

NIRPC Full Commission Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
Minutes of the April 16, 2026 Full Commission Meeting

Call to Order

Chair Wendy Mis called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

New Appointments to the Commission

Dave Hollenbeck announced the appointments of Anthony Ferraro (Governor's Appointee) and Phillip Kuiper (Town of Lowell).

Roll Call—Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 35 Commissioners present at the meeting are listed below:

- Jim Biggs, Porter County Commissioner
- Thomas Black, Town of Highland
- Austin Bonta, City of Portage
- Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor
- James Burge, Town of Porter
- Robert Carnahan, Town of Cedar Lake
- Larry Colley, Town of Pottawattomie Park
- Jon Costas, City of Valparaiso
- Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor
- Anthony Ferraro, Governor's Appointee
- Joe Haney, La Porte County Commissioner
- Keesha Hardaway, Town of Merrillville
- Christian Hendron, Porter Township Trustee
- Lori Hunt, Town of Westville
- Scott Kingan, Town of Ogden Dunes
- Peter Land, City of Crown Point
- Colleen Lane, Town of Long Beach
- Lori Latham, City of Gary
- Annette Ludwig, Town of Dyer
- John Matwyszyn, La Porte County Surveyor
- Tom McDermott, City of Hammond
- Jack McGraw, Town of Burns Harbor
- Wendy Mis, Town of Munster
- Randell Niemeyer, Lake County Council
- Courtney Parthun, City of La Porte
- David Phelps, Town of Beverly Shores
- Rick Ryfa, Town of Griffith
- Warren Schacht, Town of Trail Creek
- Tom Schmitt, Town of Schererville
- John Schoon, Town of Kouts
- Gerald Swets, Town of St. John
- Sharon Szwedow, Town of New Chicago
- Jim Ton, Town of Chesterton
- George Topoll, Union Township
- Andy Vasquez, Porter County Council

Absent

The 15 Commissioners absent from the meeting are listed below:

- Kyle Allen, Lake County Commissioner *
- Duane Arndt, Town of Kingsford Heights *
- Jenny Beier, Town of Schneider
- Bill Carroll, City of Lake Station *
- Jon Derwinski, Town of Winfield
- Daina Dumbrys, Town of Michiana Shores
- Denise Ebert, Town of Wanatah
- Bonnie Hawksworth, Town of Dune Acres *
- Vanessa Hernandez Orange, City of East Chicago
- Josh Huddlestun, City of Hobart
- Justin Kiel, La Porte County Council *
- Phillip Kuiper, Town of Lowell
- Angie Nelson Deutch, City of Michigan City
- Lisa Rosenkranz, Town of LaCrosse
- Steve Spebar, City of Whiting

* Absent for 3 or more consecutive Full Commission meetings: see Indiana Code 36-7-7.6-5 (h).

Adam Parkhouse, representing INDOT, was also present.

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

Staff present included Ty Warner, Talaya Jones, Tom Vander Woude, Kathy Luther, Charles Bradsky, Denarie Kane, Eman Ibrahim, Marisol Manley, Mitch Barloga, Meredith Stilwell, and Candice Eklund.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the March 19, 2026, Executive Board meeting were approved on motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Andy Vasquez.

Leadership – Austin Bonta, Portage Mayor

Presentation of Norman E. Tufford Award

Ty Warner explained that the Tufford Award honors NIRPC's first Executive Director, Norman Tufford, and announced that this year's recipient was Leigh Morris, recognized for his distinguished career and significant contributions to Northwest Indiana. Mr. Morris's career highlights included serving as President and CEO of La Porte Hospital, Mayor of La Porte, former NIRPC Chair, Chair of the Regional Development Authority (RDA), and Senior Vice President of the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). Mr. Morris expressed his appreciation for the award, noting that it was especially meaningful coming from NIRPC. He remarked that he was not aware of another organization where a board of 53 members, representing diverse and at times competing or politically opposing governmental units, could successfully fulfill its mission with such positive impacts on our region. He stated that many of NIRPC's accomplishments were made possible through strong vision and leadership, crediting Norman Tufford, Jim Ranfranz, John Swanson, and Ty Warner for their service as Executive Directors. He also credited the supportive staff for making a significant difference in the region. Mr. Morris thanked those involved in the selection of this award and acknowledged the presence of his wife, Marcia, and concluded by saying, "Onward and upward, NIRPC."

