

VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK PROJECT

Redevelop State Line Generating Brownfield Perimeter into Lakefront Greenspace with Improved Public Access

1. PURPOSE OF LANDSCAPE

The former coal-fired [State Line Generating Plant \(SLG\)](#) was located on an artificial peninsula that was constructed on the natural lakebed of Lake Michigan in Hammond, Indiana, adjacent to the Illinois-Indiana state line¹. The plant began operations in 1929, was closed in 2012, and was demolished years later.

SLG's historic entry gate (archway) and attached guardhouse remain as architectural remnants of the original power station. The site² currently houses [Digital Crossroad](#) data center, Commonwealth Edison substations, and Veterans Memorial Park, which includes benches and a tall flagpole. The site may accommodate additional data centers or developments in the future.



A female Merlin falcon was observed at the SLG brownfield on 10/29/25.



Figure 1 – For illustration purposes only

2. PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project objective is to strategically redevelop areas on the publicly owned parcel³ (*see turquoise highlight in Figure 1*) and easements⁴ (*see yellow highlights in Figure 1*) into publicly accessible greenspace⁵ with a lakefront trail for recreation and enjoyment, while supporting nature, human health, wildlife, and climate resilience. This objective aligns with the vision of the [Marquette Action Plan](#) (NIRPC, June 2018), which seeks to transform Indiana's lakefront—from the Indiana-Illinois state line to the Port of Indiana in Portage and beyond—into new publicly-accessible areas for conservation, recreation, amenities, and livable communities.

¹ [REGION HIDDEN HISTORY | Calumet Chronicles highlights IL-IN State Line Marker](#), a video by Paul Nelson and narrated by Dave Dolak, Professor of Geology at Columbia College

² [Google Map](#) of the site (zoom in; click on a marker; then click on photos to enlarge them)

³ Parcel No. 45-01-36-176-003.000-023

⁴ Parcel Nos. 45-01-36-176-004.000-023, 45-01-36-176-006.000-023, and 45-01-36-176-002.000-023

⁵ [Mayor's Night Out](#) at Jean Shepherd Community Center in Hammond, 9/17/2025 (watch video from 1:00:35 to 1:04:26, when Hammond resident Barb Hargrove proposed expanding the greenspace at Veterans Memorial Park on the State Line Generating brownfield redevelopment site)

3. DESIRED AMENITIES

Amenities are envisioned with the understanding that limitations may prevent full implementation.

- A. An open-air picnic shelter constructed from resilient materials capable of enduring severe storms, high wind gusts, and heavy snow loads (e.g., steel framing) could be situated in the expansive field southwest of the flagpole. The ADA-compatible structure could be equipped with a kitchen (including grill and sink) and two attached public restrooms. It could have sustainable design elements such as a green roof, solar panels, and water-saving fixtures. The structure's architectural style could mirror the Art Deco style of the original power plant buildings and blend harmoniously with the historic archway and guardhouse.
- B. A combined pedestrian and bicycle path (paved) could be installed along the waterfront to facilitate public access to the Lake Michigan viewshed and fishing opportunities. The path could connect to the [Marquette Greenway](#) trail near [State Line Plaza](#) (southwest corner) and near the southeast corner, west of Hammond Lakefront Park and Bird Sanctuary.
- C. Trees could be planted away from Lake Michigan and south of the bike path to provide visual screening from the existing Digital Crossroad data center and any future developments. The trees would lower surface temperatures to minimize heat island effect, provide shade for the public, and absorb pollutants to improve local air quality.
- D. Pollinator habitat (e.g., wildflower meadow) featuring a diverse array of native plants⁶ that bloom throughout spring, summer, and fall could be planted in open areas and maintained to provide continuous support to bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.
- E. One or more rain gardens⁷ could be installed to manage stormwater runoff and pollutants.
- F. Hardy native and noninvasive plants could be planted and maintained along the lakefront to enhance visual appeal.
- G. Nature-themed public art benches⁸ that are designed for comfort (with backs) and that harmonize with the landscape⁹ could be placed along the lakefront, near fishing spots, and in shaded areas.
- H. Six to ten parking spaces, preferably shaded and constructed with environmentally beneficial permeable pavers, could be situated northeast of the guardhouse and/or southeast of the flagpole.
- I. Digital Crossroads Dr could be extended northwest to State Line Plaza and S Access Rd to facilitate direct access to Veterans Memorial Park through the SLG archway (see illustration on page 7). The road extension could align parallel to and south of Marquette Greenway trail. It could curve around the south side of the plaza. The extension would enable the public to avoid proximity to the data center, ComEd infrastructure, and future developments, thereby enhancing public safety and infrastructure security.



