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SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

Monday, October 9th, 2025 – 6:00 P.M. (LOCAL TIME)

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER, 100 East Michigan Boulevard

- M I N U T E S -

Michigan City Sustainability Commissioners:

- Tristan Bogart (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 7/10/25-7/10/27) **Excused**
- Beverly Mack-Martin (Represents Economic Development Council; 6/4/25- 5/1/27) **Present**
- Faye Moore – Co-Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/24-5/1/26) **Present**
- Abigail Neary- Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/24- 5/1/26) **Present**
- Em Racine (Mayoral Appointment; 3/12/25-3/19/26) **Present**
- Julie Smith (City Council Appointment; 5/7/25-5/27) **Present**
- Lawrence Zimmer- (Sustainability Commission Appointment 3/6/24-5/4/26) **Present**
- Nancy Moldenhauer – (Council Liaison; non-voting) **Present**
- Gianna Galante (Staff Liaison; non-voting) **Present**

City Council Liaison: Nancy Moldenhauer

I. Roll Call

II. Approval of September 2025 Minutes

- a. Ms. Moldenhauer raised a concern regarding a section of the September minutes under Carbon Neutral Indiana. She noted that the minutes made a statement about Ms. Mack-Martin attending the Climate Solutions 10th Annual Summit and reporting on the Student Climate Journalist Project.
 - i. Ms. Moldenhauer clarified that she also attended the conference—officially titled the Climate Leadership Summit—and there was no discussion related to the Student Climate Journalist Project during that event. She expressed confusion about the connection between that statement and Carbon Neutral Indiana.
 - ii. Mr. Zimmer explained that the reference may have been included because Carbon Neutral Indiana was sponsoring the Student Climate Journalist Project. Ms. Moldenhauer responded that the project was unrelated to the conference and recommended that the statement be struck from the minutes.

- iii. Ms. Galante confirmed she would make those revisions and forward the corrected minutes to the Clerk's Office.
- b. Additionally, Ms. Moldenhauer noted that the line reading, "Julie stated that the purpose of the gatherings is to focus attention on a particular problem in a municipality and come up with solutions," should be moved to the "Commissioners Comments" section.
- c. Ms. Moore made a motion to approve the minutes with these changes. Ms. Mack-Martin seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor, and the motion passed unanimously.

III. Indiana Clean Communities Program – Presentation by Nicole Messacar

- a. Ms. Nicole Massacar introduced herself as a representative of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). She explained that IDEM is the state's environmental regulatory agency, responsible for enforcing Indiana's environmental laws. In addition to its regulatory functions, IDEM has a non-regulatory division called the Office of Program Support, which assists communities and organizations with voluntary compliance efforts.
- b. Ms. Massacar described the Clean Community Program, one of the voluntary initiatives offered through IDEM's Confidential Technical Assistance Program (CTAP). The Clean Community Program is free, project-based, and organized into three recognition tiers—Bronze, Silver, and Gold.
- c. She explained that participation typically begins with a CTAP compliance check, followed by the selection of projects from a list of 33 predefined options. She mentioned that a "Clean Team" could be composed of representatives from the sustainability commission, sanitary, refuse, etc. Ms. Massacar cited Merrillville as an example, noting that the town used program funding to install rain gardens.
- d. The program provides resources such as graphic design support, signage, and various incentives. There is also an annual virtual networking meeting held on November 5th, where communities from across the state share project ideas and experiences. A pre-approved project list, project combination examples, and additional resources—including the application link and program website—were included in the presentation.
- e. During discussion, Ms. Neary asked whether communities receive credit for projects that have already been completed. Ms. Massacar confirmed that previously completed qualifying projects would count.
- f. Ms. Neary also asked if communities must complete three to four new projects annually to maintain their tier designation. Ms. Massacar responded that while continued project progress is expected, there is flexibility, and completing one project per year or every other year is acceptable.
- g. She also noted key program details from the FAQs:
 - i. There is no formal application deadline.
 - ii. A Clean Team may include any number of members and meet as often as desired.
 - iii. Projects can be completed at the community's own pace.
- h. Mr. Zimmer asked whether projects already being undertaken by the county could count toward the city's Clean Community efforts. Ms. Massacar replied that such projects would not count for the municipality but noted that the county itself could also enroll in the Clean Community Program, presenting potential opportunities for collaboration.

