

NIRPC Full Commission Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
Minutes of the January 16, 2025 Full Commission Meeting

Call to Order

Chair Tom Dermody called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

New Appointments to the Commission

Dave Hollenbeck announced the appointments to the Commission of Nicole Migliorini (Town of Burns Harbor), Courtney Parthun (City of La Porte), Edward Morales (Porter County Commissioner), and Christian Hendron, (Porter Township Trustee).

Roll Call - Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 32 Commissioners present at the meeting are listed below:

- Jenny Beier, Town of Schneider
- Thomas Black, Town of Highland
- Austin Bonta, City of Portage
- Robert Carnahan, Town of Cedar Lake
- Daina Dumbrys, Town of Michiana Shores
- Denise Ebert, Town of Wanatah
- Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor
- Connie Gramarossa, La Porte County Commissioner
- Keesha Hardaway, Town of Merrillville
- Vanessa Hernandez-Orange, City of East Chicago
- Josh Huddlestun, City of Hobart
- Lori Hunt, Town of Westville
- Justin Kiel, La Porte County Council
- Scott Kingan, Town of Ogden Dunes
- John Matwyshyn, La Porte County surveyor
- Nicole Migliorini, Town of Burns Harbor
- Wendy Mis, Town of Munster
- Edward Morales, Porter County Commissioner
- Angie Nelson Deutch, City of Michigan City
- David Phelps, Town of Beverly Shores
- Linda Pompeii, Town of Pottawattomie Park
- Lisa Rosenkranz, Town of LaCrosse
- Rick Ryfa, Town of Griffith
- Warren Schacht, Town of Trail Creek
- Tom Schmitt, Town of Schererville
- Steve Spebar, City of Whiting
- Sharon Szwedo, Town of New Chicago
- Mary Tanis, Town of Dyer
- Jim Ton, Town of Chesterton
- George Topoll, Union Township
- Andy Vasquez, Porter County Council
- John Yelkich, Town of Lowell

Matt Deitchley, representing INDOT, was also present

Absent

The 18 Commissioners absent at the meeting are listed below:

- Kyle Allen, Lake County Commissioner
- Duane Arndt, Town of Kingsford Heights
- Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor
- James Burge, Town of Porter
- Bill Carroll, City of Lake Station
- Tim Clayton, Town of Winfield
- Jon Costas, City of Valparaiso
- Jonathan Haley, Town of Long Beach
- Bonnie Hawksworth, Town of Dune Acres
- Christian Hendron, Porter Township Trustee
- Peter Land, City of Crown Point
- Eddie Melton, City of Gary
- Tom McDermott, City of Hammond
- Randall Niemeyer, Lake County Council
- Courtney Parthun, City of La Porte
- Jim Pressel, Governor Appointee
- Gerald Swets, Town of St. John
- CJ Wittmer, Town of Kouts

Hebron, Kingsbury, and The Pines have appointed no representatives to NIRPC.

Staff present included Ty Warner, Talaya Jones, Charles Bradsky, Denarie Kane, Flor Baum, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 5, 2024, Full Commission meeting were approved on motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Angie Nelson Deitrich.

Leadership – Ty Warner, Executive Director

Presentation of Norman E. Tufford Award: The Norman Tufford Award was initiated in 2011 by NIRPC's former executive director, John Swanson. This award recognizes Commissioners and NIRPC staff who have done extraordinary work in public service associated with NIRPC. Mr. Swanson presented the award to this year's recipient, Don Ensign, saying Don served at NIRPC for 13 years and was a member of the Executive Board and various other committees. Don was on the Hebron Town Council for 16 years, 12 as Council President, President of the Porter County Aging and Community Services, and the Vice-President of the Hebron Park District and Veteran's Memorial Parkway Community. Governor Holcomb honored Don with the prestigious Sagamore of the Wabash Award in 2020. Ty and John congratulated Mr. Ensign and thanked him for his years of service. Warner added that even in retirement, Don cares about his community and has stayed engaged with NIRPC. Don said he was honored to have worked with John and Ty, adding it was always a pleasure to be involved with NIRPC and the contacts that could be made at the Commission meetings.