⁶ [Living in the Dunes](#), Parts 1 and 2

⁷ [The Southern Lake Michigan Rain Garden Manual](#)

⁸ [Public art bench examples](#) including a bench by Casey King, a local artist from Whiting, IN

⁹ [Scenic America](#) believes scenic conservation is critically important. The organization asserts that new development should respect the special character of a community and that scenic beauty improves our quality of life, is good for our minds and bodies, and is also good for business.

- J. Public art murals could be installed (with permission) on the north- and south-facing walls of ComEd’s transfer substation, adjacent to the SLG archway. The murals could be crafted from durable, weather-resistant materials (e.g., mosaic tile). The theme of the artwork could integrate harmoniously with the surrounding environment and potentially reflect the site’s historical, geological, and natural significance. An art selection process involving a well-publicized public call to artists and public input through a transparent and meaningful public consultation process is desirable.
- K. Creatively designed signage and wayfinding could be installed along access routes to Veterans Memorial Park and the lakefront pedestrian and bike path.



4. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Action items to consider include:

- A. Become familiar with the environmental history¹⁰ of the former coal-fired power plant. A clean closure certificate for the surface impoundment on the site was issued on 9/25/2025. The surface impoundment closure documents are available in the Indiana Department of Environmental Management’s Virtual File Cabinet¹¹.

Surface impoundment closure (SW-ID 45-056):

- Clean Closure Plan received 6/7/2021 – VFC #[83165490](#)
- Clean Closure Plan Approval issued 11/8/2021 – VFC #[83239519](#)
- Clean Closure Report dated 1/9/2023 – VFC #[83751487](#)
- Clean Closure Report Revision received 8/14/2025 – VFC #[83854468](#)
- Clean closure Certificate issued 9/25/2025 – VFC #[83873887](#)

Further information about remediation done in other parts of the proposed greenspace area would have to be requested from the City of Hammond, if necessary.

- B. Design the park infrastructure and landscaping to withstand extreme weather events. During the October 2025 Mayor’s Night Out¹², Hammond’s mayor stated that Veterans Memorial Park was “beautiful and then we had one of those storms and it just got annihilated.” Severe storms have also damaged nearby [Whiting Lakefront Park](#).
- C. Assess the health and viability of existing plants and trees, and the presence of invasive species (e.g., phragmites south of the ComEd transfer substation by the south perimeter).
- D. Assess the existing infrastructure, such as the remnant concrete basketball court and building foundation, and the walkway, steps, and benches at Veterans Memorial Park. Determine whether excavation, removal, repair, and/or repurposing is necessary.
- E. Remove the berm (construction debris) from the northeast perimeter of the peninsula to create an unobstructed view of Lake Michigan.

¹⁰ [Rising Waters: Climate Change Impacts and Toxic Risks to Lake Michigan’s Shoreline Communities](#), Environmental Law & Policy Center, pg. 21

¹¹ The [IDEM Virtual File Cabinet](#) provides a full set of files on State Line Generating Plant that goes back many years. The files are organized by date and the most current are at the top.

¹² [Mayor's Night Out](#) at Harding Elementary School in Hammond, 10/29/2025 (watch video from 38:34 to 52:10)

- F. Assess the Marquette Greenway trail (south perimeter) for landscaping opportunities.
- G. Avoid turf grass because it doesn't provide sufficient habitat, is costly to maintain, requires significant resources, and could cause water pollution if chemically treated, or air pollution if maintained with gas-powered equipment instead of ecofriendly goat scaping. Consider ground cover and plants that effectively remove heavy metals and degrading hydrocarbons.

5. DELIVERABLES

A landscape architect could produce:

- A site analysis that summarizes the physical and cultural characteristics of the site, as well as the project's goals and objectives
- A programmatic plan outlining the specific functions and activities that will take place on the site
- A conceptual design which presents a preliminary vision for the site, including its overall layout, circulation, and plantings
- A schematic design providing a more detailed plan for the site, including its grading, paving, and hardscape elements
- A design development document finalizing the site's design, including its materials, finishes, and plantings

One or more 3-D bird's-eye view renderings and a plan for remediating existing plants and trees, if necessary, and eradicating invasives would be greatly appreciated.

“The future will belong to the nature smart – those individuals, families, businesses, and political leaders who develop a deeper understanding of the transformative power of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.”

– Richard Louv, author of Last Child in the Woods and The Nature Principle

(Quoted in Nature and the Mind—The Science of How Nature Improves Cognitive, Physical, and Social Well-Being, 2025, by Marc G. Berman, PhD, founder & director of the Environmental Neuroscience Laboratory at the University of Chicago)



“Nature isn't an amenity— it's a necessity.”

