

NIRPC Full Commission Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
January 18, 2024 Minutes

Call to Order

Immediate Past Chair, Richard Hardaway, called the meeting to order at 9:09 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 Jenny Beier (Schneider), Mayor Austin Bonta (Portage), Bonnie Hawksworth (Dune Acres), Mayor Josh Huddlestun (Hobart), Kurt Jordan (Burns Harbor), Mary Tanis (Dyer), Andy Vasquez (Porter County Council), and CJ Wittmer (Kouts).

Roll call - Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 27 Commissioners present at the meeting included Kyle Allen (Lake County Commissioner), Jenny Beier (Schneider), Austin Bonta (Portage), Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), Bob Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Don Craft (Porter), Tom Dermody (La Porte), Daina Dumbrys (Michiana Shores), Denise Ebert (Wanatah), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), Bonnie Hawksworth (Dune Acres), Justin Kiel (LaPorte County Council), Peter Land (Crown Point), Lori Mercer (Westville), Edward Morales (Porter Township), Randall Neimeyer (Lake County Council), Barb Regnitz (Porter County Commissioner), Lisa Rosenkranz (La Crosse), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), Gerald Swets (St. John), Sharon Szwedo (New Chicago), Jim Ton (Chesterton), George Topoll (Union Township), Andy Vasquez (Porter County Council), CJ Wittmer (Kouts), and John Yelkich (Lowell). Also present was Matt Deitchley representing INDOT.

The 17 Commissioners absent included Duane Arndt (Kingsford Heights), Thomas Black (Highland), Bill Carroll (Lake Station), Tim Clayton (Winfield), Anthony Copeland (East Chicago), Connie Gramarossa (LaPorte County Council), Tony Hendricks (LaPorte County Surveyor), Josh Huddlestun (Hobart), Ellen Hundt (Beverly Shores), Scott Kingan (Ogden Dunes), Tom McDermott (Hammond), Wendy Mis (Munster), Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee), Regina Ruddell (Pottawattomie Park), Rick Ryfa (Griffith), Steve Spebar (Whiting), and Mary Tanis (Dyer).

Gary, Hebron, Kingsbury, Long Beach, Merrillville, Michigan City, The Pines, Trail Creek, and Valparaiso have appointed no representatives to NIRPC.

Staff present included Ty Warner, Tom Vander Woude, Kathy Luther, Charles Bradsky, Lisa Todd, Scott Weber, Denarie Kane, Kevin Polette, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Presentation of Norman E. Tufford Award – Ty Warner

The Norman Tufford Award “for exceptional dedication and service to NIRPC” was presented to David Hollenbeck, who has served as legal counsel to the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission since 1984. Mr. Hollenbeck has worked with all four NIRPC Executive Directors and has been involved in every significant regional project. Mr. Warner congratulated Mr. Hollenbeck and expressed the Commission’s sincere thanks for his service to NIRPC and the region.

Mr. Hollenbeck said it was a privilege to have had this opportunity of influence in NWI. He reiterated he’s worked with all four of NIRPC Executive Directors; Norm Tufford, Jim Ranfranz, John Swanson, and Ty Warner. He added it has been a pleasure and an honor to have been a small part of this organization over the last 40+ years.

A picture was taken of former NIRPC Chairmen, who joined Attorney David Hollenbeck as he received NIRPC’s Norman Tufford Award, including Michael Griffin (Highland), Jim Ton (Chesterton), Leigh Morris (La Porte), Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor, Richard Hardaway (Merrillville), Justin Kiel (La Porte County Council), former NIRPC Executive Director John Swanson, George Topoll (Union Township), and NIRPC Executive Director, Ty Warner.

Public Comment – There were no public comments.

Officers and Executive Board for 2024 – Tom Dermody

To celebrate his service as 2023 Chair, Ty Warner presented Richard Hardaway with the gavel plaque and thanked him for his service as Chairperson last year and for always being available and responsive. Richard Hardaway turned the gavel over to newly elected Chair, Tom Dermody. Mayor Dermody was thankful and said it was an honor to serve with Richard to get things done and he looks forward to that continuation.

