

NIRPC Executive Board Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
Minutes of the March 19, 2026, Executive Board Meeting

Call to Order

Chair Wendy Mis called the meeting to order at 9:04 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 Lori Latham (City of Gary), Larry Colley (Town of Pottawattomie Park), Annette Ludwig (Town of Dyer), Jim Biggs (Porter County Commission), and Joe Haney (La Porte County Commission).

Roll Call - Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 9 Commissioners on the Executive Board in attendance are listed below:

- Austin Bonta, City of Portage
- Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor
- Denise Ebert, Town of Wanatah
- Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor
- Wendy Mis, Town of Munster
- Courtney Parthun, City of La Porte
- David Phelps, Town of Beverly Shores
- Tom Schmitt, Town of Schererville
- Jim Ton, Town of Chesterton

Absent

- Robert Ordway, Governor's Appointee

Note: Lisa Rosenkranz has stepped off the Executive Board but remains a commissioner representing the Town of La Crosse on the Full Commission. A new representative on the Executive Board from La Porte County is nominated with the 2026 Executive Board slate that is pending a quorum of the Full Commission.

The 11 other Commissioners present at the meeting are listed below:

- Jenny Beier, Town of Schneider
- Jim Burge, Town of Porter
- Bob Carnahan, Town of Cedar Lake
- Daine Dumbrys, Town of Michiana Shores
- Joe Haney, La Porte County Commission
- Keesha Hardaway, Town of Merrillville
- Colleen Lane, Town of Long Beach
- Lori Latham, City of Gary
- John Matwyshyn, La Porte County Surveyor
- George Topoll, Union Township
- Andy Vasquez, Porter County Council

Adam Parkhouse, representing INDOT, was also present

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

Staff present included Ty Warner, Tom Vander Woude, Charles Bradsky, Meredith Stilwell, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the February 19, 2026, Executive Board meeting were approved on motion by Kevin Breitzke and seconded by Jim Ton.

Leadership – Wendy Mis, Town of Munster

The Commissioners with perfect attendance in 2025 were announced at last month's meeting, as documented in the February 19 meeting minutes, and were recognized today with their attendance certificates.

Ty Warner addressed the discussions regarding Commissioner attendance at the February meeting and shared his feedback. He outlined the current procedures for supporting and encouraging attendance at every Commission meeting, emphasizing the expectation that all Commissioners attend the four Full Commission meetings each year – just one meeting per quarter – and that Executive Board members attend all meetings. The current procedures supporting attendance are:

- **Welcome Letter** – Sent to each newly appointed Commissioner, the letter provides links to key informational items on NIRPC's website, including the annual meeting schedule, and conveys the expectation that Commissioners attend the four quarterly Full Commission meetings each year, while also welcoming them to attend Executive Board meetings.
- **Orientation** (occasional) – While new commissioner orientations have been offered in the past, it has been several years since one was held. This practice will be revitalized to better support new Commissioners.
- **Meeting Notice** – NIRPC uses Constant Contact to send meeting notifications to all Commissioners one week prior to each Commission meeting. This notice includes two RSVP voting buttons for Commissioners to indicate their attendance. Their response helps NIRPC determine whether a quorum will be met and whether a meeting should proceed or be canceled. The system also confirms receipt when the notice was received and opened. A link to the meeting materials is also included in the notification.
- **Follow-up Contact** – If an RSVP is not submitted, Candice Eklund sends a follow-up email three days before the meeting. If there is still no response, a phone call is made the following day. Warner emphasized that with 53 members on the commission, these follow-up efforts can become quite burdensome if there is a lack of response.
- **Minutes Tracking** – Attendance is recorded in the meeting minutes, noting who was present and absent. When a commissioner has missed more than three Full Commission meetings, this is tracked in accordance with Indiana Code 36-7-7.6-5(h), and an asterisk is placed next to their name.
- **Notification to Appointing Authority** – If a Commissioner is absent for three consecutive Full Commission meetings, Indiana Code mandates that the Commission shall notify the Commissioner's appointing authority and request that they either (1) replace the member or (2) take action to ensure the member's conscientious attendance at meetings of the Full Commission.
- **Attendance Awards** – Commissioners are recognized for their commitment to attendance, whether they attend all four quarterly Full Commission meetings or attend all Full Commission and Executive Board meetings within a calendar year.
- **New Practice Beginning for the April 19 Full Commission Meeting** – After each meeting, Candice Eklund will send direct calendar invites for the next meeting. Invitations will be sent to all Commissioners and their administrative assistants for the Full Commission meeting. Invites will be sent only to Executive Board members for Executive Board meetings.

Bill Emerson asked whether NIRPC would award points for attendance at committee meetings as part of the project review criteria for scoring in this year's NOFA. NIRPC staff answered affirmatively. Adam Parkhouse, INDOT, shared that MACOG allows virtual attendance to count for voting only when a quorum of in-person attendees is not met, but, given MACOG has fewer members, this rarely occurs. He also noted that MACOG added INDOT as a voting member; however, implementing changes to voting members of the NIRPC Commission would require changes to NIRPC's state statute. Ty explained that when the Indiana State Legislature adopted provisions for virtual meeting participation following the COVID pandemic, the virtual participation requirements were considered, but the consensus at the time was that, with 53 Commissioners, ensuring compliance with legislative requirements would be overly burdensome.

