

Commission on Sustainability



MICHIGAN CITY INDIANA

Thursday, September 10, 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) | <i>Excused</i> |
| • Beverly Mack-Martin (Represents Economic Development Council; 6/4/25- 5/1/27) | <i>Present</i> |
| • Faye Moore – Co-Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/26-5/1/28) | <i>Excused</i> |
| • Abigail Neary- Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/26- 5/1/28) | <i>Present</i> |
| • Em Racine (Mayoral Appointment; 3/12/26-3/19/28) | <i>Excused</i> |
| • Lawrence Zimmer- (Common Council Appointment 5/1/26-5/1/28) | <i>Present</i> |
| • Dale Batz - - (Common Council Appointment 6/3/26-6/2/28) | <i>Present</i> |

City Council Liaisons: Nancy Moldenhauer & Daisy Lee

Both present

I. **Roll Call** at 4:33, a quorum was present

II. **Approval of August 2026 Minutes** *Unanimously approved with minor edits*

III. 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 updates since last meeting: Councilman Don Przybylinski reported that Darrel Garbackic, Central Maintenance. Director is still working on getting a bid from a contractor on getting the Maintenance Garage fitted to repair Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) vehicles.

Abby reported as noted above.

B. **Solar Power Options for City Government**—Tristan Bogart, Beverly Mack-Martin

- a. **Project Summary:** Explore the use of solar panels and arrays to save on utilities and lower carbon footprint for City Government buildings.
- b. **Project Details:** Plan 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 pause; Solar panels at Police Station and Senior Center are down and need repair; team is working to move forward with finding companies to do the work.

Abby reported as noted above.

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 upfitment information. We have found 3 upfitters thus far that are known to have worked with EV vehicles.
- c. **Status:** Cooperative partnership between Drive Clean Indiana, Police Department, and Sustainability Commission will continue to explore options for and pursue grants to add electric vehicles to the fleet.

Abby reported as noted above.

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:** The Board of Cemetery Trustees has not officially approved the Rules for Green Burials yet. We will share them once approved.

Lawrence reported that the Green Burial rules for Swan Lake have been approved. Twenty two plots have been designated for Green Burial with room for expansion.

E. Waste Reduction: “Recycle Smart, Do Your Part”, “Ask for a Straw and Cutlery”, & Festival Recycling—
Em Racine, Daisy Lee, Lawrence Zimmer, Nancy Moldenhauer, Refuse Department Director Chris Carter, and Sacha Gee Burns

- 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”. Project members, City Directors & Supervisors agreed on 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 only for plastic bottles and aluminum cans 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.
- 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/>
- c. **Status Update:** Recommendation made to have an educational video made with Sacha Gee Burns and Chris of MC Refuse Department. Em and Nancy contacted pro-bono design and

marketing professional to resume consultation fall. Dale to work with Al's Supermarket on reusable bag incentives.

Nancy: The Master Recycler Program for 2026 has been announced. It will be every Thursday for 6 weeks starting on 10.15, concluding on 11.12 at 1:00 at the Solid Waste District office in LaPorte. Contact Sacha to sign up: sgeeburns@solidwastedistrict.com You must attend at least 5 of the 6 sessions to be certified.

Dale has begun conversation with Alexis Pontius at Al's Supermarkets about a reusable shopping bag program to reduce plastic use.

F. 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.
- b. **Project Details:**
 - i. Climate solutions journalists are authoring articles for Purdue, Indiana, and Ball State Universities' student newspapers
 - ii. Order the book: <https://carbonneutralindiana.org/book/>
- c. **Status Update:** Hopefully, student articles will resume with upcoming school year.

Abby reported as stated above.

