Commission on Sustainability

MICHIGAN CITY
INDIANA

Thursday, June 12, 2025, 4:30 pm
City Hall, EOC Room Downstairs

MINUTES (Recording available on the ALCO YouTube channel)

Michigan City Sustainability Commissioners PRESENT: Tristan Bogart, Beverly Mack-Martin, Faye Moore (Co-Chair), Abigail Neary (Chair), Em Racine, Julie Smith, Lawrence Zimmer (Secretary).

Commissioner EXCUSED: Michelle Basta

Student Commissioners ABSENT: Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds

City Council Liaison PRESENT: Nancy Moldenhauer

I. **Roll Call** A quorum was present.
II. **Approval of May 2025 Minutes** Unanimously approved.
III. **Project Teams**

A. **Explore Use of Biodiesel by City Fleet**—Abigail Neary**: Reported as noted.**
   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:** Reached for Drive Clean Indiana for update but on vacation. Will reach back out.

B. **Solar Power Options for City Government**—Tristan Bogart: **Reported as noted.**
   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 pause until Mayor surveys all buildings.

C. **Electric Municipal Vehicle Project: Michigan City Police Department (MCPD) & Transit Department**—Tristan Bogart & Bailey Chavis: **Abby reported as noted.**
   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 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**: Tristan to reach out for up-fitment contacts.

D. Green Burials & Burial Sections—Lawrence Zimmer, Abigail Neary: **Larry reported:**

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:** In progress. Larry to provide any updates on test results or public feedback. A meeting was held earlier this month at the cemetery with the superintendent, vault rep from LaPorte, and sub-committee members. Jeff, the superintendent, had a grave dug surrounded by 4 existing burial vaults to demonstrate how tight, tricky, and difficult it can be to dig a grave without disturbing the adjacent soils. Also, he wanted to show us the high-water table – the bottom of the hole had about 6" of water. What we're learning is that at Swam Lake concrete burial vaults are necessary – one goal of green burial that can't be achieved. They installed a concrete 'dome' (or upside-down vault without a lid) in the hole to do a several month-long test to see if the fluctuating water table will affect the 'vault'. A probe on top will measure whether the vault is being affected by the water table.

Beverly inquired about how the green burial guidelines align with those of Native Americans. No answer was given but Larry stressed that everyone should be sure their end-of-life wishes are documented with their family and funeral director.

E. Waste Reduction—Em Racine, Julie Smith, Daisy Lee, Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds, & Michelle Basta: Nancy reported.

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**: 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: May 20th City Council presentation "Recycle Smart Do Your Part" by Sacha Gee Burns. Lawrence Zimmer to attend "Plastic Waste Reduction Forum" on June 18th. Requested Em Racine and Julie Smith think of new ways to reignite the program with a focus on waste reduction at local restaurants. Potential ideas include signage and education on ask for a straw, no plastic utensils for carry-out unless requested, and movement to recycled containers. Julie to present her drafts. Julie put together a letter to the community that included 3 designs for plastic waste reduction flyers for restaurants and submitted examples for us to review. Em reported that Save The Dunes will be taking over the plastic bench project. Nancy is working with Chris Carter and Daisy Lee to bring a recycling workshop to the city in the fall. The city council is very engaged with this project. There was also a reminder that there is a beach cleanup every Monday at 5:30pm.

F. **Continue Promoting SolSmart Silver Designation with Partner Indiana University Resilience Cohort**—Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart, Angie Reynolds, Beverly Mack-Martin. Nancy reported.
   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.
   b. Project Details: Randy Novak, LP County Councilman, reported the LaPorte County Plan Commission has gone a different direction and appointed two farmers, so we can no longer count on them or the County Commission to correct the Ordinance; will pursue the MC Council authoring a Resolution for the correction 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: Nancy will retrieve the corrected section from Kelly Aves at NLC then forward it to City Attorney for Resolution format. Abby has reached out to Indiana Clean Communities to begin the application process. Signature by the Mayor is required as well as some EPA permit details. Nancy reported as noted.

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 Lawerence and Deb Chubb
   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 No updates given.

H. **Contract with Performance Services (PS) under $98,000 Grant from Indiana Office of Energy Development (OED)**—Nancy Moldenhauer, Project Manager, Tristan Bogart, Shannon Eason, Jamie Huss, David Dipert, Beverly Mack-Martin, & Richard Pate
   a. **Project Summary:** Assessment and planning continues for installation of solar array between Bismark Hill and The Tower; within Washington Park potential solar panel installation on other buildings, battery or generator backup, solar powered electric-vehicle charging stations with battery backup, plus work stations and benches with solar shade canopies around the park and in the zoo would be an amenity for residents and visitors.
   b. **Project Details**: PS's drone operator has sent our Zoo Director questions about her preferences for the drone flyover to map landscape and buildings.
   c. **Status Update**: No updates. On pause due to unsure federal funding (ensure contract has been signed by PS and Mayor; waiting for second quarterly report and need to schedule Zoom meeting in May with Brendan Becht, David Tice, and our project team) No updates given.

I. **NWI Region Resilience (NWIRR) Action Planning Work Group**—Nancy Moldenhauer & Tristan Bogart

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:** Current National Wildlife Federation Wildlife Habitat points earned by MC which initially signed up in July 2024: 48 Habitats certified – 2 new since last month (68 points of 250), Registration (25 points of 40), Education (15 points of 40), Community Outreach (30 points of 50—earned 5 more), Administration (5 points of 20); after certified, 30 new signups required annually for recertification; Press release needs to be modified and sent to media after workshop scheduled for community. NIRPC's developed best practices and model programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is still being edited by Kathy Luther with Abigail and Nancy's help. Nancy reported that the Shoreland Hills neighborhood will be registered as a 'public facility' for the NWL certification purposes. How about the Town of Long Beach?

J. 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:** No updates as regular monthly meeting exchanged for meeting with State NAACP President. Five Tier II students have completed the online and in classroom coursework. One student has obtained their NABCEP & NEC with another still studying. Next Tier III session will start in late May/early June. Another group of students will begin Tier I in June. Beverly gave info on available Urban Enterprise funding to Donita Scully. Faye reported that the IN President of the NAACP spoke at the local May meeting. Chief Corley was also present. Their focus will be increasing membership and fundraising. Perhaps engaging youth at PNW and Ivy Tech.

K. 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**: No updates. On pause. Brian and new Rural Associate would be available to deliver a Solar 101 for the churches in the Uptown Arts District and members of the two Michigan City ministerial groups, but partner Faith in Place had to lay off many staff due to loss of Federal grant focused on environmental justice. No updates/on pause given the current political climate and funding cuts.

M. "Caught YOU Being Green" Engagement—Em Racine, Michelle Basta Em reminded everyone to send her all social media updates for the Facebook page.

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

VI. Commission Comments Beverly is looking into asking the knowledgeable Ted Liu to speak to the city.

VII. Public Comments **Faye reminded us that June 19 is Juneteenth, a national holiday. Faye also reported that the Leadership Academy and Economic Development Corp (Clarence Hulse) are teaming up to bring MC HOOPS, an effort to help keep kids off the streets. The Y is donating the gym. The kids designed the website. The two age groups are 13-15 and 16-24.**

VIII. Announcements

Northwest Indiana Green Drinks will not meet in July due to customary July summer break. For information about August presentation contact: Em@savedunes.org

XI. Adjournment at 5:15.

Submitted by: Lawrence Zimmer, Secretary