhall  
*Arts United*

Ken McCrory  
*DeKalb County*

Melissa Norby  
*Adams County*

Mike Packnett  
*Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership*

Kate Riordan  
*Knight Cities Challenge*

Lori Rose  
*Fort Wayne Trails*

Melissa Schenkel  
*Vera Bradley*

Joe Svitek  
*Ash Brokerage*

Lora Tormanen  
*LaGrange County*

Ron Turpin  
*Greater Fort Wayne Inc.*

Marshall White  
*Unity Performing Arts Foundation*

Pone Vongphachanh  
*Upstate Alliance of Realtors*

Rob Young  
*Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne*

### What is considered a “regional city”?

A regional city is a self-identified region in the state of Indiana, so in the case of Northeast Indiana, the region consists of 10 counties: Allen, Adams, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells and Whitley. The Steering Committee will have a regional footprint and stakeholder input will be gathered from all 10 counties.

### What is HB1403?

HB1403 is legislation that

- enables the state to financially partner with regions
- creates the Indiana Regional City Fund that will be administered by the IEDC
- requires that applicants be development authorities and expands the permissible units that may establish a development authority (RDA).

### How will regional cities be chosen?

Applicants have been asked to submit proposals for their self-identified regions to be considered by the IEDC, which will oversee the initiative. Up to two regional cities will be chosen and funded if HB1403 passes. Projects will be reviewed based on greatest economic potential; degree of regional collaboration; and the level of state financial commitment and potential return on investment.

### What types of projects are being proposed and how many will be chosen?

The state is looking for quality of place projects that have significant economic impact. Existing plans from the 10 counties (Vision 2020, Thrive, Stellar, Riverfront Plan, etc.) will be leveraged to create a final slate of approximately 50-60 projects.