Currently, four towns have no appointed Commissioner: Hebron, Kingsbury, Lowell, and Pines. It was discussed that if Commissioners knew members of these Town Councils, would they be willing to personally encourage them to make appointments? Joe Haney offered to reach out to the Town of Kingsbury regarding

their appointment. Ty invited additional feedback on his discussion and provided his phone number for those who would like to share comments directly with him.

Ty reminded the Commissioners that the new slate of officers for 2026 will be voted on by the Full Commission at the April meeting, and he thanked Wendy Mis and Austin Bonta for collaborating on the best timing for holding a vote. In addition, the Tufford Award recipient will be presented at the April meeting.

Transportation – Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor

Kevin Breitzke reported that the Transportation Committee met on March 3, 2026, where they heard a presentation on the Gary Elevated Project, a proposed 3.8-mile bike trail. The next Transportation Committee meeting is scheduled for April 7, 2026.

Tom Vander Woude presented Resolutions #26-04 and #26-05 together, explaining that both resolutions amend NIRPC's core planning documents to update how changes to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) are processed. Each resolution was then voted on separately.

- **Resolution #26-04:** Amend *Engage NWI*; Updates how NIRPC engages with the public and stakeholders. *Engage NWI* currently contains the definitions and thresholds for TIP revisions; the amendment removes those definitions and thresholds.
- **Resolution #26-05;** Incorporates the revised definitions and thresholds for amendments and administrative modifications directly into the TIP document.

When NIRPC completed its federal certification review and received the final report in November 2025, the federal review team recommended that the TIP document include the thresholds that distinguish an administrative modification from an amendment. An amendment is a significant change requiring public comment and Commission approval. An administrative modification is a minor change that does not require public comment and can be approved administratively. The federal review also noted that NIRPC's modification thresholds differ from those used by INDOT for changes to the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which can delay processing of their project changes. NIRPC recognized the need to update cost-change criteria within the TIP to reflect costs that have increased due to inflation. Currently, any project cost change exceeding \$100,000 is classified as an amendment; changes under this threshold are an administrative modification. Tom explained that the proposed changes clarify definitions and revise the thresholds. Resolution #26-04 removes these definitions from *Engage NWI*, and Resolution #26-05 places them in the TIP document.

The Transportation Resources Oversight Committee (TROC) voted to recommend these thresholds to the Transportation Committee at their meeting on January 21, 2026, suggesting these thresholds be reviewed every two years and that a list of completed administrative modifications be provided to the Transportation Committee at each meeting. The Transportation Committee recommended approval of both resolutions at their meeting on March 3, 2026. On motion by Jim Ton, seconded by David Phelps, the Executive Board approved Resolution #26-04. On motion by David Phelps and seconded by Bill Emerson, the Executive Board approved Resolution #26-05.

INDOT – Adam Parkhouse

Adam Parkhouse reported that the environmental document for the Flex Road project was approved in February. The Flex Road project is scheduled for completion in 2029. The freeze/thaw road conditions have created many problems and potholes, which can be reported on INDOT's website at [855-INDOT4u](https://www.in.gov/indot/855-INDOT4u). The 112th Purdue Road School was held this week.

Economy & Place – George Topoll, Union Township

George Topoll reported that the next Economy & Place has not been scheduled yet.

Environment – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson reported that the next Environment meeting is scheduled for May 7.

Other Business

Jim Ton commended Ty Warner for handling a very difficult, hard-to-approach subject of attendance, and he appreciated his leadership skills.

Announcements

John Matwyszyn reported that Governor Braun announced the availability of \$1 billion to enhance the Agricultural Biology industry and related areas. The objective is to increase participation in this industry by 100,000 people. Bob Carnahan shared that the Cedar Lake Town Council is concerned about the number of Illinois-registered vehicles whose owners are living in Cedar Lake. Austin Bonta discussed the Wheels Tax in Portage and efforts to explore ways it could potentially be connected to utilities.

Ty Warner concluded the meeting by noting that the Northwest Indiana Times began their annual Progress edition cycle last Sunday, and that copies of the guest article he was invited to write were available in the lobby. Times staff also wrote an extensive article in that edition covering NIRPC's role in developing the Marquette Greenway trail. He also announced that Lisa Rosenkranz would be stepping down from the Executive Board while continuing to serve on the Commission, and that Joe Haney has been nominated as the La Porte County Representative. Ty thanked Fluid Coffee Roasters for providing the coffee at today's meeting

Hearing no other business, Wendy Mis adjourned the meeting at 10:31 a.m. The next meeting will be a Full Commission meeting on April 16, 2026. The remaining Full Commission meetings for 2026 are scheduled for July 17 and November 10.

The livestream video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [March 19, 2026 Commission Meeting](#).