IV. Project Teams

- A. Explore Use of Biodiesel by City Fleet**—Abigail Neary, Tristan Bogart
- a. **Project Summary:** Working with Drive Clean Indiana and Michigan City to identify opportunities to transition any vehicles from traditional fuel to biodiesel. Other cities that have implemented this have seen reduced costs and reduced emissions.
 - b. **Project Details:** Ryan Lisek at Drive Clean Indiana has been meeting with the Street Department and will take the lead on next steps.
 - c. **Status:** No updates.
 - d. **Ms. Neary noted that she plans to reengage with the Street Department regarding this project.**
- B. Solar Power Options for City Government**—Tristan Bogart, Beverly Mack-Martin
- a. **Project Summary:** Explore the use of solar power for City Government buildings.
 - b. **Project Details:** Report on Michigan City Electric Vehicle Charging Station Survey; solar panel array plan update for installation of solar panels at remaining city buildings without solar, plus battery and inverter installation in those buildings with panels only already
 - c. **Status:** On long-term hold.
 - d. **Ms. Mack-Martin stated no updates.**
- C. Electric Municipal Vehicle Project: Michigan City Police Department (MCPD) & Transit Department**—Tristan Bogart & Beverly Mack-Martin, Abigail Neary
- a. **Project Summary:** Explore the possibilities of adding electric vehicles to the MCPD and Transit fleets
 - b. **Project Details:** Met with Chief Corley, he instructed us to collect some additional information about Dodge EVs, as well as upliftment information. We also have reached out to Performance Services for some additional information regarding solar on the roof and/or field the department has. We have found 3 upfitters thus far that are known to have worked with EV vehicles.
 - c. **Status:** No updates. Issue to be addressed with the new police chief, Chief Forker.
- D. Green Burials & Burial Sections**—Lawrence Zimmer, Abigail Neary
- a. **Project Summary:** Pursuing options for Green Burial and Burial Section at Swan Lake Cemetery.
 - b. **Project Details:** Working with the Michigan City Cemetery Board, we are exploring options for green burial options at Swan Lake. The Commission members and Board have met several times and held discussions with other Indiana Cemeteries that have green burials.
 - c. **Status:** This project is on hold for now while the cemetery completes testing and analysis of ground water issues.
- E. Waste Reduction/"Garbology"**—Em Racine, Julie Smith, Daisy Lee, Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds, & Michelle Basta

- a. **Project Summary:** Pilot project in Washington Park Beach which would include fun, colorful recycling collection containers of native species, like frogs. Collaborative effort with Sacha Gee Burns for a “Re-Use Room”, trading, borrowing, donating items to a communal or virtual location for public use.
- b. **Project Details:** \$3000 Community Activation Grant to our Boards and Commissions. These funds, made possible through the Mayor’s Charitable Gala, are intended to support meaningful, locally focused initiatives that promote community involvement and visible neighborhood improvement. Continue to explore IDEM grant for recycling projects up to \$100,000; collaborative effort with Sacha Gee Burn of LP Co. Solid Waste District, Shannon Eason of MC Parks & Rec Dept., and Robin Kohn of MC Public Art Committee; contact within NIPSCO for potential public sculpture funding will be approached when plan available.
 - i. Sustainable options for restaurants campaign. Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory for carbon footprint reduction indicates Michigan City and NWI are extremely high for sending trash to landfills instead of practicing refuse, reduce, reuse, and recycle <https://www.in.gov/idem/recycle/resources/indiana-community-recycling-grant-program/>
 - ii. “Re-Use Room”- 1st Presbyterian of Michigan City has agreed to let us use their parking lot off Washington for our possible future Pop-Ups in Spring 2025
- c. **Status Update:** Abby to prepare grant application and share with Committee for review.
- d. Ms. Neary noted that they would like to rename the project to “Recycle Smart, Do Your Part.” Ms. Neary stated that she will update the name accordingly moving forward. Ms. Neary noted that Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds, and Michelle Basta will be removed from this project at this time.

F. Continue Promoting SolSmart Silver Designation with Partner Indiana University Resilience Cohort and Indiana Clean Communities—

Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart, Angie Reynolds, Beverly Mack-Martin

- a. **Project Summary:** Michigan City had received SolSmart Silver Designation and has been pursuing “Gold” designation. Gold designation requires changes by LaPorte County Plan Commission and the Commission in their Solar Ordinance. Applying for membership in Indiana Clean Communities Program which is a free and voluntary program aimed at recognizing and rewarding Indiana communities for implementing a proactive, positive approach to addressing community and social issues through sustainable environmental and wellness projects.
- b. **Project Details:** Nancy will pursue the MC Council authoring a Resolution for the correction(s) then submit to Kelly Aves, National League of Cities, who will forward the passed Resolution to the U.S. Department of Energy for review with hopeful acceptance. Our link "Getting Started With Solar" found on Sustainability Commission

Michigan City Government website page has been helping NWI Area residents and businesses with solar panel installations:

