

NIRPC Executive Board Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
February 15, 2024 Minutes

Call to Order

Chair Tom Dermody called the meeting to order at 9:01 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 James Burge (Porter), Jonathan Haley (Long Beach), Keesha Hardaway (Merrillville), Vanessa Hernandez-Orange (East Chicago), and David Phelps (Beverly Shores).

Roll call - Taken by Candice Eklund.

Present

The 8 Executive Board members present at the meeting included Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), Tom Dermody (La Porte), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), Justin Kiel (La Porte County Council), Wendy Mis (Munster), Lisa Rosenkranz (LaCrosse), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), and Jim Ton (Chesterton).

The 4 other Commissioners present at the meeting included James Burge (Porter), Robert Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Kurt Jordan (Burns Harbor), and George Topoll (Union Township). Also present was Adam Parkhouse representing INDOT.

Absent

The 2 Executive Board members absent from the meeting included Denise Ebert (Wanatah) and Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee).

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

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

Public Comment – There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the January 18, 2024, Full Commission meeting were approved on motion by Bill Emerson and seconded by Jim Ton.

Report of the Chair – Tom Dermody

Tom Dermody reported he attended the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) conference this week and turned further reporting over to Mr. Warner.

Report of the Executive Director - Ty Warner

Ty Warner appreciated Tom Dermody, Justin Kiel, and Wendy Mis attending the NARC Conference of Regions in Washington, DC this year. Warner reported that one of the primary focus areas was on transportation and laying the groundwork now for the re-authorization of the next transportation bill. This new legislation will come up in two years and there is still no sustainable source of funding for the Highway Trust Fund program yet. This funds all the projects that come through NIRPC's normal transportation funding programs and is currently funded by the gas tax, which has not changed since 1993. There is a huge movement to try and replace that allocation with a mileage-based user fee, also known as a Road User Charge, moving away from the dependence on the gas tax. The group attending the NARC conference also discussed the ongoing issues with blocked railroad crossings, stating that although some efforts have been made in Hammond since the ProPublica article capturing on video school children crawling under railroad cars, it continues to be a problem to find effective solutions, and congressional help will be needed to bring those class 1 railroads to the table for discussion. Thirdly, the group discussed the Calumet National Heritage Area, where NIRPC has passed a resolution in support of this initiative but has so far not been introduced.

Wendy Mis reported the NARC conference offered great information and felt the sessions were helpful from both the municipalities and the MPOs points of view and appreciated the opportunity to attend. Tom Dermody reported La Porte County has had dealings with the Norfolk and Southern Railroad, who has not shown interest in participating as a good community partner, but noted the top administration in La Porte County is meeting with the CEO of Norfolk and Southern Railroad today. Justin Kiel reported he had the opportunity to moderate a panel where the Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration was speaking and was able to talk with him regarding the issues La Porte is facing with the railroads.

Ty Warner provided an update on House Bill 1251 that would increase the local appropriations NIRPC receives from the counties that has not changed since 1992. Representative Hal Slager introduced House Bill 1251 and asked to receive resolutions of support from Lake, La Porte, and Porter Counties to ensure they are aware of and in agreement with increasing the appropriation to NIRPC. La Porte County approved the request in January. Lake and Porter Counties also approved the request but with two stipulations; (1) increase the appropriations \$0.16 a year for five years (2025-2029) to phase in the increase to \$1.50 per capita, and (2) re-visit the counties for any additional appropriation increase once the per capita amount reaches \$1.50 in 2029. Warner is thankful for the support from all three counties and the value the counties are seeing from NIRPC. Hal Slager is now seeking to attach the language in House Bill 1251 to a similar bill from the Senate.

Denarie Kane reported NIRPC will be getting a Fellow through the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). NIRPC received notification last week that they were 1 of 65 organizations across the country selected for this inaugural Economic Recovery Corps program. The EDA is funding the \$30 million program and will offset the cost of the Fellow for two and a half years to a host organization. The Fellow selected for NIRPC is Celena Green, who will be working on in-depth research on vacant and brownfield sites within a certain proximity of Lake County. Kathy Luther attended training in Portland, Oregon to be a host organization and Ms. Kane attended virtually.