G. National Wildlife Federation (NWF)—Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart & Leslie Shad

- 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=IwY2xjawQbLrxleHRuA2FlbQlxMABicmlkETFHV2Y4U1pYQ0RHR1pJVkVrc3JOYwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHqEM7yQsBLXWeHdzvAAxMw6yOfNFqT3T6Jb4eSEFbiw_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:** There has been one new signup this month. Current National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Habitat points earned by MC (which initially enrolled in July 2024): 60 Habitats certified (84 points of 250) [met 33.6% needed], Registration (25 points of 40), Education (40 points of 40), Community Outreach (40 points of 50) [gained 10!], Administration (20 points of 20); after certified, 30 new signups required annually for recertification; Hitachi-Sullair is in communication with NWF to certify their 7 acres of native wildlife habitat on their

Michigan City campus. Received one edit from NWF on Media Release—because there are already two municipalities certified in Indiana—which will be held for publication in spring 2027; will need to ready for and schedule in May 2027 a Proclamation entitled “Garden for Wildlife Month” by Nancy at City Council Meeting; Leslie Shad and Dale to table at MC Farmed and Forged (formerly MC Farmers Market) on September 12th [see Announcements below] and potentially the Walker Street Park Community Garden’s Harvest Festival on October 24th [see Announcements below]; Leslie already presented at LaPorte Master Gardeners and scheduling with Potawatomi Audubon for November to present for Community Outreach points

Abby and Nancy reported as stated above.

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

- a. **Project Summary:** Ongoing job training and certification program for solar panel assistants, installers, and designers in partnership with NAACP LaPorte County, Michigan City Sustainability Commission, IBEW-531, Ivy Tech Valparaiso, WorkOne, and Just Transition NWI
- b. **Project Details:** Soul Power is 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; certifications offered are: Solar Panel Assistants certified [Tier I], Solar Installers are North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) certified [TIER II], NABCEP Installation Professional and the NEC (National Electrical Code) certified [Tier III]; new website has information to learn more about this program, to sign up for future trainings, and to make donations: <https://soulpowerinc.org/>
- c. **Status Update:** Nancy will follow up with Kila Ward, Director of the Michigan City Promise Scholarship, who is positive about the possibility of paying tuition for Michigan City residents who want to enroll in Soul Power courses to receive certification with further discussion to continue in the fall; received no updates from NAACP

Abby reported as noted above.

I. Solar United Neighbors (SUN)— Andie Jahnz-Davis, Nancy Moldenhauer & Faye Moore

- a. **Project Summary:** Partnerships re-activated to coordinate Solar United Neighbors’ third round of their FREE solar cooperative with NWI Sustainability Commissions, Faith in Place (FIP), League of Women Voters LaPorte County, and others. Opportunity for homeowners to explore solar power, research solar panels and businesses, choose which units and installer to contract with, then decide to participate or not.
- b. **Project Details:** NWI Co-Op Project coordinator: Erin Charpentier echarpentier@solarunitedneighbors.org ; Indiana contact for home & small business information & continuous installer referrals: Brian Flory bflory@solarunitedneighbors.org ; <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/> ; <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org/indiana/go-solar/>
- c. **Status Update:** Monthly Solar Action Team Meetings. fourth Tuesdays monthly, 6 pm, via Zoom, sign up to receive email invitations in order to RSVP monthly and receive link: <https://solarunitedneighbors.org/actions/join-the-indiana-solar-action-team/> ; Upcoming coordinated activities include NWI Green Drinks online, workshop at City Hall, Proclamation by Councilperson Nancy Moldenhauer, and League of Women Voters LaPorte County event [see Announcements below]

Abby reported as noted above. Nancy added that SUN has chosen NWI to do Round 3 of their cooperative because of our recent extended power outages from the Aug 11 storm.

J. 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:** Nancy attended Climate and Environment Stakeholders Workshop to review and evaluate implementation of strategies and set measures for future goals. Continued workshop is Thursday, October 1st, NIRPC, in person or online

Nancy attended and found it very scientific (and political.) Announced next meeting as stated above.

K. 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:** The Mayor's Office is supporting the completion of and Sustainability Commission approved participating in Indiana Clean Community Program.
- c. **Status Update:** Mayor Angie and Gianna Galante to attend Annual Meeting, Wednesday, October 14th.

Perhaps Gianna could attend our Nov meeting and give a report?