Tom Dermody presented the recommendations of the Nominating Committee for 2024. No additional nominations were made. On motion by Gerald Swets and seconded by Kyle Allen, the Full Commission voted to adopt the 2024 slate as presented.

Elected as Chair for 2024 was Tom Dermody, Mayor of La Porte. Wendy Mis, Clerk-Treasurer was elected as Vice Chair and Justin Kiel, La Porte County Council, was elected as Secretary. Warner stated Wendy Mis has agreed to continue the function of Treasurer until the position is formally filled.

Members elected to the Executive Board included Tom Schmitt (Schererville) and Bill Emerson (County Surveyor), representing Lake County; Clerk-Treasurer Lisa Rosenkranz (La Crosse) and Clerk-Treasurer Denise Ebert (Wanatah), representing LaPorte County; and Kevin Breitzke (County Surveyor) and Councilman James Ton (Chesterton), representing Porter County. The continued appointment of Representative Jim Pressel as the Governor's appointee to the Executive Board is assumed.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the December 7, 2023 Full Commission meeting were approved on motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Kevin Breitzke.

Report of the Executive Director – Ty Warner

Ty Warner briefly discussed the 2024 Commission meeting schedule and thanked the City of Portage for supplying a police officer to be at the meeting to ensure a safe and secure environment for the elected officials. In an effort to support small businesses in NWI and provide good exposure, NIRPC is reaching out to some local roasters about providing coffee at the Full Commission meetings. The coffee today was graciously provided by Yaggy Road Roasting Co. in Valparaiso.

Mayor Tom Dermody, Wendy Mis, Justin Kiel, and Ty Warner will travel to Washington, D.C. next month for the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) conference. They will provide a report at the February meeting.

Resolution 23-16, approved last month, is in support of NIRPC's local appropriations adjustment. In order to operate, NIRPC receives local appropriations from each of the three counties that supplies the local share. There are additional federal funds NIRPC should be able to access but cannot because NIRPC is limited by how much local share it receives. NIRPC is the closest it has ever been to finally getting the appropriation adjusted. House Bill No. 1251, its Fiscal Impact Statement, and Resolution 23-16 documents were distributed at the meeting. Representative Hal Slager filed the House Bill and has requested support from the counties to know they are aware of and supportive of the impact on their future budgeting. The increase in the per capita appropriation would not go into effect until 2025. La Porte County had their organizational meeting this month and supported the request, but scheduling issues have made it difficult to get on the agendas of Lake and Porter Counties.

Warner recognized perfect attendance at all of the Commission meetings in 2023. Those acknowledged were Bob Carnahan, Don Craft, Denise Ebert, Bill Emerson, Richard Hardaway, Ellen Hundt, Jane Jordan, Justin Kiel, Sue Lynch, Wendy Mis, Tom Schmitt, Jim Ton, and George Topoll. Mr. Warner also recognized Thomas Black, Daina Dumbrys, Jack Jeralds, and Edward Morales for attending all of the Full Commission meetings.

Finance & Personnel Committee (F & P) – Tom Dermody

Tom Dermody reported the F & P Committee met this morning to review the financial reports, bank reconciliations, and claims registers for November 2023. The F&P Committee brought the action item below to the Full Commission for approval to execute the contract for the Marquette Greenway project for Butler, Fairman and Seufert, Inc. (BFS).

