

An expanded voice for Northwest Indiana's future

Our opinion: This can be an important step toward mending the fractious Northwest Indiana, with municipalities vying for their individual -- and in some cases, parochial -- needs

The table for NIRPC recently had a couple of leaves put in to accommodate its expanded family. This is a welcome addition and a necessary one as well.

NIRPC, officially known as the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, underwent a major overhaul during the last legislative session, when lawmakers wisely saw the need to include all communities in its membership. And each member gets a vote.

This makes so much sense, it's a wonder it took so long to get to this point.

Now, the smaller communities in Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties have an opportunity to have a say in planning the region's future.

As more officials realize the need to band together and plan for the entire region, this is clearly a move in the right direction. With elected officeholders from each community coming together, each has an opportunity to see the other's needs and problems and to offer their perspectives as well.

Economist Morton Marcus hopes the change will open everyone's thinking to a more regional approach.

"I think the most important change is that NIRPC now has an opportunity to be a major voice for economic development in Northwest Indiana," said Marcus, who also writes a weekly column for The Times' Business section.

With this new set-up, NIRPC has a major opportunity to be a much more proactive organization and to bring together all the municipalities. This new NIRPC should be the umbrella agency for other agencies, councils and groups, each with its own agenda. To plan for the future, Northwest Indiana needs many voices, but one overall agenda.

This can be an important step toward mending the fractious Northwest Indiana, with municipalities vying for their individual -- and in some cases, parochial -- needs and desires.