

Commission on Sustainability



MICHIGAN CITY INDIANA

Thursday, April 9, 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; 3/12/26-3/19/28) PRESENT
- Julie Smith (City Council Appointment; 5/7/25-5/27) EXCUSED
- Lawrence Zimmer- (Common Council Appointment 3/6/24-5/1/28) EXCUSED

City Council Co-Liaisons: Nancy Moldenhauer and Daisy Lee BOTH PRESENT

I. **Roll Call** *A quorum was present.*

II. **Approval of March 2026 Minutes** *The minutes were approved as amended.*

III. **Nominations & Votes: Re-appointments**

- a. Faye Moore- Appointment 5/1/26-5/1/28 *Votes to reappoint were unanimous.*
- b. Abigail Neary- Appointment 5/1/26-5/1/28 *Votes to reappoint were unanimous.*

IV. **Guest Update on Earth Month Extravaganza** *Andie Jahnz-Davis gave a progress report on the day's activities for Saturday April 25th.*

V. **Project Teams**

A. **Explore Use of Compressed Natural Gas by City Fleet**—Councilman-at-Large Don Przybylinski, 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 Przybylinski and Shong Smith of the Street Department under Central Services are gathering data for grant applications.
- c. **Status:** No update from Councilman Don Przybylinski regarding coordinating efforts of Drive Clean Indiana and the Street Department under Central Services to gather information for grant applications. *Abby reported as noted.*

- B. Solar Power Options for City Government**—Tristan Bogart, Beverly Mack-Martin
- Project Summary:** Explore the use of solar power for City Government buildings.
 - 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
 - Status:** On long-term hold. *Abby reported as noted.*
- C. Electric Municipal Vehicle Project: Michigan City Police Department (MCPD) & Transit Department**—Tristan Bogart & Beverly Mack-Martin, Abigail Neary
- Project Summary:** Explore the possibilities of adding electric vehicles to the MCPD and Transit fleets
 - 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.
 - Status:** MCPD is exploring grants that are available from Drive Clean Indiana for police vehicles and charging stations. *Tristan reported on Whelen's Core control system to synchronize all emergency vehicles.*
- D. Green Burials & Burial Sections**—Lawrence Zimmer, Abigail Neary
- Project Summary:** Pursuing options for Green Burial and Burial Section at Swan Lake Cemetery.
 - 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.
 - Status:** This project is on hold for now while the cemetery completes testing and analysis of ground water issues. *Abby reported as noted.*
- 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
- 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"
 - 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:** Em and Nancy consulted with pro-bono design and marketing professional and filled out questionnaire; Larry and Nancy met with Mayor and City Directors & Supervisors to agree on a plan for a pilot recycling trial at a couple festivals this year supported by a big recycling dumpster to be purchased by our Mayor which will be filled by smaller cardboard box containers labeled with paper stickers indicating they're for plastic bottles and aluminum cans only throughout the park yet placed far away from the trash containers to prevent contamination while the MC Events Director is to work with the food trucks indicating MC would prefer cardboard water containers or aluminum water bottles over plastic plus require placement of vendors' large broken-down cardboard boxes into the recycling dumpster.

Nancy reported that the pro-bono design work is in progress and there will be a recycling trial at city events using cardboard recycling boxes for plastic bottles and aluminum cans only at this point. Terry Gretham of Special Events has notified all vendors to do their part in the recycling effort or they won't be invited back. He is also encouraging vendors to use boxed or aluminum cans of water and beverages instead of plastic. This trial will kick off with the Food Truck Fest and Juneteenth events. Staff and volunteers will learn what works and what can be improved.

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 needs to connect with Daniel Straka, Senior Field Manager of Land & Liberty Coalition Indiana, 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. She has to shift focus to a LaPorte County Data Center Ordinance for a while then return to this.
Abby reported as noted above.

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 update. *Abby reported as noted.*

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. New statewide initiative, entitled “Hoosier Habitats Challenge”, coordinated by Kathy Sipple with partners Earth Charter Indiana and National Wildlife Federation, is an effort to certify Indiana to become 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
- 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:** Julie to follow up with common areas, schools, and nature centers to earn higher points with less effort. There have been no new enrollments and statistics have not 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 submitted from YouTube.
Abby reported that we are averaging about 1 new certified garden a month. Tristan noted that certifications are 20% off in April. Schools are encouraged to participate because they earn more points.

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], 4 NABCEP Installation Professional and the NEC (National Electrical Code) certified [Tier III], for a total of 42 certificates earned; total of four students have completed the highest level NABCEP Installation professional and the NEC (National Electrical Code) certification!
- c. **Status Update:** -- Remaining Tier III student passed test for the NABCEP PV Installation professional exam. NAACP continues to seek and has submitted grants to sustain Soul Power. Hope to present on how to “Stop Dirty Data Centers”, April 22nd (Earth Day), H.O.P.E. Community Center, time to be announced. Looking for Advisory Board Members, so contact Donnita Scully at donnita4sfhs@hotmail.com if interested. Donations to train solar panel installers can be made at: <https://buy.stripe.com/8wM4khgl4cud8gw288>

Faye reported that they are having trouble with funding and have decided to make Soul Power a separate 501(c) 3 non-profit organization – Soul Power Inc. – separate from NAACP. It will have an independent board of directors and will more aggressively pursue funding strategies. Nancy noted that perhaps they should be tapping into the city's Promise Scholarship to bring in funds by students paying tuition.