Staff Recognition - Ty Warner and Austin Bonta recognized Marisol Manley, Accounting Assistant, for her 5-year milestone service at NIRPC.

Election of Officers & Executive Board

Wendy Mis read the proposed slate of officers for 2026 that is being voted on today. On motion by Andy Vasquez and seconded by George Topoll, the Full Commission voted to adopt the 2026 slate as presented.

Elected as Chair for 2026 was Austin Bonta, Mayor of Portage. Denise Ebert, Clerk-Treasurer (Wanatah), was elected as Vice Chair. Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor) was elected as Treasurer, and David Phelps, Town Council President (Beverly Shores), was elected as Secretary.

Members elected to the Executive Board included Councilman Tom Schmitt (Schererville) and Clerk-Treasurer Wendy Mis (Munster), representing Lake County; County Commissioner, Joe Haney and Clerk-Treasurer Courtney Parthun, representing La Porte County; and Kevin Breitzke (County Surveyor) and Councilman James Ton (Chesterton), representing Porter County. The Governor's appointee to the Executive Board is Anthony Ferraro.

Wendy Mis continued the tradition of passing the gavel to the new NIRPC Chair, Austin Bonta. Ty Warner presented Wendy Mis with the Chair plaque, saying she has been a delight to work with as Chair, she has been wholeheartedly committed to NIRPC, and has always wanted to do what was best for NIRPC. Wendy Mis will remain on the Executive Board this year.

A photo was taken of past NIRPC Chairpersons in attendance: Geoff Benson, Kevin Breitzke, Jon Costas, Richard Hardaway, Tom McDermott, Wendy Mis, Brian Snedecor, Jim Ton, and George Topoll. Tom Dermody and Leigh Morris were also in attendance but were not pictured, as they had departed earlier. Ty Warner thanked all of the past Chairpersons for their commitment and service.

Wendy Mis reported that the Leadership Committee met this morning to discuss the three items below, which were being recommended to the Full Commission for approval.

- **Procurement Recommendation:** This is to purchase 18 vehicles for the transit subrecipients. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Jim Ton, the Full Commission approved the procurement.
- **Resolution #26-06: US Economic Development Association (EDA) Planning Partnership.** This planning partnership authorizes the resubmission of the application, allowing for a 3-year extension. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Jack McGraw, the Full Commission approved Resolution #26-06.

- **Contract: Corradino LLC – 2026 Road Safety Audits.** Tom Vander Woude presented on this contract agreement for Road Safety Audits (RSAs) in the amount of \$77,485.41 to be used to complete a series of road safety audits throughout NWI. The audits will begin this spring, with completed reports being available this fall. On motion by Bob Carnahan and seconded by Jim Ton, the Full Commission approved this contract.

Transportation – Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor

Kevin Breitzke reported that the Transportation Committee met on April 7, 2026, where they heard presentations on the development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update and the regional truck parking study. The next meeting is scheduled on May 5, 2026.

The Transportation Committee recommended the resolution below to the Full Commission.

- **Resolution #26-07: FY 2027-2028 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).**
Tom Vander Woude reported that the UPWP is required by the U.S. Department of Transportation for NIRPC in its role as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The UPWP outlines how NIRPC's federal transportation planning funds will be used to carry out the region's MTP and details the planning tasks to be completed during the fiscal year. It is the financial planning document linking work activities to funding sources. The two priorities implemented in the UPWP are the locally and regionally identified issues through the MPT, and federally and state-identified planning emphasis areas. The major focus in FY 2027 will be on developing the MTP update, and in FY 2028, on implementing the MTP. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Bill Emerson, the Full Commission approved resolution #26-07.