- a. <https://www.emichigancity.com/1214/Sustainability-Commission>
- b. <https://solsmart.org/news/soul-power-equitable-solar-workforce-development-in-michigan-city-indiana/>
- c. **Status Update:** No updates regarding Sol Smart Gold Designation. Indiana Clean Communities presentation by Nicole Messacar today, follow with discussion and vote to proceed if agreed upon. Abbey in consultation with Wendy Vachet, MC Director of Public Works, stated a signature by the Mayor is required as well as some EPA permit details.
- d. Ms. Moore asked whether Ms. Massacar had provided any cost estimates for participation in the program. Ms. Neary confirmed that there were no associated costs.
- e. Ms. Moore then inquired about the benefits of joining the Indiana Clean Community Program. Ms. Neary explained that participation would offer several forms of recognition, including plaques, signage, and the city's inclusion on the Clean Community website.
- f. Ms. Moore made a motion for the Sustainability Commission to join the Indiana Clean Community Program. Ms. Smith seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor, and the motion passed unanimously.
- g. Ms. Neary stated that she would work with Ms. Galante on the application process.

G. Carbon Neutral Indiana (CNI)—Nancy Moldenhauer, Faye Moore, & Lawrence Zimmer

- a. **Project Summary:** Carbon Neutral Indiana's innovative book—entitled *Carbon Neutral Indiana: A Practical Guide to Climate Solutions*—available to buy online includes interviews with Faye and Nancy and shout outs to Lawrence and Deb Chubb. We're backing [asphalt recycling in northern Indiana](#) that cuts carbon emissions by 71%. Indiana repaves 200,000 miles of roads every 15 years. That produces emissions like 16,000 households. It would take 700,000 football fields of forest to soak up that much carbon. We're also paying to [cap abandoned oil wells in Indiana](#). This could prevent 850,000 tons of carbon from reaching the atmosphere in Indiana alone. That's like removing 180,000 cars from the road for a year. Climate solutions journalists will author articles for Purdue, Indiana, and Ball State Universities' student newspapers
- b. **Project Details:** Open to all residents who would like to consider becoming Carbon Neutral in their household by getting an assessment OR with a monthly donation for CNI to purchase carbon credits to offset your household emissions.
 - i. To schedule an assessment or get an updated calculation for home to become carbon neutral with subscription OR set up a monthly tax-deductible contribution, contact Daniel Poynter, Executive Director and Founder of CNI. Learn more: <https://carbonneutralindiana.org/>
 - ii. Order the book: <https://carbonneutralindiana.org/book/> ;
 - iii. Donate: <https://carbonneutralindiana.org/about/donate/>

- c. **Status Update:** No updates.

H. NWI Region Resilience (NWIRR) Action Planning Work Group—Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart & Julie Smith

- a. **Project Summary:** Awarded National Wildlife Federation’s Northwest Indiana regional certification—the first in our country—in September 2023 with coordinated efforts by Kathy Sipple. Continue efforts to enroll more private and public spaces within municipalities and counties.
- b. **Project Details:** Each county and municipality can now enroll more homes, schools, places of worship, businesses, parks, and nature preserves to obtain their individual local NWF pollinator sanctuary certifications.
 - i. To create and certify your pollinator garden:
<https://www.nwf.org/Native-Plant-Habitats/Create-and-Certify>
 - ii. Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) has published a sustainability tool kit entitled “Sensible Tools Handbook + Best Practices for a Changing Landscape 2023” available online: https://nirpc.org/wp-content/uploads/Sensible-Tools-Handbook-Plus-Final_12.2023.pdf
 - iii. MC will secure municipal certification from National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Certification for our local wildlife habitats including households (1 point), common areas (3 points), and schools and nature centers (5 points).
- c. **Status Update:** There have been no new enrollments, and statistics remain the same. Current National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Habitat points earned by MC which initially signed up in July 2024: 52 Habitats certified (76 points of 250), Registration (25 points of 40), Education (15 points of 40), Community Outreach (30 points of 50), Administration (5 points of 20); after certified, 30 new signups required annually for recertification

I. Soul Power—Donnita Scully, Faye Moore, & Nancy Moldenhauer

- a. **Project Summary:** Ongoing job training and certification program for solar panel installers and designers in partnership with NAACP LaPorte County, Michigan City Sustainability Commission, IBEW-531, Ivy Tech Valparaiso, WorkOne, and Just Transition NWI; to learn more about this program: <https://naacp3061.org/highlights/soul-power-program/> ; to sign up for future trainings: <https://naacp3061.org/programs/soul-power-program/> ; to make donations to this program: <https://buy.stripe.com/8wM4khgl4cud8gw288>
- b. **Project Details:** 31 Solar Panel Assistants certified [Tier I], 7 Solar Installers are North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) certified [TIER II], 3 NABCEP Installation Professional and the NEC (National Electrical Code) certified [Tier III], for a total of 41 certificates earned; three of four students have completed the highest level NABCEP Installation professional and the NEC (National Electrical Code) certification with last one still working on it.

