

# Commission on Sustainability



## MICHIGAN CITY INDIANA

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 4:30 pm  
City Hall, EOC Room Downstairs

### *Meeting Minutes* (Shown in italics; recording available on ALCO YouTube channel.)

#### Michigan City Sustainability Commissioners:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Tristan Bogart (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 7/10/25-7/10/27)       | PRESENT |
| • 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)                              | EXCUSED |
| • Julie Smith (City Council Appointment; 5/7/25-5/27)                           | EXCUSED |
| • Lawrence Zimmer- (Common Council Appointment 3/6/24-5/4/26)                   | PRESENT |

**City Council Liaisons:** Nancy Moldenhauer *PRESENT* and Daisy Lee *EXCUSED*

Visitor: *Andie Jahnz-Davis*

- I. **Roll Call** at 4:36 and a quorum was present.
- II. **Approval of February 2026 Minutes** *Unanimously approved.*
- III. **Potential Guest to discuss Earth Month Extravaganza** *Andie Jahnz-Davis gave us an update on preparations for the Earth Month Extravaganza: Event is on Saturday 4.25 from 12-3 at the Senior Center. Other events include a 9am tree planting at the Walker Street Community Garden and 10am Washington Park beach cleanup; The Tree Board will be giving away tree saplings; There will be a seed exchange; Electric Vehicles will be on display in the parking lot; Laura Henderson will lead a guided hike; There will be games and crafts for the kids; They have 25 display tables reserved so far, contact Andie at [andie.goinggreen@gmail.com](mailto:andie.goinggreen@gmail.com) to reserve a table or contribute in any other way.*
- IV. **Project Teams**
  - A. **Explore Use of Compressed Natural Gas by City Fleet**—Councilman-at-Large Don Pryzbylinski, Abigail Neary
    - a. **Project Summary:** Working with Drive Clean Indiana and Michigan City to identify opportunities to transition vehicles from traditional diesel to compressed natural gas. Other cities that have implemented this have seen reduced costs and reduced emissions.
    - b. **Project Details:** Ryan Lisek of Drive Clean Indiana along with Councilman Don Pryzbylinski and Shong Smith of the Street Department under Central Services are gathering data for grant applications.

- c. **Status:** No update from Councilman Don Pryzbylinski regarding coordinating efforts of Drive Clean Indiana and the Street Department under Central Services to gather information for grant applications.  
*As reported above by Abby.*
  
- 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.  
*As reported above by Abby.*
  
- 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 Forker, he instructed us to collect some additional information about Dodge EVs, as well as up-fitment information. We have found 3 upfitters thus far that are known to have worked with EV vehicles.
  - c. **Status:** MCPD is exploring grants that are available from Drive Clean Indiana for police vehicles and charging stations.  
*As reported above by Abby. Nancy has sent a letter of support to Chief Forker; Abby and Tristan to do the same.*
  
- 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.  
*As reported above by Abby.*
  
- E. Waste Reduction: “Recycle Smart, Do Your Part” & “Ask for a Straw and Cutlery”**—Em Racine, Julie Smith, Daisy Lee & Nancy Moldenhauer, Refuse Department Director Chris Carter
  - a. **Project Summary:** A city-wide effort will be launched to reduce waste via two campaigns, one called “Recycle Smart, Do Your Part” and another around “Ask for a Straw and Cutlery”
  - b. **Project Details:** \$3000 Community Activation Grant awarded to our Commission. 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 Matt Kubik of MC Public Art Committee; contact within NIPSCO for potential public recycling sculpture funding will be approached when plan available. Explore sustainable options for expanded restaurant projects. 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/>
  - Status Update:** This Monday is first pro-bono consultation with design and marketing professional; Mayor Angie has graciously granted us an extension on project completion date.  
*As reported above by Abby.*

**F. Continue Promoting SolSmart Silver Designation with Partner Indiana University Resilience Cohort**

Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart & 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 update; Nancy connected with Daniel Straka, Senior Field Manager of Land & Liberty Coalition Indiana, at Renewable Energy Day (RED) at the Statehouse to coordinate with LaPorte County Plan Commission and LaPorte County Commission to hopefully get language and data in Solar Panel Ordinance corrected in order to obtain SolSmart Gold Designation this year. As reported above by Abby. Nancy has shifted to working on the data center ordinance. Larry mentioned an upcoming webinar on sustainable data centers sponsored by UCS (Union of Concerned Scientists).