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

Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart & Beverly Mack-Martin

- a. **Project Summary:** Michigan City received SolSmart Silver Designation and is pursuing Gold designation. Gold Designation is back on the table since SolSmart has been transferred from the U.S. Department of Energy to International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) under Sarah Yaeger with consulting support via Upasana Roy of the Great Lakes Institute.
- b. **Project Details:** Corrections in the LaPorte County Solar Ordinance by the LaPorte County Plan Commission and their Commission should still be pursued due to mistakes contained within it which affect Michigan City's use of this Ordinance; seeking Gold Designation by ICMA and IREC
- c. **Status Update:** Solar informational landing page needs to be re-established on MC municipal government website since links for solar information were removed when MC Sustainability Commission page was streamlined on new website; contacts with International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and Interstate Renewable Energy Council (IREC) under Sarah Yaeger with consulting support via Upasana Roy of the Great Lakes Institute were shared with other Sustainability Commissions in NWI desiring to seek Bronze level designation.

Nancy reported as stated above.

M. NWI Clean Air Partners—Em Racine & Nancy Moldenhauer

- a. **Project Summary:** Northwest Indiana (NWI) Partners for Clean Air (PCA), coordinated by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) and the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), is a coalition of Indiana businesses, industries, government entities, community groups, and individuals that are committed to improving overall air quality and public health through voluntary actions in NWI. The goal of

the coalition is to educate its members and the public about the importance of air quality and what can be done to help reduce ground-level ozone and particulate matter (PM) in NWI communities. Learn more: <https://nwipartnersforcleanair.org/>

- b. **Project Details:** Membership is determined based on contributions (monetary or in-kind) and number of voluntary actions taken to improve air quality, including energy conservation, emissions reductions and organizational policies and incentives. Membership is FREE for *Bronze Members* commitment to implementing at least 4 voluntary actions to improve air quality, and for *Green Members* commitment to implementing at least 2 voluntary actions to improve air quality. We are registered as a Green Member.
- c. **Status Update:** Invited to upcoming meetings on Friday, September 11th & October 9th (every second Friday monthly), 9-10 am, 330 West U.S. Highway 30, Ste. F, Valparaiso OR Google Meet

Abby reported as stated above.

- N. **“Caught YOU Being Green” Engagement**—Em Racine *Award given at Nov meeting? In coordination.*
 - a. **Social Media**- Shared posts, “Caught YOU Being Green”
 - b. **Earth Month Extravaganza:** April 24th, 2027 at Senior Center in Washington Park.

IV. DISCUSSION & VOTE:

- a. Proclamation in support of the NWI Solar Co-Op by Councilperson Nancy Moldenhauer to be authored then read at City Council Meeting on October 20th. *Unanimously approved.*
- b. Opportunity to apply for grant with MC Economic Development Corporation with Neighborhood Grant Program to fund plants, soil, and pots for our Native Species Planting Workshop in the spring. *Unanimously approved.*
- c. Opportunity to sign a Letter of Support for the Angel Dove Foundation to apply for grant dollars. The Angel Dove Foundation Inc. is developing Youth Going Green: Roots to Resilience, a proposed 12-month green infrastructure final-design and permitting initiative in Michigan City. The project will advance the design of a community-based green infrastructure site incorporating a rain garden and stormwater-management features, native vegetation, pollinator-supporting habitat, trees and/or shrubs, and environmental education elements. The initiative will connect stormwater resilience, improved water quality, native habitat and youth environmental stewardship. *Unanimously approved.*

V. Public Comments *None*

VI. Commission Comments

Lawrence outlined his efforts to bring more recycling to Dunebrook’s Dragon Boat Races on 9.12 at Stone Lake in LaPorte. He also attended the Solid Waste District meeting on 9.9 to inquire about getting the district to pick up the recyclables from special events. No luck – they don’t have the resources beyond what they already do.

Beverly suggested that the solar panel repairs on the police station become a learning experience project of the NAACP Soul Smart Program. It was also suggested that we apply for a Community Block Grant to get them repaired.