Kevin Breitzke concluded his report, saying Carl Lisek, Drive Clean Indiana, reported on the available grant cycle at the Transportation Committee meeting, and Kelly Wenger, NICTD, reported that the Monon Corridor is now open. Ty added that though it is often overlooked because it happened years ago, \$1.5 billion for the double-tracking and the new Monon Corridor would not have been possible without the NIRPC Commission approving those funds.

INDOT – Adam Parkhouse

Adam Parkhouse reported that next week is [National Worker Zone Awareness Week](#). The theme this year is "Safe Actions Save Lives." Adam reminded the Commission that potholes can be reported at [855-INDOT4u](#).

Tom McDermott reported that a neighboring community is planning to shut down a road that will disrupt regional traffic flow and could harm an economic development project in the City of Hammond. He asked what role INDOT or NIRPC plays in this situation regarding local road closures. Ty Warner commented that a Regional Corridors Study conducted around 2012 talked about those roads that would be improved or connected for regional benefit, and that there's a lot of modeling data associated with that. It is possible NIRPC could project what certain road closures would do to the overall road network.

Austin Bonta added that NIRPC is happy to serve as a connector to the people. Since the other municipalities would need a neutral space, NIRPC is available, but was not aware of the legal authority NIRPC would have. Tom McDermott and Adam Parkhouse indicated they would continue the discussion following the meeting.

Economy & Place – George Topoll

George Topoll reported that the committee met on April 8, 2026, where they heard a presentation on the 2026 NWI RDA Development Catalyst Grant from David Wellman, Director of Communications. The NWI RDA is investing \$250,000 in Lake and Porter Counties through this grant. Grants will range from \$15,000 to \$75,000, with a local match of 10-50%. NIRPC staff delivered presentations on the MTP update, updates on the regional demographics data over the last 10 years, updates on land-use and housing-related performance measures, updated transportation performance measures, and updates on MPT's environmental section covering brownfields, managed land, and tree equality. All presentations are available on NIRPC's website.

Ty Warner added that the Economy & Place Committee was responsible for developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which was adopted by the Commission in May 2025. He reported that NIRPC had just received notice on Monday that it had finally been formally approved and accepted by the EDA with no changes, and he thanked the Economy & Place Committee for their work.

Environment – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson had nothing to report since the committee had not met since the last Commission meeting.

Ty Warner and Carl Lisek, Executive Director of Drive Clean Indiana, reported that the NIRPC Green Fleet was awarded to the City of East Chicago. This award recognizes the city's commitment to Hoosier Fuels and sustainable municipal operations through several key technology deployments. In 2025, the city became a leader by deploying three all-electric Ford F-150 Lightning trucks for the public works department. Jaylan Robinson and Jaylen Johnson, from the Public Works Department in East Chicago, accepted the award.

Announcements

Randell Niemeyer announced that Central Data Centers is hosting an open house at Lowell High School tonight to discuss data center development.

Mayor Bonta announced that if you live in Porter County, you can vote early in the NIRPC lobby. He also announced that orientation for new Commissioners or Commissioners who would like a refresh on what NIRPC is, how it works, and how to utilize NIRPC resources, including its policies and how to advocate for their own communities, will be held after this meeting.

It was asked if the Chicago Bears would choose to move to NWI. Mayor McDermott said there will be hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure, and that the state of Indiana is being generous by offering \$1.5 billion to be spent in Hammond, which would then bring 2,000 permanent jobs to the region. He thanked Governor Braun, Speaker Huston, and all the legislative leaders for making this happen. He also announced that the groundbreaking ceremony of the new downtown Hammond train station is this afternoon.

Hearing no further business, Austin Bonta adjourned the meeting at 10:08 a.m. The next meeting will be an Executive Board meeting on May 21, 2026.

The livestream video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Full Commission Meeting 4-16-26 \(youtube.com\)](#)