Election of Officers and Executive Board: Self-introductions were made by the Commissioners before the proposed slate of officers for 2025 was discussed. Ty Warner said the nominating committee included Tom Dermody, Wendy Mis, and himself. All of the nominees were contacted before the meeting and agreed to serve on NIRPC's Executive Board this year. No additional nominations were made. On motion by Tom Schmitt and seconded by Justin Kiel, the Full Commission voted to adopt the 2025 slate as presented.

Wendy Mis, Clerk-Treasurer from Munster, was elected Chair for 2025. Austin Bonta, Mayor of Portage, was elected Vice Chair. Denise Ebert, Clerk-Treasurer from Wanatah, was elected Secretary, and David Phelps, Town Council President from Beverly Shores, was elected Treasurer.

Members elected to the Executive Board included Tom Schmitt (Schererville) and Bill Emerson (County Surveyor), representing Lake County; Clerk-Treasurer Lisa Rosenkranz (LaCrosse) and Clerk-Treasurer Courtney Parthun, representing La Porte County; and Kevin Breitzke (County Surveyor) and Councilman James Ton (Chesterton), representing Porter County. Jim Pressel, the Governor's appointee, has not managed to be present and requests have been made to the Governor that he be replaced on the Commission, with no response thus far.

With the approval of this year's new slate of officers, the gavel was exchanged from Mayor Dermody to Wendy Mis. Ty Warner stated that Mayor Dermody is a man of action and follows through on initiatives to completion. One example is when the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) attended a commission meeting because Mayor Dermody led the discussion with them when he heard the concerns of some of the communities with their audits. The meeting went very well and resulted in a positive outcome. Ty thanked Mayor Dermody for his service and presented him with the gavel plaque award. Mayor Dermody thanked everyone, saying it was an honor to serve as Chair of NIRPC last year, and asked the communities to continue doing what's best for the residents.

Ty Warner presented the perfect attendance awards, which have become a tradition at NIRPC. Certificates were awarded for attending all Commission meetings in 2024 or all four Full Commission meetings (if not on the Executive Board). The Commissioners who attended all Commission meetings were Bob Carnahan, Tom Schmitt, James Ton, Lisa Rosenkranz, and George Topoll. Jenny Beier, Austin Bonta, and Edward Morales were recognized for attending all Full Commission meetings.

Wendy Mis reported that the Leadership Committee met this morning to discuss the two items below, which are being recommended to the Full Commission for approval. Discussions also took place on this session's legislative initiative update for the federal and state governments

- Proposed 2025 Budget Amendments #1-3 Transfers Within Categories. The 2025 budget was approved at the Full Commission meeting last month, but new information has since been obtained. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Jim Ton, the Full Commission approved the 2025 budget amendments.
- New Three-Year Executive Director Employment Agreement. Wendy Mis reported three differences in this contract from previous contracts: A three-year agreement with three years of projected rate increases at 5% yearly, participation in the Lambda Alpha International Land Economics Society, and a sabbatical in 2026. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Austin Bonta, the Full Commission approved the three-year Executive Director employment agreement. It was noted that the Leadership Committee will form a group to discuss and formulate the specifics of the sabbatical. Andy Vasquez asked how long the sabbatical would be, and Wendy Mis stated it could be up to 10 weeks, but they would know for sure after further discussion with the Leadership Committee. Wendy concluded by saying Ty is doing a good job, and this contract amendment is doing what can be done to keep him employed at NIRPC longer.