- c. **Status Update:** --We've made great strides in collaborating with numerous community members to effectively tackle criminal justice issues. We are currently working with key stakeholders to address the violence in our community, starting with our youth. In addition, through our Soul Power program we have been awarded many OSHA-10 safety training and NABCEP PVA (photovoltaic solar) certifications leading to enhanced skills, education, and competitive wage jobs for individuals. We continue to look for grants to sustain our program. We are currently submitting grants. The Michigan City Community Enrichment activities report is due by September 30th, and the new grant application opens October 1st. Advisory Board and workers are needed for Soul Power! If you are interested, please contact Donnita Scully ... please! We will meet quarterly starting in October.
- d. **NAACP SOULPOWER program** establishing a Community Board composed of local residents to assist with researching grants and educating the public on the benefits of solar power. She noted that the board will meet quarterly, beginning in October.
- e. **Ms. Moore also shared that one of the students who recently graduated has secured a position in Ohio through the Solar Power Program.**

J. Solar United Neighbors (SUN)– Andie Jahnz-Davis, Nancy Moldenhauer, Faye Moore, & Abigail Neary

- a. **Project Summary:** Effort to coordinate SUN, Faith in Place (FIP), places of worship, nonprofits, and Mayor's Office for education on solar installation.
- b. **Project Details:** Brian Flory from SUN has offered his new Rural Associate to hold introductory sessions with Faith in Place for places of worship and nonprofits about solar panel installation on their facilities of which Nancy has requested and Mayor Angie supports; Brian is coordinating engagement of those interested in solar installation for homes and small businesses with ongoing solar panel Zoom sessions, information online, and continuous installer referrals at bflory@solarunitedneighbors.org ; <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/> ; <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/go-solar/>
- c. **Status Update:** Continue to advocate for community solar installations via online workshops and legislative actions. Be sure to sign up to be included in their emails and announcements; Nancy met up with Brian Flory and Zach Schalk at Climate Leadership Summit 10 in Indy. They lost their multi-million-dollar federal grant to multiple cities for group solar installations.
- d. **Ms. Moldenhauer explained that individuals can get involved by participating in online workshops and engaging in legislative advocacy efforts through the organization's website. By signing up online, participants can receive email updates and announcements about upcoming events and actions.**
- e. **Ms. Moldenhauer noted that the organization is well-organized and provides excellent informational resources. She shared that she personally registered for the program, participated in several online meetings, and received formal acknowledgment for her involvement.**

- f. She further encouraged members to spread awareness among others who are committed to community solar, explaining that such programs allow groups of residents or neighborhoods to install shared solar panels and collectively benefit from the generated energy. This approach helps reduce costs and could potentially allow renters to participate as well.
- g. Ms. Moldenhauer added that some community solar projects are currently not legal in Indiana, as the state legislature previously passed a law prohibiting them.

K. Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)’s Environment Committee’s Climate Action Plan

- a. **Project Summary:** NIRPC Environment Committee’s Climate Action Plan has resumed its prior commitment to become once again a Greater Chicago Area Regional effort to create a Climate Action Plan which will include Northwest Indiana--Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties
- b. **Project Details:** Parallel to this Chicago Regional effort coordinated by NIRPC, NWI will forge a collaborative effort to author a NWI Specific Climate Action Plan
- c. **Status Update:** At Climate Leadership Summit 10, it was announced that Earth Charter Indiana will no longer hold statewide gatherings and would concentrate on regional efforts, so Kathy Sipple is committed to bring a meeting to Northwest Indiana—possibly Michigan City—to craft specifically a Climate Action Plan for our area
- d. Ms. Neary asked whether a project team should be assigned to this initiative. Ms. Moldenhauer stated that she is the official representative to NIRPC’s Environmental Committee and would likely serve as the appropriate point person for this effort.
- e. She noted that there has been considerable discussion and back-and-forth on the topic, and the group feels a need to move forward rather than continue waiting. The goal is to begin developing a plan for Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties.
- f. Ms. Moldenhauer added that other Indiana cities, including Fort Wayne, Evansville, and possibly Bloomington, have already established similar programs.