**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:** 1) When discussing the impact of geothermal systems in the Midwest, several climate-activists agree that the Hoosier state has significant potential for this form of energy generation. One notable example of an entity in Indiana utilizing geothermal is Ball State University. Learn more: “Indiana taps into earth’s energy with geothermal growth” at <https://cardinalmediabsu.com/article/e329e7d0-60fc-4c2e-b79c-432ee32f5f2e> (2) Purdue University’s carbon emissions transparency improved over the summer, with release of a new emissions dashboard; students and professors say the new release is a step in the right direction—but they’re still looking for greater transparency. Learn more: “How Purdue’s

emissions transparency has changed with a new climate dashboard” at [https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/general\\_news/purdue-climate-dashboard/article\\_b9ddb197-4249-4c08-a20a-640a7c96e7e6.html](https://www.purdueexponent.org/campus/general_news/purdue-climate-dashboard/article_b9ddb197-4249-4c08-a20a-640a7c96e7e6.html).

*As reported above by Abby.*

#### H. National Wildlife Federation (NWF)—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](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 has been 1 new enrollment and statistics have changed. Current National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Habitat points earned by MC (which initially signed up in July 2024): 53 Habitats certified (77 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. Will have one more Education event to add when the February NWI Green Drinks on native plants and pollinator gardens is posted on YouTube. New statewide initiative was soft launched at Green Drinks on Thursday then hard launched at Indiana Wildlife Federation’s Annual Conference on Saturday with other partners Earth Charter Indiana and National Wildlife Federation by Kathy Sipple. “Hoosier Habitats Challenge” is an effort to certify Indiana to be the first ever statewide community wildlife habitat in the whole country! Engage here: [https://www.earthcharterindiana.org/nwf?fbclid=IwY2xjawQbLrxleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFHV2Y4U1pYQ0RHR1pJVkVrc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHqEM7yQsBLXWeHdzvAAxMw6yOfNFqT3T6Jb4eSEFbiw\\_bpvThAy074W-SoNi\\_aem\\_9BKAjkr9JyVHLF-hFEzKfw](https://www.earthcharterindiana.org/nwf?fbclid=IwY2xjawQbLrxleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFHV2Y4U1pYQ0RHR1pJVkVrc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHqEM7yQsBLXWeHdzvAAxMw6yOfNFqT3T6Jb4eSEFbiw_bpvThAy074W-SoNi_aem_9BKAjkr9JyVHLF-hFEzKfw)

*As reported above by Abby and Tristan. Nancy added that we would earn outreach points with the upcoming Save The Dunes pollinator gardens webinar.*

#### 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:** -- One of the Tier III students is still to test for the NABCEP PV Installation professional exam. Received \$3,000 grant from Michigan City Community Enrichment Corporation. Planning to submit another EPA grant application for funds. NAACP continues to seek and has submitted grants to sustain Soul Power. Hope Center to conduct a Green Energy Solar and Industrial Fair on Earth Day, April 22, 2026, and seeking sponsorships. Looking for Advisory Board Members, so contact Donnita Scully at [donnita4sfhs@hotmail.com](mailto:donnita4sfhs@hotmail.com) if interested. Donations to train solar panel installers can be made at: <https://buy.stripe.com/8wM4khgl4cud8gw288>  
*As reported above by Faye.*

**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](mailto:bflory@solarunitedneighbors.org) ;  
<https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/> ;  
<https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/go-solar/>
- c. **Status Update:** Nancy assisted Zach Schalk with contacts in Kankakee Valley area for RePower REMC, a grassroots coalition uniting concerned rural electric cooperative (REMC) member-owners with community partners like Solar United Neighbors, Faith in Place, and other local organizations to build a more democratic, transparent, and sustainable energy future. Their focus is on energy democracy, energy affordability, and energy freedom for homeowners and rural communities.  
*As reported above by Nancy. Indiana's Ready, Set, Solar webinar series will have 8 sessions with the first on 3.19 at 6. Register at Solar United Neighbors online to receive a link.*

