Commission on Sustainability

MICHIGAN CITY
INDIANA

Thursday, August 14, 2025, 4:30 pm
City Hall, EOC Room Downstairs

MINUTES (video available on the 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) EXCUSED
- Abigail Neary- Chair (Sustainability Commission Appointment; 5/1/24- 5/1/26) PRESENT
- Em Racine (Mayoral Appointment; 3/12/25-3/19/26) PRESENT
- Julie Smith (City Council Appointment; 5/7/25-5/27) EXCUSED
- Lawrence Zimmer- (Sustainability Commission Appointment 3/6/24-5/4/26) PRESENT

City Council Liaison: Nancy Moldenhauer PRESENT

I. **Roll Call** **A quorum of voting members was present**
II. **Approval of July 2025 Minutes** **Unanimously approved**
III. **Voting Items**
   a. **Approval to sign letter protecting Water: Updated HR3898 opposition letter** **Unanimously approved**
IV. **Project Teams**
   A. **Explore Use of Biodiesel by City Fleet**—Abigail Neary, Tristan Bogart
      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:** Working to schedule meeting with consultant on tech agnostic software enablement. Next step is to then schedule another discussion with Drive Clean Indiana. Tristan reported as stated above. Abby is researching how to scope municipal vehicle projects.

   B. **Solar Power Options for City Government**—Tristan Bogart
      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. Tristan working on update from mayor. This project is on long term hold.

   C. **Electric Municipal Vehicle Project: Michigan City Police Department (MCPD) & Transit Department**—Tristan Bogart & Bailey Chavis

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 up-fitment 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 has reached to up-fitment contacts and Abby meeting with consultant on August 15th to learn more about technology. No new developments or updates.

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 Chairwoman of The Green Burial sub-committee is preparing a proposal to present to the full Board of Cemetery Trustees at their August 14 meeting at 3pm. Meeting moved to August 21. This project is on hold for now while the cemetery completes testing and analysis of ground water issues.

E. Waste Reduction/"Garbology"—Em Racine, Julie Smith, Daisy Lee, Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds, & Michelle Basta

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: No recycling was available at Singing Sands Event. How do we ensure that City sponsored events include recycling? Lawrence raised this question. No recycling at the Grand Prix Boat events either. Each group or event organizer is responsible for making sure recycling happens. Nancy reported that the Park Board was too busy to undertake this at every event. Lawrence is making sure it happens at Dunebrook's Dragon Boat Family Fest on 9.6 in LaPorte.

F. Continue Promoting SolSmart Silver Designation with Partner Indiana University Resilience Cohort—Nancy Moldenhauer, Tristan Bogart, Angie Reynolds, 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 updates regarding Sol Smart. 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. Abby reported as stated 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 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. Abby did have an update: Daniel Poynter and CNI received a grant to extend their student Climate Journalism project at IU. Students write environmentally focused articles geared toward their peers. CNI distributes them in their newsletter. Recently an excellent one was written on Green/Natural Burial: How To Die Green – A Growing Movement in IN. Read it here: https://drops-in-the-pond.super.site/blog/blog-posts/how-to-die-green-a-growing-movement-in-indiana

H. 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: 51 Habitats certified (75 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; -Climate Action Planning has resumed prior plan to become once again a Greater Chicago Area Regional effort which will include Northwest Indiana--Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. Appears federal funding was received to continue this collaborative effort. Tristan reported that additional points have been earned, and Tryon Farm was just certified today. Abby is reaching out to the Long Beach Garden Club.

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.

J. **Status Update:** --No updates. As reported by Nancy.

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**: -- Solar for Schools program being held August 26th at 2pm. Continue to advocate for community solar installations via online workshops and legislative actions. Be sure to sign up to be included in their emails and announcements. SUN sent out thanks via emails and phone calls for participation. Abby reported as stated above. Em to post on Facebook.

L. **"Caught YOU Being Green" Engagement—**Em Racine, Michelle Basta None to add.
   a. **Social Media**- Shared posts, "Caught YOU Being Green"

M. **Mayoral Community Activation Grant**
   a. **Project Summary:** $3000 Community Activation Grant to our Boards and Commissions. 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. Projects need to be completed by March 2026.
   b. **Project Details:** Ideas shared included: Committee Sponsored re-usable cups where discounts are provided for use by local restaurants, installation of water refill stations, solar phone charging in the park.
   c. **Status Update:** Open for discussion After discussion it was voted on and approved unanimously to pursue 'Engage Restaurants: Plastic Reduction'. Abby to pursue the grant docs.

V. Commission Comments **Lawrence reported on the Sustainable Building Workshop held on the 8.11.**

VI. Public Comments **Gianna Galante introduced herself and was welcomed into the group as our liason to the Public Works Dept. She was thanked for her contributions to the Sustainable Building Workshop mentioned above. Nancy carefully discussed her stance on the new data center which is posted on FB. The biggest concern is safety (being near 3 schools), light pollution and noise pollution. There is a trip planned to visit data centers near Columbus, OH and Beverly is going.**

VII. Announcements **Abby made these announcements:**

Help promote event and invite many people to Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, Thursday, September 4th, 6:30 pm, via Save the Dunes Facebook Live or Zoom link, contact: Em@savedunes.org. "Recycle Smart: Do Your Part!", presented by engaging and inspiring Sacha Gee Burns, Environmental Educator/Community Outreach, LaPorte County Solid Waste District.

Attend Earth Charter Indiana's Climate Leadership Summit 10—which our Sustainability Commission is a supporter--Friday, September 5th, Ivy Tech, Indianapolis. Abigail, Beverly, and Nancy are going with one more FREE regular admission available; students are always FREE. Let Nancy know and register: https://www.earthcharterindiana.org/

Also added: https://indianathrivingschools.org/photo-camp

Also added: https://www.plasticreductionalliance.org/events/pra-meeting Concerned citizens coming together to figure out how to reduce single use plastics, like bags. Sept 17 in Valpo University.

VIII. **Adjournment** **at 5:24**

Submitted by: Lawrence Zimmer, Secretary