L. “Caught YOU Being Green” Engagement—Em Racine

- a. **Social Media-** Shared posts, “Caught YOU Being Green”
- b. Ms. Racine updated the Commission that Royale with Cheese now offers the option to have to-go orders placed in reusable containers. Customers must visit the restaurant in person and request that their order be packaged in these containers.
- c. She also gave a shoutout to the Michigan City Goodwill, which currently has two racks of secondhand Halloween costumes available.
- d. Ms. Racine mentioned that she will feature both initiatives on her blog with Save the Dunes and confirmed that she continues to manage posts on the Michigan City Sustainability Commission’s Facebook page.

VOTE: Pass our Officer's approval of signing onto the letter with Indiana Conservation Voters, Earthjustice, and other environmental organizations in opposing EPA's proposed deadline extensions for coal ash cleanups.

"The undersigned XXX public interest groups strongly oppose the proposed extension of compliance deadlines contained in the Direct Final Rule and Proposed CCR Management Unit Deadline Extension Rule (hereinafter "Proposed Rule") published by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") on July 22, 2025.

The Proposed Rule is reckless, dangerous, and entirely unnecessary, and it will endanger frontline communities and their environment by allowing toxic waste to continue leaking unmonitored and unabated."

Ms. Racine made a motion to approve signing on in opposition to this EPA proposed deadline extension. Beverly seconded and all present members voted in favor, unanimously approved. Ms. Moore asked if that quote can be separated in the minutes.

V. Commission Comment

- a. Ms. Neary shared information about the Michigan City Clean Air Survey, which is being distributed by Councilman Greg Coulter. Community members can contact him at gcoulter@emichigancity.com for additional details.
- b. Ms. Neary reported that, during the most recent City Council meeting, a resident brought attention to the amount of litter along Franklin Street, specifically between Barker Avenue and 11th Street. She was pleased to note that community volunteers quickly came together to clean the area, which is now under control.
- c. The discussion then turned to the broader question of how to re-engage an active group of residents to assist with regular city cleanups. Ms. Ms. Moldenhauer asked Ms. Smith whether she was still in contact with members of the former "Great Michigan City Green Clean" group. Ms. Smith explained that the group had stopped meeting and was never reactivated after the winter season.
- d. Ms. Moore added that Councilman Joseph Nelson currently leads a group of youth volunteers who conduct cleanup efforts on the city's west side.

VI. Public Comment

VIII. Announcements

Help promote event and invite people to Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, Thursday, November 6th, 6:30 pm, via Save the Dunes Facebook Live or for Zoom link, contact: Em@savedunes.org. Topic of indigenous history, law, and the cross-cultural connections that impact Native American rights and identity will be presented by Dr. John Low, an enrolled citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, in recognition of Indigenous People's Month.

Ms. Racine mentioned that the title will be "Chicago on the Lands of the Potawatomi and Why Land Acknowledgments for Chicago Should Acknowledge This History."

League of Women Voters Lake Michigan Region will host their Annual Meeting and Conference, "Exercising Democracy: Protecting Lake Michigan & the Great Lakes in the Face of Data Centers & Other Challenges", October 24th and 25th, The Spa

Speakeasy Banquet Hall at the Spring House Inn 303 N. Mineral Springs Road, Porter, IN.

Ms. Mouldernharuer stated tha you can either do this in person or online and they will be talking aout Data centers. Friday (4-9)will be a meet andgreet and the real bulk of it will be on that Saturday (9:30 to4:30 ends with a fieldtrip that is optional).

Conference details: <https://files.constantcontact.com/c57e4575101/446a009f-3fc0-410c-ab37-58a3576abb84.pdf?rdr=true>

In-person attendance registration:

https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/rtqej3w/lp/6474b8e9-a28c-4391-b829-adb181958098?source_id=0b98b443-2876-4990-afb1-af6c948467f3&source_type=em&c=2dhMAsTaEgoq25C59_8Bh-ps5bXzdcJH6fN3OmedQuBuYv_R1FwNOQ==

Online attendance registration:

https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/rtqej3w/lp/6474b8e9-a28c-4391-b829-adb181958098?source_id=0b98b443-2876-4990-afb1-af6c948467f3&source_type=em&c=2dhMAsTaEgoq25C59_8Bh-ps5bXzdcJH6fN3OmedQuBuYv_R1FwNOQ==

“Recycle Smart: Do Your Part!”, Wednesday, November 12th, 5:30 pm, Michigan City Hall, EOC Room, hands-on workshop presented by Sacha Gee Burns, program sponsored by City of Michigan City, MC Refuse Department, MC Sustainability Commission, and LaPorte County Solid Waste District

XI. Adjournment: Ms. Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Moore seconded, and all present members voted in favor of the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 5:39 p.m.