Charles Bradsky announced there will be a New Administration Workshop at NIRPC on February 29 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The workshop will focus on how NIRPC administers federal funds, disburses federal funds, and submitting Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) applications. A registration form to sign up for the workshop will be sent out tomorrow.

Environmental Management Policy Committee (EMPC) – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson reported the EMPC met on February 1, 2024. Kathy Luther added there was a presentation on the *Sensible Tools Handbook* +. A summary was provided on the different climate planning and climate grants available at the state and metropolitan area levels. Kathy also noted there will be a working group meeting on March 7 at 9:00 a.m. to focus on the NOFA to discuss funding categories and projects that the EMPC will rank for their committee. The next EMPC meeting will be held on May 2, 2024.

Finance & Personnel Committee (F & P) – Wendy Mis

Wendy Mis reported the F&P Committee did not meet this month. The Full Commission gave authority to Attorney Dave Hollenbeck and Executive Director Ty Warner at the Full Commission meeting last month to continue the lease negotiations and execute the new lease on the Commission's behalf. Attorney Hollenbeck reported NIRPC now has an approved five-year lease, which includes some additions such as the Portage Redevelopment Commission (RDC) will be responsible for changing the American and State flags in the courtyard. The approved lease will now include the utilities being factored into the lease, eliminating utility invoices, which were quite inconsistent in the past. Warner noted the City of Portage RDC approved a comprehensive mold assessment to ensure the building is safe for staff to occupy. The next F&P meeting is scheduled for March 21, 2024.

Technical Planning Committee (TPC) - Kevin Breitzke

Kevin Breitzke reported the TPC met on February 6, 2024, and heard a presentation on the Roads chapter of *NWI 2050+*. The TPC brought the two action items below to the Executive Board for consideration with a favorable recommendation. The next TPC meeting is scheduled for March 5, 2024.

- Resolution #24-02: Air Quality Conformity Determination (AQCD) report for *NWI 2050+* and FY 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): Scott Weber reported there were no public comments received. The *NWI 2050+* and the Fiscal Years 2024-2028 TIP were adopted last year. Before the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) can officially approve these core documents for use in administering federal aid funding, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) must approve

the AQCD report because portions of our region are designated non-attainment for ozone under the Clean Air Act by the United State Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). The TPC requested approval of this resolution subject there are no adverse comments received during the public comment period ending February 20, with an effective date of March 19. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Bill Emerson, the Executive Board approved Resolution #24-02.

- Resolution #24-03: FY 2024 – 2028 TIP Amendment #24-01: Charles Bradsky reported there were no public comments received. The Inter Agency Consultation Group (ICG) submitted questions and NIRPC addressed each question. Approval and concurrence were given for these projects by members of the ICG on January 18, 2024. Bradsky briefly discussed the summary of projects in TIP Amendment #24-01, which is subject to FHWA and USEPA approving NIRPC's Air Quality Conformity Determination on March 19, 2024. On motion by Kevin Breitzke and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution #24-03.

INDOT – Adam Parkhouse

Adam Parkhouse reported INDOT organized a statewide Safety Summit in Indianapolis last month, which was in response to Commissioner Mike Schmitt's state goal to reduce fatal crashes and serious injury crashes along Indiana Roadways by 25% over the next 10 years. In the coming months, INDOT will hold similar summits at the district level. Parkhouse also addressed the potholes situation that has had a substantial impact on our roadways and how they are working around the clock to fill them in. Kevin Breitzke invited INDOT to give an updated presentation on the Borman Expressway since it is a MEGA project and Parkhouse agreed.

Other Business

No other business was reported.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan announced Cedar Lake met with Lowell's Town Council (due to Cedar Lake sending their sewage to Lowell) where they were informed the expansion of the sewage plant may cost the Towns of Cedar Lake and Lowell \$35-\$40 million. Carnahan asked if anyone knew of any federal grants to help the towns reduce this burden on the residents.

Adjournment

Hearing no other business, Tom Dermody adjourned the meeting at 9:52 a.m. The next meeting on March 21, 2024, will be an Executive Board meeting.

The livestream video recording of this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Executive Board Meeting 2-15-24 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)