**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 completed 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:** Headed by NIRPC, NWI will return to create a collaborative effort to author a NWI Specific Climate Action Plan. Suggested that interested individuals could meet during the off months of the quarterly NIRPC Environmental Committee's Climate Meeting to work on it.
- c. **Status Update:** No update.  
*As reported above by Abby.*

**L. Indiana Clean Community Program—Abigail Neary, Gianna Galante**

- a. **Project Summary:** IDEM's Clean Community Program seeks to make Indiana a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable place to live. The Clean Community Program is about ensuring a better quality of life for all Hoosiers, now and for generations to come. The Clean Community Program 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:** Public Works team is supporting the completion of and Sustainability Commission approved participating in Indiana Clean Community Program.
- c. **Status Update:** Application submitted! *A special THANK YOU to Gianna Galante for putting the submittal together.*  
*As reported above by Abby.*

**M. “Caught YOU Being Green” Engagement—Em Racine**

a. **Social Media-** Shared posts, “Caught YOU Being Green”

**Earth Month Extravaganza** - Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 12-3pm, Michigan City Senior Center; 10 am Beach Clean-Up

**V. Public Comments** *None*

**VI. Commission Comments** *Beverly announced the City of Gary’s Plant Palooza on 3.11 from 11-2 :30 sponsored by Brown Faces Green Spaces. See their FB page for more info. Also, Beverly continues to look for private and corporate donors to help offset/replace lost government funding.*

**VII. Announcements** *All by Nancy as noted below:*

Join Mitch Barloga, of NIRPC and Greenways & Blueways of Northwest Indiana, and Rafi Wilkenson, of Indiana Dunes National Park, as they update us on enormous progress being made on the trails through the National Park which are a significant part of the Marquette Trail which will run from Illinois to Michigan when completed. Whether you walk, hike, or bike, this wonderful pathway will be of interest to you, your family and friends. Northwest Indiana Green Drinks will meet on Thursday, April 2nd, 6:30 pm, at Save the Dunes Facebook Live or via Zoom link. For any questions and more information: [em@savedunes.org](mailto:em@savedunes.org).

Presentation of Michigan City Sustainability Commission’s Annual Report and “Caught YOU Being Green” Business Award to Hitachi-Sullair, City Council Meeting, April 7th, 6:30 pm, City Council Chambers, downstairs. Please plan to be in attendance to make an impressive presence for our ongoing projects and of our dedicated commitment.

“Recycle Smart: Do Your Part” will be facilitated on Wednesday, April 15th, 5:30 pm, Michigan City Hall, downstairs EOC Room. All participants are encouraged to bring a challenging item which they don’t know whether to recycle or trash. Sacha Gee Burns, Public Educator and Public Outreach Coordinator of LaPorte County Solid Waste District, will help guide us through the uncertainty of what is accepted by our new recycling vendor Borden. Our community send more trash to the landfill than most municipalities of our size—costing our City over half a million dollar in dumping fees—so anything we can do as residents to cut that down will save us money and be beneficial to all of us!

A “Pollinator Garden Planting Workshop” will provide a hands-on experience in which participants will practice planting a native plant, take it home with them, then transfer it to their yard, school, or organization (with permission of course). Leslie Shad, former National Wildlife Federation Board Member, and Kathy Sipple, Resiliency Coordinator of Earth Charter Indiana and founder NWI Region Resilience, have decades of experience between them in recommending native plants and in designing pollinator gardens. Join them on Saturday, May 9th, 1-2:30 pm, Michigan City Senior Center.

*Finally, Nancy announced a High School Environmental Debate: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Centers on Monday 3.16 at 6:15 at the Porter County Administration Building Chambers.*

**VIII. Adjournment** *At 5:25*

*Submitted by Lawrence Zimmer*