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The region will achieve the vision of world-class higher education and community partnerships, access and connectivity, and high-performing communities by creating a formal “Innovation District Network”, effectively linking and coordinating all of its high value regional city assets, development projects and innovation resources. Specifically, the region will build upon its legacy industry base, technology knowledge and capabilities, as well as the strengths of institutions of higher education to retain, attract and create new employment opportunities, increase wages; and increase overall productivity. This network will require and bolster place-based investments designed to attract and cultivate the talent needed to grow and sustain the region’s economy.

Based on the region’s existing assets, the nature of the projects proposed, and goals expressed by industry, community, and private sector leaders, building upon Northern Indiana’s innovation capacity offers a logical approach for sustained economic opportunity. The regional network will consist of seven innovation hub cities: 1) South Bend, 2) Mishawaka, 3) Elkhart, 4) Plymouth, 5) Goshen, 6) Nappanee, and 7) Warsaw. Each hub will have at least one formally defined District (generally the central business district and adjacent neighborhoods) targeted for ongoing investment and

programming.

The region will leverage and connect activities and investments within these hubs to create higher-wage jobs; increase talent and population; and create density in terms of both population and deal-flow from innovation activities. These innovation activities in turn will generate more ideas, investment, and businesses. This will be achieved by leveraging, developing, and connecting regional innovation districts; expanding innovation resources to conduct R&D for existing and new regional industries; generating spin-outs, startups and small business growth; and establishing industry partnerships that will appeal to headquarters and executive functions.

Northern Indiana’s innovation district network and quality of place investments will expand upon and link a currently diverse asset base of industry, education, place-making, and economic development resources. By linking these assets and filling gaps with planned investments, Northern Indiana’s formal innovation ecosystem and enhanced community amenities will position the region as a major participant in the global marketplace. There is particular interest in building upon Northern Indiana’s manufacturing base.

Ongoing projects, services and programming, plus projects in the project list will be developed. For instance, there is interest to engage legacy companies such as those within the Recreational Vehicle (RV) manufacturing sector to determine where new market opportunities and areas to innovate may exist. The ongoing convergence of diverse industry sectors may present opportunities for embedded technologies that are currently unique to the RV industry but could be applied to products or industry sectors. This may be true for other sectors and businesses important to the region. These opportunities will generate growth and innovation, contributing to the resiliency of the local economy.

### Funds

The financial resources in the Region for economic development are varied. One area considered to be under-funded regionally, as well as on a statewide basis is the availability of venture capital investments for start-up businesses. As government generated projects, there exist a variety of tax revenues like the Economic Development Income Tax (EDIT), the County Option Income Tax (COIT), and Tax Increment Financing. There are also various categories of federal funding, which include but are not limited to: Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Housing and Urban Development, Community Development Financing Institution, and Economic Development Administration.

Additionally, there is a large assortment of State resources, such as Indiana Finance Authority, Indiana Economic Development Corporation, Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, and Indiana Department of Transportation.

Although somewhat limited, the region has small business incubators and minority and women-owned business support services. The two urban Enterprise Zones in Elkhart and South Bend have associations that provide support and sometimes tax

incentives to businesses located within the zones. The region also has a variety of lending institutions that may provide economic development financial tools. These include large national banks, regional banks, as well as local banks and credit unions.

The Regional Cities of Northern Indiana (RCNI) are applying for \$42 million funding from the state through the Regional Cities Initiative. If awarded, the high-priority projects will be funded up to 20% with that award. The financing for those projects are 20% state funds, 20% local funds, and 60% private funds.

### High-Priority Projects

The high-priority projects are the result of the RCNI engagement. Together the group has advanced 39 projects with a total capital investment of \$703.4 million to the Regional Cities Initiative review and funding consideration. These projects are designed to enhance various assets and close gaps within each hub city while addressing at least one – and often more than one – of the four key success factors (density, connectivity, amenities, and productivity). Larger anchor projects are expected to create the needed scale and density that will impact and serve each of the innovation hubs in the short term. The projects identified in the proposed project portfolio represent foundational investments critical in establishing the Regional Innovation District Network.

High-Priority projects include bold, transformative developments that will have high-impact results on a regional scale. These centers of innovation and industry diversity will allow Northern Indiana to thrive during shifts in the economy. The Innovation District project involves adaptive reuse of facilities in the city's downtown to develop a technology campus. South Bend Blue Ways and Elkhart Market District projects enhance wellness and quality of life along the cities' rivers through mixed-use development and activation of the waterways. The South Shore infrastructure project will improve reliability and speed of the commuter train between South Bend



*RCNI Focus Group Meeting - St. Joseph County*

and Chicago. Finally, the Metronet fiber network extension will bring unlimited telecommunications to locations around the entire region.

This planning and project portfolio draws upon an extensive body of previous plans to inform current conditions, strategy development, and the project portfolio. An initial list of projects was sourced from 2010-2014 CEDS, Marshall County's economic development quarterly meetings, Elkhart County's Horizon 3.0 planning process, St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce plans, municipal comprehensive plans, and multiple studies and analysis completed for RCNI communities and organizations in the past few years. Regional stakeholders and leaders added to this list of projects via interviews, public input sessions, and Steering/Strategy Committee meetings. In total, the region identified more than 600 projects for preliminary consideration.

Through a series of meetings and public input sessions around the region, the Steering/Strategy Committee and broader stakeholder



*Public Forum*

community filtered this list to 55 potential high-impact projects for Elkhart, Marshall, and St. Joseph Counties. Of these projects, 45 formal project applications were submitted via a public request for project process conducted online and through public workshops. The Steering/Strategy Committee prioritized the final set of projects through a qualitative and quantitative review based on project type, readiness, timeline, budget, funding structure, anticipated impact, and alignment with the region's goals of innovation, connectivity, and enhanced quality of place. The List of Proposed Projects is in Appendix A.