Beverly also stated that there have been a lot of calls regarding solar but the local utility is pushing back about battery backup. Nancy clarified that its communities that may not use battery back up.

Nancy encourage folks to attend the 10.8 Green Drinks and the 9.15 Faith in Place www.faithinplace.org event called ‘Unlock Solar Savings : How to Fund Your Clean Energy Transition.’ 6pm Register online.

VII. Announcements *All as noted below:*

Northwest Indiana Partners for Clean Air, Friday, September 11th & October 9th (every second Friday), 9-10 am
330 West U.S. Highway 30, Suite F, Valparaiso, OR Google Meet

League of Women Voters LaPorte County, Friday, September 18th, 2 pm, Solar United Neighbors' coordinator Erin Charpentier to introduce NWI Solar Co-op and Save the Dunes new Deputy Director Daniel King will present on new projects and remodeling, Barker House, 444 Barker Road

7-in1 Hazardous Waste Collection, Saturday, September 19th, 8 am to 1 pm, LaPorte County Fair Grounds, an opportunity to get rid of items out of your home, garage, and storage! Sponsored by LaPorte County Solid Waste District. Waste guidelines:

https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/files/ugd/766f6e_dae3cb966b20454bbab72565f5131351.pdf ;

https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/files/ugd/766f6e_cdce320deba44326ab9fa1ed88dcfb9e.pdf

Schedule 2026: <https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/household-hazardous-waste>

* Jammin' with Save the Dunes, Saturday, September 19th, 11 am - 1 pm Emta II Boat Ride w VIP ticket package, 1-5 pm Concert, Food Trucks, & Libations, Millennium Park

* Michigan City Farmed and Forged Market, 8th & Washington Streets, Saturdays, 8 am to 12 pm, triple SNAP benefits, until Sept. 26th—TABLING ON SEPT. 12TH

Solar Action Team, Tuesday, September 22nd, 6 pm, Solar United Neighbors Indiana, Zoom, register via email and RSVP monthly

* Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, "NWI Solar Co-Op Launch" presented by Erin Charpentier, Indiana Rural

Organizing Associate with Solar United Neighbors Indiana, Thursday, October 1st, 6:30 pm, via Save the Dunes FB Live and Zoom link from either STD website under events or Em@savedunes.org

Household Hazardous Waste ONLY Collection, Saturday, October 3rd, 9 am to 2 pm, Marquette Mall, an opportunity to get rid of items out of your home, garage, and storage! Sponsored by LaPorte County Solid Waste District. Waste guidelines:

https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/files/ugd/766f6e_dae3cb966b20454bbab72565f5131351.pdf ;

https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/files/ugd/766f6e_cdce320deba44326ab9fa1ed88dcfb9e.pdf

Schedule 2026: <https://www.solidwastedistrict.com/household-hazardous-waste>

* "Solar Smart: Do Your Part" Workshop to launch NWI Solar Co-Op, with Solar United Neighbors Indiana, Wednesday, October 21st, 5:30 - 7 pm, City Hall, EOC Room, downstairs

* Indiana Clean Community Program, Annual Meeting, Wednesday, October 14th, Bloomington (Mayor & Gianna to attend)

* Walker Street Park Community Garden, Annual Fall Festival, Saturday, October 24th, 1 – 5 pm (Sustainability Commission a sponsor and tabling opportunity)

* Crossroads Clean Tech Conference, Tuesday & Wednesday, November 17th & 18th, Drive Clean Indiana, Blue Chip Casino & Events Center (details to follow)

Monday Mornings Beach Clean-Ups! Show up at 8:30 am and stay until 10 am—or as long as you're able—to become a member of the Michigan City and LaPorte County Solid Waste District crews which make our gorgeous Washington Park Beach even more beautiful. Did you know Sacha Gee Burns and Mike Kilbourne

coordinate these activities by making announcements regarding cancellations due to weather on The Great Michigan City Green Clean FB page through September 28th

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/549215926250423/>

* denotes event we're actively participating in or sponsoring with donation

VIII. Adjournment at 5:33

Submitted by Lawrence Zimmer