Transportation – Jim Ton, Porter County Surveyor

Jim Ton reported the Transportation Committee met on January 7, 2025, and heard a presentation from NIRPC staff on the status of the Marquette Greenway Trail initiative. The trail is a 60-mile trail that stretches from Chicago to New Buffalo, Michigan. Currently, portions of the trail in Gary, Portage, and Michigan City are being implemented using RAISE grant funding. NIRPC was also awarded a \$20 million Lily Endowment Grant to design and implement connections between the trail, South Shore stations, and local communities. The next Transportation Committee is scheduled for February 4, 2025.

Resolution #25-01: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #24-02.1, 24-04.2, and #24-04.5. Charles Bradsky reported there were no comments received during the public comment period from the public or from the Interagency Consultation Group. The three amendments include projects for transit, air quality non-exempt, and exempt, totaling 150 projects. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Tom Schmitt, Resolution #25-01 was approved by the Full Commission.

INDOT - Matt Deitchley

Matt Deitchley reported that Mike Braun was sworn in as the new Governor of Indiana on January 13, 2025, resulting in structural changes at INDOT. Ken Abernathy is now the Commissioner of INDOT, and Matthew Ubelhor is now the Secretary of Transportation and Infrastructure.

The first call for Community Crossings applications for 2025 is open and will close on January 31, 2025. The maximum award will continue to be \$1.5 million for this calendar year. In 2024, \$340 million in statewide matching funds for Community Crossings were distributed. The Broadway Corridor study, which NIRPC also participated in, will wrap up this week, and preliminary findings will be distributed soon.

Economy & Place – Denarie Kane

Economic Development District Report

Ms. Kane reported the Economy and Place Committee met on January 8 and provided housing data, including wages needed to rent a two-bedroom home, average median income, and the increased density per acre recommended to meet the projected 2050 housing unit demand. In addition, a preliminary overview of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was presented. The committee decided Fintech, Quantum Communications, Decarbonization, Energy, and Bio-Tech industry clusters should be included in the CEDS. It will contain recommendations related to machinery and primary metals manufacturing and pharmaceutical research and manufacturing. Two special Committee meetings are scheduled for January 29 and February 14 at NIRPC to discuss the CEDS goals and plan. Ty noted the CEDS will be voted on at the Executive Board meeting on March 20, 2025, for final approval.

Presentation: Miah Michaelsen, Executive Director, Indiana Art Commission

Ty Warner introduced Miah Michaelsen, Executive Director of the Indiana Arts Commission. He said he was grateful she accepted his invitation to present today on arts and culture, which also syncs up with the IGNITE project the NWI Forum manages. The presentation “Why Arts and Creativity Belong in Every Community”

included a section on how this makes the residents more attached to their communities, including making them more likely to stay, volunteer, be civically engaged, and be philanthropic. Beautiful pictures were presented and shown from several states depicting how art has enhanced their communities' beauty, adding that arts, heritage, and history drive 68% of tourism. To view the presentation, click [HERE](#). Ms. Michaelsen also provided information on the two grant programs below:

- **Arts Project Support (APS)** grants provide awards up to \$4,000. No matching funds are required. The guidelines can be found [HERE](#). The informational webinar dates are January 28, 2025, 10:00 a.m. ET ([Register to attend](#)) and January 29, 2025, 6:00 p.m. ET ([Register to attend](#)).
- **Creative Convergence Workshop and Early Action Grant Program** award a \$10,000 early action grant for participating communities. The application opens in 2025.

You can email Miah Michaelsen at mmichaelsen@iac.in.gov for additional information.

ENVIRONMENT – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson announced the next Environment Committee meeting is February 6 at 10:00 a.m. He encouraged those interested in water, air, land use, and environmental issues to attend.

Other Business

No other business was reported.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan and Mayor Angie Nelson Deuitch announced various open job openings within their communities.

Hearing no other business, Wendy Mis adjourned the meeting at 10:14 a.m. The next meeting will be an Executive Board meeting on February 20, 2025.

The livestream video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Full Commission Meeting 1-16-25 \(youtube.com\)](#)