

**Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore  
Civic Engagement of Neighboring Communities  
Public Meeting Results, November 2009**

**Introduction**

To continue dialogue and open communication with the four neighboring communities of Beverly Shores, Ogden Dunes, Dune Acres, and Porter Beach, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (INDU) agreed to hold open public meetings with each community. These quarterly meetings were a solution agreed upon by all parties at a previous set of public meetings held in September and October of 2009. It was the general consensus of participants in these meetings that communications between INDU and the towns was in need of improvement. Therefore one of the goals of the quarterly meetings is to facilitate better communication.

INDU entered into a partnership with the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands to facilitate the quarterly meetings. Since the Eppley Institute team collected and analyzed data regarding the major issues faced by each community and INDU, and facilitated the process of narrowing those issues down to the highest priorities, the same team was a logical choice as a facilitator. Familiarity with the issues along with extensive experience working with both the National Park Service and communities across the nation is a combination most likely to move the quarterly meetings in a results-oriented direction.

**Methodology**

Following the September/October meetings, results were provided to INDU for distribution to the three communities. These results included both the raw data, as recorded at the meetings on flip charts and post-it notes, and a summary and analysis of the data. A separate report of results in this format was completed for each of the three communities. The reports also contained a listing of the highest priority issues for each community and a list of suggested possible solutions to those issues based on discussions that took place during the meetings.

INDU posted those meeting results on their website in a special location designated for this project. In addition the results were sent electronically by email to the designated person from each community for further distribution to community members on their respective list serves. All results were available to community members at least one week prior to the designated quarterly meeting dates.

The dates for the first of four quarterly meetings were set during the public meetings held in September/October. Reminders of the meetings were then sent out to the communities via their designated representatives. In addition, the meeting dates were publicized on the INDU website and announced in an INDU press release.

The first of the four meetings in each community was held as follows:

November 3, 2009    7pm-8:30pm    Ogden Dunes Fire Station  
November 8, 2009    2pm-3:30pm    Dune Acres/Porter Beach Club House

December, 2009

November 9, 2009 7pm-8:30pm Beverly Shores Town Hall

## Meeting Agenda

Each meeting was conducted following the same standard agenda. The desired outcomes of the meetings were presented as follows:

1. A primary outcome of this and subsequent meetings is to develop a mutual understanding between the communities and the NPS of the responsibilities, authorities, and needs of each entity.
2. A primary outcome of this meeting is to create projects and tasks that result in development of common projects or programs, with mutual benefits to both groups. These tasks and projects should have measurable objectives so that both groups can easily agree on their accomplishment.
3. Another outcome of these meetings is to have the NPS and community members develop an understanding and respect for each other's needs, responsibilities, and limitations.
4. A long-term outcome of this civic engagement effort is to build a collaborative relationship between the communities and the NPS that will create support for the national lakeshore and NPS goals.

The meetings began with self-introductions of all participants. The Eppley Institute facilitators then described the desired outcomes of the meeting and briefly reviewed the results from the earlier meeting in that community, including the agreed-upon priority issues. This was followed by a facilitated discussion about one of the priority issues in which the community members expressed their interests or desired outcomes regarding that issue, and then INDU expressed its interests or desired outcomes regarding the issue.

All interests and desired outcomes were recorded on flip charts. The Eppley Institute facilitators then pointed out the common interests and desired outcomes and facilitated a discussion about how those common outcomes could be achieved.

## Results

### Ogden Dunes

There were only four participants from the community at the Ogden Dunes meeting, and two of them were actually from Beverly Shores but were not able to make it to the scheduled meeting there. The lack of participation turned out to be an interesting illustration of the communication issue, which was listed as one of the high priority issues to overcome in this community.

The participants made it a point to acknowledge INDU's efforts to be more neighborly. The remainder of the discussion focused on the common desired outcome of reliable communication channels between INDU and Ogden Dunes.

Methods for accomplishing this outcome included:

- INDU will specify a discussion topic in its future meeting announcements
- INDU will make its General Management Plan available on its website
- Ogden Dunes Town Clerk will post information and announcements from INDU on the town board near the gatehouse/police station
- Ogden Dunes will create a communication system (during the course of this meeting it became apparent that the town did not have an emergency response system in place. The town council member present agreed he would move this forward on the town council agenda).

### **Dune Acres/Porter Beach**

There were 19 participants from the community in attendance at this meeting. The first priority issue from the results of the previous meeting was communication and it was decided to focus on this issue.

The common desired outcomes regarding communication were:

- Visitors are informed about traffic patterns, parking availability, and lake and weather conditions
- The community receives accurate and correct information about INDU projects and their results.

The agreed-upon tasks to accomplish these outcomes include:

- INDU will create a contact list of its senior staff, including their areas of responsibility, and provide it to the Dune Acres webmaster and the Porter Beach Property Owners Association (PBPOA) list serve manager
- INDU will add the Porter Beach Property Owners Association list serve manager to their main email distribution list; and continue to send regular communications to both the Dune Acres webmaster and PBPOA list serve manager for further distribution to their email lists
- Dune Acres will erect a sign north of the railroad tracks on Mineral Springs Road to inform visitors about beach parking options
- Dune Acres town council will contact INDOT about placing more informative signage on US-12 that provides way-finding information for Indiana Dunes State Park and INDU parking areas (INDU will support this effort through letters to or meetings with INDOT if necessary).

### **Beverly Shores**

There were 18 participants from the community in attendance at this meeting. The first priority issue from the results of the previous meeting was communication and it was decided to focus on this issue.

The common desired outcome regarding communication was:

- Mutual trust between INDU and Beverly Shores.

The agreed-upon tasks to accomplish this outcome include:

- INDU will create a contact list of its senior staff including their areas of responsibility and provide it to the Beverly Shores list serve manager
- INDU will designate its Deputy Superintendent as a primary contact with the Town of Beverly Shores
- INDU primary contact will attend regularly scheduled meetings with the town liaison (these meetings may be in person or by phone)
- The Town of Beverly Shores will designate a primary contact (Angela Maurello) with INDU to participate in regularly scheduled meetings (as specified in the INDU task above)
- The Town of Beverly Shores will designate a volunteer to monitor the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) system to follow INDU projects that may affect the town.

## Conclusion

The series of November meetings identified concrete plans of action on topics considered by each group. Indeed, these defined actions are small steps in building working relationships and open lines of communication. Considering the long history and current events lived and perceived by residents, small actions offer reasonable grounds for a continued follow-up and pursuit of more amendable relationships between the communities and the National Lakeshore.

The Civic Engagement project has gone through three substantial phases. Residents are aware of the project and INDU's commitment to communication, information sharing, and outreach efforts. With continued endeavors and good will, the communities and the National Lakeshore will become more aware of the constraints and opportunities faced by each entity.

Future facilitated meetings will be most productive to the National Lakeshore and residents if specific preparation criteria are developed and adhered to. Progress will be most measurable if preparation includes the following elements.

- a. Pre-determined specific topics are determined by INDU as a result of previous meetings and other project research
- b. Materials are made available to the communities in advance of all meetings. Announcement of meeting topics, date and time is widely announced and made to all communities well in advance.
- c. Facilitation guides are deliberately determined.
- d. Meetings are held as designated with open forums (15 to 30 minutes) at the end to capture concerns, to address new issues, and to enter into productive dialogue.