1. Marquette Greenway Project Contract: Charles Bradsky presented stating while the content, terms, and amounts remain the same as what was in the packet, INDOT requires the contract be entered in their

template because they are the pass-thru on this contract. This was an unforeseen occurrence that was brought to NIRPC's attention yesterday and BFS immediately updated the contract with INDOT's template. A deep dive into the updated contract has not been completed but is believed the monetary amount and overall scope will remain the same. The contract stemmed from FHWA requesting NIRPC hire a consultant to be the project manager since NIRPC does not handle, nor is equipped, to plan and execute infrastructure projects. Since the contract was updated last night, Dave Hollenbeck stated he has not reviewed the new contract in its new form. On motion by Justin Kiel and seconded by Bill Emerson, the Full Commission approved the contract contingent on the approval of NIRPC's attorney and INDOT.

2. NIRPC Building Lease: Dave Hollenbeck presented stating the lease expired on December 31, 2023. A 30-day extension on the current lease has been secured and he feels confident the details can be worked out towards the end of January. On motion by Barb Regnitz and seconded by Kevin Breitzke, the Full Commission delegated the aspects of the lease that need attention to Tom Dermody, Ty Warner, and Dave Hollenbeck.

Technical Planning Committee (TPC) – Kevin Breitzke

Kevin Breitzke reported the TPC met on January 9, 2024 and heard a presentation on the Land Use and Housing chapter of *NWI 2050+*. The TPC brought the action item below to the Full Commission for approval. The next TPC meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2024.

- Resolution #24-01: Scott Weber presented the Safety Performance Measure Targets for 2024. These targets are federally required to be included in NIRPC's core planning documents; *NWI 2050+* and the 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program. The TPC recommended NIRPC adopting INDOT's statewide safety performance measure targets. On motion by Jim Ton and Seconded by Justin Kiel, the Full Commission approved Resolution #24-01.

Economic Development District Report – Denarie Kane

Ms. Kane reported she will be learning about the "Make My Move" business program to gain knowledge about financial participation available to communities from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). This program is designed to attract remote workers as new residents and is an action item in NIRPC's *Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan*. Ms. Kane continues to have ongoing discussions with the new Economic Development Representative for Indiana, Ellen Heinze, about potential EDA grant applications. Mr. Warner stated he also met with Ms. Heinz recently while in Indianapolis. Ms. Kane will be attending 10 sessions on revolving loan programs, which she feels will be beneficial when the *Recover NWI* loan program is available again.

NIRPC serves as an Economic Support Organization, so Ms. Kane is participating in monthly calls with the IEDC on entrepreneurship support topics and programs. IEDC has opened applications for technical assistance for small businesses through their INTAP program and launched an online entrepreneurship website. It was suggested communities alert their Chambers of Commerce and businesses to both resources. It was noted the READI 2.0 applications are due to the Northwest Indiana Forum tomorrow.

INDOT – Matt Deitchley

Matt Deitchley stated he appreciates the partnership with communities in snow operations. INDOT has been working 24/7 with snow removal efforts since last week. To view live snowplow camera's and see road conditions visit, 511in.org

The first call for Community Crossings applications for 2024 is open and will close on January 31, 2024. Matt discussed the new pilot program which will include the maximum award being increased to \$1.5 million from \$1 million for this calendar year.

Other Business

Kathy Luthy reported there are two opportunities for energy projects for communities or government facilities. The first is for the Office of Energy Development for projects costing between \$100,000-\$200,000 and would be for fleet electrification and energy efficiency. Secondly, IDEM is applying to a federal Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG). Cities and towns can apply to IDEM for projects including fleet electrification, energy efficiency, and solar. The application is to include detailed costs and benefits and is due at the end of February. If successful, IDEM will submit to the EPA April 1st with the projects starting in October. No match required for inclusion in state application for federal funds.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan relayed announcements of various events in Cedar Lake, including they have a new Town Manager, Jeff Bunge, who started earlier this month.

Reggie Korthals announced there will be an MS4 certification training program for all contractors and developers on March 8, 2024 from 7:00 am – 12:30 pm at the Gary Career Center.

Hearing no other business, Tom Dermody adjourned the meeting at 10:25 a.m. The next meeting on February 15 will be Executive Board meeting.

The livestream video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Full Commission Meeting 1-18-24 \(youtube.com\)](#)