- J. Solar United Neighbors (SUN)—** Andie Jahnz-Davis, Nancy Moldenhauer & Faye Moore
- a. **Project Summary:** Effort to coordinate Solar United Neighbors, Faith in Place (FIP), places of worship, nonprofits, and Mayor's Office for education on solar installation. Cooperatively, their commitment is 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.
 - 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:** 2026 Indiana Ready, Set, Solar program (a Solar 101 information session) was launched on March 19th. Solar United Neighbors Annual Report can be read here:
<https://solarunitedneighbors.org/about-us/our-impact/?emci=160ae0bf-142e-f111-9a48-000d3a14b640&emdi=2b9e3b0e-b12e-f111-9a48-000d3a14b640&ceid=3775341>
Abby reported on SUN's educational resources and annual reports.

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:** Presentation "The Future of Steelmaking in Northwest Indiana" was delivered by Gary Advocates for Responsible Development (GARD) which revealed our Region produces nearly half of the nation's primary steel—but aging technology and growing competition are putting public health, jobs, and the region's economy at risk. Full report:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13m0E7NcTnS1A3bKcyjyCsOMG3TBelOfu/view> , Summary:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MIDQARUpI77j2CJBotPz9elpcVenZEuF/view> ; In addition, read Environmental Resilience Institute at Indiana University's new report which explores how modernizing steel production could cut harmful air pollution: https://eri.iu.edu/news-and-events/news/archive/2026/20260402-eri-report-modernizing-northwest-indiana-steel-mills-could-bring-major-economic-community-benefits.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawRADnZleHRuA2F1bQlxMABicmlkETFIamJVWhYdWRmdzc5cTRVc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHIEcYnZLIsFVRRHE0mJRkuX6ro2FeUSuAbleBJguXoT1tsOLybTZI2-2QVTG_aem_Rqt-OvffavKUKd4QUnJJPg
Nancy reported on the recent presentation 'Future of Steel Making in NWI' by GAARD (Gary Area Residents Respond to Development). Half of the country's steel comes from this area and it is feeling the effects of aging technology and increased competition. Electric arc furnaces are cleaner than burning coke. Read more at the IU Environmental Resilience Institute website:
<https://eri.iu.edu/resources/fact-sheets/sustainable-steel.html>

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! *Abby reported no updates available.*

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

- a. **Social Media-** Shared posts, “Caught YOU Being Green”
Em reported that a list of restaurant conversations is forthcoming.
- b. **Earth Month Extravaganza** - Saturday, April 25th, 2026, 12-3pm, Michigan City Senior Center; 10 am Beach Clean-Up
Abby quickly recapped the days events as reported earlier by Andie.

VI. Public Comments

- *Nancy : The MC Parks Dept would like everyone to participate in a survey as they prepare their next 5 year plan. Surveys are due 10.16.26. Public input meetings to be held 10.7, 10.21, 11.4. Surveys can be found on the city’s website and Parks FB page.*
- *Daisy announced the Steibel Pond clean up day on Sat 4.11, 8 :30-11 :30. Please RSVP on FB so they have enough equipment available. She also mention the city’s tool trailer is available to community groups and neighborhoods free of charge for clean-up projects.*
- *Nancy thanked Abby for her great presentation at the common council meeting and the award to Hitachi Sullair who installed a 7 acre native prairie on their property. HS was also thanked for their contributions to Friendship Botanic Gardens.*
- *Native plant sale at Pinhook Park in South Bend on Sat 5.2 from 9-12.*
- *Em reported the National Park clean-up day is on 4.22 starting at 9 at the Visitor Center.*
- *Faye announced that on 4.22 during the lunch hour the Hope Center will show a film about dirty data centers. More detail at NAACP3061.org.*

VII. Commission Comments *None*

VIII. Announcements

- Presentation of Michigan City Sustainability Commission’s Annual Report delivered by Abby and “Caught YOU Being Green” Business Award given by Nancy to Hitachi-Sullair at City Council Meeting on April 7th.
- “Recycle Smart: Do Your Part” will be promoted 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 to stump our expert. 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 recycling vendor Borden. Our community sends more trash to the landfill than most municipalities of our size—costing our City over half a million dollars 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!
- Join Katie Hobgood, Program Director of Save the Dunes, as she describes how birds, from backyard songbirds to long-distance migrants, depend on healthy landscapes to survive—and your garden can be part of a much larger story. This presentation introduces “*Living in the Dunes: A Homeowner’s Landscaping Guide for Bird Conservation in Indiana’s Coastal Communities*”, a new resource created by Save the Dunes and collaborative partners to help Northwest Indiana gardeners transform home landscapes into meaningful bird habitat.

Northwest Indiana Green Drinks will meet on Thursday, May 7th, 6:30 pm, at Save the Dunes Facebook Live or via Zoom link. For any questions and more information: em@savedunes.org.

- 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.

IX. Adjournment at 5:25.

Seven pages submitted by Lawrence Zimmer