

**Environment Committee**  
Lake Michigan Room  
November 6, 2025

**Minutes**

Commissioner David Phelps called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

In attendance were:

Katherine Balkema, DNR; Reggie Korthals, MS4; Susan MiHalo, The Nature Conservancy; Nancy Moldenhauer, Michigan City Council; Ryan Lisek, Drive Clean Indiana; Chris Li, Drive Clean Indiana; Jacob Nieto, Save the Dunes; Katie Hobgood, Save the Dunes; Ellen Kapitan, City of Valparaiso; Connie Wachala, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability; Cathy Perrin, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability; Jenny Dimitroff, Porter Sustainability Commission; Doug Ross, Kathy Sipple, Earth Charter Indiana; Kay Nelson, NWI Forum; Jake Cseke; Hobart; Julia Carillo, BF&S

NIRPC staff present were Kathy Luther, Jen Birchfield, Meredith Stillwell, Denarie Kane, Tom Vander Wood. Fellow Celena Green was also in attendance.

On motion by Reggie Korthals, seconded by Ryan Lisek, the August 7, 2025 meeting minutes were approved.

**Public Comments**

Connie Wachala shared comments about a Sustainable Steel Cohort. She noted the Steel industry is important in NWI and needs to be modernized. Connie asked if Gary Advocates for Responsible Development (GARD) can be on the next Environment Committee Agenda to present on the initiative.

Susan MiHalo shared that The Nature Conservancy will be planting 100 trees in Gary City Parks over the next two weekends with the Student Conservation Association with funding from DNR Community and urban Forestry. She distributed a flyer.

**Brownfield Action in NWI- Kathy Luther**

Kathy Luther presented on Brownfield action in NWI.

David Phelps asked how NIRPC targets sites. Kathy answered that in the first grant we let local government suggest sites to us. In the second we focused on development potential. Now the focus is on the Quantum Corridor.

Kay Nelson noted that the property owner must be willing and we must work with municipal departments to prioritize. It is very time-consuming and challenging.

David said it would be helpful to get TDD communities together regarding brownfields.

Reggie Korthals said the role for NIRPC is education to help elected officials understand their role.

**Brownfields as Economic Opportunity, Redevelopment Barriers and Strategies**

Celena Green, Economic Recovery Corps Fellow, presented.

A Gary Townmakers workshop will be held November 14 at IUN.

Nancy Moldenhauer said Michigan City gets information from the Redevelopment Commission, Planning Department, Economic Development Corporation, and internet research.

Susan MiHalo noted that Delta Institute did a study of vacant land in Gary. That was used, but administrations can change focus areas. Was green infrastructure and offsetting stormwater considered? Luther responded that the project is trying to incorporate previous work, but that this wasn't the focus of Celena's work, but discussed in a prior grant that green infrastructure and protecting natural resources was a scoring point in selecting sites.

Hoosier Environmental Council made a guide on data centers, but there is nothing on quantum.

Jake Cseke noted that citizens do not have much time to review plans before meetings. It is a struggle to get clear information and to know the intentions.

Kathy suggested a possible Quantum workshop in off months of Environment Committee meetings.

### **NIRPC Projects and Programs**

Jen reported that NIRPC awarded 487 trees this fall. In total, CommuniTree partners have planted nearly 14,000 trees since 2027.

Kathy reported that the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan for the Chicago metropolitan area has been completed and submitted to EPA. NIRPC will be updating the Greenhouse Gas Inventory.

### **Planning Partner Updates**

Drive Clean Indiana distributed their report.

Lake Michigan Coastal Program's grants are open and accepting preproposals until Friday, December 5. Categories are conservation (acquisition or restoration) and public access. Workshops will be held.

### **Announcements**

Reggie Korthals announced a NISWAG contractor's training.

Nancy Moldenhauer announced Green Drinks tonight featuring Dr. John Lowe on Indian American history. You can join via Save the Dunes' Facebook or a Zoom link from [em@savedunes.org](mailto:em@savedunes.org).

Susan MiHalo moved to adjourn the meeting. Reggie Korthals seconded. The meeting was adjourned.

The next Environment Committee meeting is slated for February 5, 2026, at the NIRPC offices.