

#001 Permitting

April 2011

Opportunity: Streamline the permitting and zoning processes in Northeast Indiana to create one of the most consistent and business friendly regions in the country.

Background: Throughout the Vision 2020 process of leadership interviews and county outreach meetings, “establishing a business-friendly tax and regulatory climate” was often near the top of wish lists in the Competitive Business Climate pillar. More than half of the counties ranked this initiative in the top two *must haves* for the region. Oddly enough, some didn’t rank this issue at all, implying that they have no issues with the regulatory climate and permitting and creating inconsistency across the region. Overall in the process, this issue was ranked second in terms of priority. This was taken into consideration going into topical group discussions, which determined it was a strong enough initiative to include as a strategy in the presentation at the Regional Economic Summit. To be noted, some communities may view permitting/zoning as a competitive advantage over other communities within the region and may not support the need for consistency.

Since the Summit, High Performance Government Network (HPGN), a not-for-profit consulting organization dedicated to cultivating thriving communities, has created and is working to survey local government agencies and key business customers to accurately assess the current permitting process.

Marketing Northeast Indiana as a region requires an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current permitting. To speak from a common basis when discussing permitting would be a strong asset to Northeast Indiana—a streamlined, business-friendly permitting process would raise Northeast Indiana’s reputation as a place conducive to business with a competitive business climate.

Update – September, 2011:

HPGN completed an initial survey of permitting entities and their customers in June of 2011, of which 11 city and county permitting entities from across Northeast Indiana, and 34 permitting customers participated in the study. The Executive Summary from the survey stated the following:

“Survey results showed high variability in the commercial permitting processes of each jurisdiction, as well as discrepancies in the metrics that are tracked. Customers were difficult to reach due to the lack of contact information provided by each jurisdiction, but those customers who were contacted value the same qualities: a transparent, fair, easy-to-access system. Customers have misperceptions about the process between jurisdictions because of the different levels of transparency and variations in the actual processes used. ”

HPGN recommends the following next steps to bring about streamlined permitting in Northeast Indiana. This process will require key support, buy-in, and leadership from the permitting process owners. Without their direct engagement, this initiative will not be successful.

- Create jurisdictional profiles of the existing processes, stakeholders, customer feedback and potential change agents.
- Identify champions in each jurisdiction to promote the process and ensure participation.
- Define the future state of the commercial permitting process for the region as a whole by involving the individual process owners.
- Implement the new process in each jurisdiction and track results.
- Overcome implementation challenges, including changing ordinances.
- Revise the process and set goals. After the new process has been in place, process owners and champions must report on the status of their changes and set uniform goals for the region that can be measured and clearly communicated.

Citizens Advisory Panel Feedback – September 28, 2011

Impact

- Efficiency – sharing of information (more jobs)
- Would encourage rapid growth and entrepreneurial success
- Could eliminate competitive disadvantages that our county or city might have

Difficulty

- Hard to get groups to agree on what steps should be to simple and standardized. Cost of technology and training on services that would make this possible would be

Options

- A. Pursue opportunity
- B. Obtain further information
- C. Realign/Refocus the opportunity
- D. Put aside for future consideration