Commission on Sustainability

MICHIGAN CITY
INDIANA

Thursday, July 10, 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), Julie Smith, Lawrence Zimmer (Secretary).

ABSENT: Michelle Basta and Em Racine

Student Commissioners ABSENT: Bailey Chavis, Angela Reynolds

City Council Liaison ABSENT: Nancy Moldenhauer

I. **Roll Call** **A quorum was present.**
II. **Approval of June 2025 Minutes** **Unanimously approved.**
III. **Voting Items**
   a. **Reappointment of Tristan Bogart** **Unanimously approved.**
   b. **Engagement of Restaurant Community** **See Project Team 'E' below**
   c. **Community Activation Grant – Official Project** **This was officially added as a Project Team category by unanimous vote. Commissioners were invited to bring ideas to the August meeting about how to best utilize a 3k grant. Some ideas already put forward: Small scale phone charging stations in the park, water bottle refill stations, reusable beverage cups to minimize the manufacture and use of plastic.**
IV. **Project Teams**

A. **Explore Use of Biodiesel by City Fleet**—Abigail Neary
   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 no response. Will reach back out and also connect with Diatech. Abby reported on as noted.

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. Tritan is working to obtain an update from the mayor.

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 out to up-fitment contacts. Tritan will work on this with Abby as part of Project Team 'A' above. Tritan looking into Tech Diagnostic System software that can evaluate and manage the city's fleet of vehicles to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

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:** In progress. Larry to provide any updates on test results or public feedback. 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. Lawrence reported as stated above. He encouraged commissioners to attend the cemetery meeting and write letters of support for Green Burial.

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:** Lawrence Zimmer attended "Plastic Waste Reduction Forum" on June 18th. LZ attended the forum at Valpo U on 6.18 sponsored by the Plastic Reduction Alliance of NW Indiana. Professors spoke about the environmental damage and the toll on personal health. One explained how several ounces of microplastics were removed from the brain of a corpse. She also explained how these microplastics may be affecting childhood neurological development. Read more at: https://www.plasticreductionalliance.org/

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:** Nancy emailed Kelly Aves at NLC for the correction(s) then will 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. Abby 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**: Update from Carbon Neutral Indiana "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." Abby reported as noted.

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**: –Grant contract for funding has been withdrawn by the Indiana Office of Energy Development. This item 'c' to be removed. Beverly found a new source of funds in the Energy Innovation Partnership Project and will pursue.

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: 49 Habitats certified – 1 new since last month (71 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; --Still trying to retrieve Climate Action Plan from Kathy Luther--who seems to have moved on to a greater area Plan including Chicago--to forward to Abbey. Abby reported as noted.

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:** --Tier II students have completed classroom coursework. One has obtained NABCEP PVA certification. Other three have attended remedial tutoring to help them prepare for certification exam. Two have obtained tech jobs. Faye reported and encouraged everyone to become a member of the local NAACP to support their education efforts. It costs about 3k per student to complete the Soul Power program. Students receive a $200 stipend to encourage participation and offset expenses.

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**: --Abbreviated message from Zach Schalk, Indiana Program Director: Congress passed a short-sighted and reckless budget that repeals tax credits for solar homeowners at the end of 2025. This will put solar out of reach for many families, make electricity more expensive for everyone, and kill hundreds of thousands of jobs. We beat back an outrageous solar tax that snuck into the bill at the last minute. This is thanks to the tens of thousands of solar supporters like you who contacted lawmakers. If you're trying to go solar, any system that is paid for this calendar year will be eligible for the 30% tax credit.
We are committed to turn this short-term loss into long-term victory. It's important to thank lawmakers who supported our solar rights and to tell anti-solar officials that their constituents are watching and want them to do better. Please take a moment to send a personalized message. Just add your personal story as to why you care about solar energy. Take action: https://solarunitedneighbors.org/take-action/ Abby reported.

M. "Caught YOU Being Green" Engagement—Em Racine, Michelle Basta Both excused.

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

VI. Commission Comments **Beverly reminded us about MC Youth Leadership Project : Midnight HOOPS starting at the 'Y'. Larry announced a Sustainable Building Workshop to be held on Monday 8.11, 5 :30-7 :30 in the EOC Room at City Hall. It is open to all.**

VII. Public Comments **Visitor Bruce DeMedici expressed his concerns about the energy consumption of the new AI date centers in development in the region and its affect on residential customers.**

VIII. Announcements **Faye announced the NATIONAL NIGHT OUT event coming up. Abby reminded us about the weekly beach clean-ups on Mondays at 5:30.**

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/ Abby reported.

For information about Northwest Indiana Green Drinks, Thursday, August 7th, 6:30 pm, via Save the Dunes Facebook Live or Zoom link, contact: Em@savedunes.org. Topic may be on Soils and Sediments by representative of EPA once supervisory approval is obtained. This topic would be of local interest since Trail Creek runs through Michigan City which contributes not only cattle and fertilizer pollution to Lake Michigan, but sand and silt from farmlands as well. Abby reported.

XI. Adjournment **at 5:35**

Submitted by: Lawrence Zimmer, Secretary