– Marc G. Berman, PhD

6. PUBLIC ACCESS, SECURITY, AND SAFETY

The project goals include:

- Facilitate public vehicular and bicycle access^{13, 14} to the lakefront greenspace
- Safeguard the data center, transfer substations, and future developments from potential threats
- Enhance public safety related to the infrastructure and operations of the above facilities

¹³ [Public Trust Doctrine](#), Save the Dunes fact sheet

¹⁴ [Safeguarding Public Trust Rights on Lake Michigan](#), Conservation Law Center webpage

Potential hurdles include:

- A. A *locked gate* west of the Hammond Lakefront Park and Bird Sanctuary parking lot restricts public access to Digital Crossroads Dr, State Line Plaza, the historic State Line Generating (SLG) archway, and Veterans Memorial Park on the lakefront.

Unrestricted public access at this gate would allow vehicles to travel northwest along Digital Crossroads Dr *without* necessitating a call and identification verification to Hammond Port Authority Security for the gate to be opened. Visitors who are in vehicles

and not riding bicycles or walking on Marquette Greenway trail should not have to drive a circuitous route through Illinois to visit Veterans Memorial Park in Indiana.

- B. Digital Crossroads Dr would need to be *extended* northwest to State Line Plaza and S Access Rd to facilitate direct access to the plaza and to Veterans Memorial Park through the SLG archway.
- C. Decision-makers must identify and designate *public access* areas on the publicly owned parcel, easements, and any other affected parcels for the greenspace, pedestrian and bike path, amenities, and extended roadway.



Locked Hammond Port Authority Gate

7. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

During Mayor's Night Out at Harding Elementary School on 10/29/2025, City personnel indicated the 100-year-old seawall surrounding the peninsula must be upgraded to protect infrastructure on the site. The City attorney said the seawall upgrade will cost over \$100 million. The mayor tasked the Hammond Port Authority and others to investigate the matter.

The future rehabilitation and repurposing of the vacant State Line Generating historic guardhouse must be determined. Potential reuse ideas include establishing an SLG history museum and/or an educational facility.

8. COMMUNITY PARTNERS

In early 2025, citizens formed an ad hoc Friends of Veterans Memorial Park group to support this project. Committee members include Hammond residents Barb Hargrove and Lisa Vallee, Highland residents Cathy Perrin and Terry Steagall, and Indianapolis resident Denise Szocka. New members are welcome. The committee is beginning efforts to build partnerships with citizens, nonprofits, veterans' organizations, and local government, especially the City of Hammond:

- Mayor's Office (Tom McDermott)
- Chief of Staff to the Mayor (Scott Miller)
- Hammond Common Council (Mark Kalwinski, 1st District Councilman)
- Law Department (Kevin Smith, Corporation Counsel)
- Hammond Port Authority (Jeff Smith, Director)
- Engineering Department (Dean Button, PE, City Engineer)
- Parks Department (Jim Taillon, Administrator)
- Planning and Development (Anne Taylor, Executive Director)
- Environmental Management (Ron Novak)

- Planning Department (Brian Poland, AICP)
- Hammond Public Works – Parks Maintenance Department (Felix Gonzalez)

The committee’s community engagement may include outreach to decision-makers and the public through meetings, a press release, a public meeting, and/or public expression at Hammond Common Council meetings¹⁵ (held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at 6:00 p.m.), Hammond Redevelopment Commission meetings (held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month at 4:30 p.m.), and/or Mayor’s Night Out (typically held six times per year in various districts from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.).



The mascot for this project is the Merlin falcon observed at the site (pictured). Merlin falcons are birds of prey known for their incredible speed and hunting skills. Their alarm calls can be heard on [Audubon’s](#) website. Further details can be found at [iNaturalist](#).

9. PURDUE UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE SUPPORT

In November 2025, Linnea Jiahe McWilliam, a senior in Purdue University’s Landscape Architecture Program (West Lafayette), selected this proposed project concept as her final project for the Capstone Course in Landscape Architecture. She will volunteer her time, expertise, energy, and resources to the project, with support from community partners, starting in January 2026. Ms. McWilliam is scheduled to graduate in 2026.



Linnea Jiahe McWilliam

Dr. Aaron Thompson serves as the director of the Center for Community & Environmental Design (CCED) within the Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture at Purdue University’s College of Agriculture. He is the supervising instructor for the Capstone Studio experience.

CCED facilitates the creation of robust and vibrant places that protect the health of our environment, enhance the quality of life for residents, and build support for open spaces, parks, trails, and community development projects that will make Indiana communities stronger and more economically competitive.

10. MAPS



A map of the proposed project concept is depicted on page 7. Please also view the interactive [Google Map](#) with photos and captions.

American Flag and plaque at Veterans Memorial Park, which community leaders dedicated on November 18, 2020, in honor of all who proudly served and protected our country

¹⁵ [Hammond Common Council Meeting](#) at Hammond City Hall, 11/24/2025 (watch video from 28:00 to 31:10 for Terry Steagall’s public comment concerning greenspace and public access on the State Line Generating site with funds from the corporate neighbors to enhance the environment)

Reclaiming Indiana's Magnificent Lakefront for all to Enjoy



For further information or to provide feedback, please contact Denise Szocka at dls@toast.net.