Commission on Sustainability

MICHIGAN CITY
INDIANA

Thursday, October 8, 2026, 4:30 pm
City Hall, EOC Room Downstairs

MINUTES (Shown in italics. Recording on ALCO YouTube channel.)

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; 5/1/26-5/1/28) *ABSENT*
- Abigail Neary- Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/26- 5/1/28) *PRESENT*
- Em Racine (Mayoral Appointment; 3/12/26-3/19/28) *PRESENT*
- Lawrence Zimmer- (Common Council Appointment 5/1/26-5/1/28) *PRESENT*
- Dale Batz - - (Common Council Appointment 6/3/26-6/2/28) *PRESENT*

City Council Liaisons:

- Nancy Moldenhauer *EXCUSED*
- Daisy Lee *PRESENT*

I. Roll Call *at 4:31 and a quorum was present*

II. Approval of September 2026 Minutes *Unanimously approved*

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.

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.
Status: The Board of Cemetery Trustees has not officially approved the Rules for Green Burials yet. We will share them once approved. Twenty two plots have been designated for Green Burial with room for expansion.

Lawrence reported that cemetery's rules for Green Burial have been approved. Additional guidelines have been added. To be available at the November meeting. The concrete vault maker is working on a bottomless design with holes in the sides to increase the coffin/casket's contact with the earth while maintaining structural support for the ground above.

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

Dale continuing to work with Al's on program noted above.

Lawrence to generate a special events recycling To Do list based on what he has learned from his experiences. List will be available at the November meeting.

Lawrence also reported on recycling with https://www.ridwell.com/ and the dangers of accumulating microplastics in the environment making their way into the human body. His report from the Climate Week NYC webinar he attended in August available at the November meeting.

Additional recycling source from Abby: https://www.trashie.io/

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 Lawerence 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.

No updates here.

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

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=IwY2xjawQbLrxleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFHV2Y4U1pYQ0RHR1pJVkVrc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjIyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHqEM7yQsBLXWeHdzvAAxMw6yOfNFqT3T6Jb4eSEFbiw_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 Dale reported as noted 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 as they are heading to Indiana State Convention

Abby reported as noted above.

I. Solar United Neighbors (SUN)— 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/ ; View and share Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, *"Northwest Indiana Solar Co-Op: How to Connect with Affordable, Reliable, and Clean Power",* presented by Erin Charpentie, Indiana Rural Organizing Associate with Solar United Neighbors Indiana, on Save the Dunes free YouTube subscription page; Upcoming coordinated activities include workshop at City Hall and Proclamation by Councilperson Nancy Moldenhauer [see Announcements below]

Abby reported as noted above. Em suggested watching the Green Drinks recording on Save The Dunes for more details on the co-op.

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:** No update.

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 Sustainaiblity Commission approved participating in Indiana Clean Community Program.

c. **Status Update:** Mayor Angie and Gianna Galante to attend Annual Meeting, Wednesday, October 14th. Requesting November meeting report out by Gianna Galante.

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.

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

N. "Caught YOU Being Green" Engagement—Em Racine

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

b. **Earth Month Extravaganza:** April 24th, 2027

IV. DISCUSSION & VOTE:

a. Vote to add a new project for evaluation. Direct Air Capture (DAC) Pilot. A project developer is looking for a Community to pilot the installation of power-free DAC systems utilizing cooling tower waste energy. Units capture an average of 1350 tons of CO2 monthly in moderate-to-heavy pollution areas. Captured CO2 integrates into RCM Titan 10X cement products, increasing concrete strength by 30%. Systems capture methane, ozone, and heavy particulates, which are repurposed for asphalt production. Units reduce fan power demand by 2% to 5% and lower electricity usage by nearly 40%. Next steps would include meeting with the Mayor for approval and then connecting relevant City Departments with the Project Developers.

New project proposed and passed – it will become Project Team O: Direct Air Capture (DAC) Pilot. Abby to get with Mayor Angie. This technology could potentially be used to sell carbon off-sets.

b. Email from National Wildlife Federation inviting us to join them in supporting clean water and opposing the proposed EPA cuts. On September 9th, the EPA and Army Corps opened comments on a supplemental proposal to their 2025 Updated Definition of "Waters of the United States." This supplemental fully undercuts clean water protections far beyond previous efforts and beyond what was required by *Sackett v. EPA*. If finalized, it will effectively gut America's primary law protecting us against water pollution and aquatic habitat destruction. This supplemental proposal continues a decades-long effort to weaken basic federal Clean Water Act protections. Water Protection Network members, including the NWF, have a long history of engaging on this issue, urging strong federal protections for wetlands and streams and opposing the *Sackett* decision. Weakening water protections, especially when combined with planned massive resource and staffing cuts at EPA, increases threats to drinking water sources, flood and wildfire-prone communities, and wildlife habitat. Given the particularly devastating potential impacts of this proposal, we drafted a comment letter and we hope you will consider signing on to it.

Lawrence moved to have our commission join in signing on to the NWF opposition to EPA cuts, unanimously approved. Em gave some additional background info on this effort.

V. Public Comments *None*

VI. City Council Liaison Comments *None*

VII. Commission Comments *Lawrence announced Master Recycler class and Dale announced the Green Farm event coming to Blue Chip.*

VIII. Announcements *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

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

Solar Action Team, Tuesday, October 27th, 6 pm, Solar United Neighbors Indiana, Zoom, register via email and RSVP monthly [see details above]

* NWI Solar Co-Op Proclamation Reading, Michigan City Common Council Meeting, Tuesday, October 20th, 6:30 pm, City Council Chambers, City Hall

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

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

State of Lake Michigan Meeting, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, University of Illinois and Purdue University, Blue Chip, Wednesday, November 4th, Friday, November 6th, Blue Chip Casino, registration required along with payment of fee: https://web.cvent.com/event/b896ea11-3ed5-4e29-a83b-40f53fb2516d/summary

* Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, "TBA" presented by ???, Thursday, November 5th, 6:30 pm, via Save the Dunes FB Live and Zoom link from either STD website under events or Em@savedunes.org

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

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

XI. Adjournment *at 4:23.*

Submitted by Lawrence Zimmer