

Environment Committee

Lake Michigan Room

May 1, 2025

Minutes

Bill Emerson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Bill Emerson, Mallorie Medellin (IDEM), Joe Exl (LMCP), Katherine Balkema (LMCP), Thomas Black (Highland), Kathy Sipple (Earth Charter), Ryan Lisek (DCI), Lori Hunt (Westville), Reggie Korthals (MS4), George Topoll (Union Township), Katie Hobgood, Linda Pompeii (Potawattomie Park), Jenna Ambrosia (DCI), Connie Wachala (HNS), Jenny Dimitroff (TPSC), Victoria Wittig (NWI UWFP), Rahim Evans (IDEM), Michele Munday Pariso (IDEM), and Beth Shrader were in attendance.

NIRPC staff present were Kathy Luther, Jen Birchfield, Tom Vander Woude, Meredith Stilwell, and Flor Baum.

The February 27, 2025 meeting minutes were approved on motion by Reggie Korthals and seconded by Tim Kingsland.

Environmental Project Updates

This spring, NIRPC successfully distributed 289 trees through its Community Tree Program and initiated an invasive tree replacement effort, with plans for another tree distribution in the fall. Additionally, two workshops were conducted focusing on planning tools and green infrastructure. These sessions aim to build capacity and understanding, particularly among nonprofessional members of community boards, with more workshops planned for future scheduling near. The committee discussed the need for an additional event designed for municipal sustainability, to help clarify their roles and promote collaboration. It was suggested that the event be held in the evening to accommodate the schedules of volunteer members. Furthermore, the committee explored the idea of developing a "road show" to present sustainability topics to various community groups, allowing the content to be customized based on each group's specific interests and needs.

Partners for Clean Air Update

Mallorie Medellin (IDEM) gave an informational presentation on "What is PCA and why everybody should be a Partner." Mallorie is a senior manager at IDEM's Northwest regional office, overseeing the compliance and technical assistance program, which provides free environmental compliance counseling. PCA, established in the mid-90s as a voluntary partnership under the Clean Air Act, aims to educate businesses, government entities, and communities about environmental actions they can take to improve air quality. It currently operates across various regions. Efforts to improve air quality in Northwest Indiana focus on engaging diverse stakeholders in concrete actions like energy conservation, emissions reduction, and organizational policies. Energy conservation and emissions reduction can be achieved through simple actions like switching to LED lights and implementing organizational policies such as remote work and carpooling, alongside larger initiatives like sustainability plans and carbon neutrality pledges. The organization offers scholarships for high school seniors pursuing education in clean air and public health, focusing on expanding support for trade school students, and has awarded over \$32,500 to date. There is a focus on promoting air quality improvement actions, educating members on opportunities to reduce emissions, and disseminating ozone action day alerts to encourage behaviors that mitigate ozone levels. Efforts are underway to promote energy conservation, air quality education, and community

engagement through various outreach events and partnerships, particularly focusing on middle school science projects and local initiatives. A grant program is being developed to support teachers and community groups in environmental initiatives, alongside efforts to engage schools through citizen science and an anti-idling campaign, while fostering partnerships and educational opportunities within the community.

Mallorie emphasized the importance of community engagement and education in environmental initiatives, particularly regarding air quality and ozone action days, while expressing a desire to revitalize membership and outreach efforts. Efforts are underway to improve air and water sustainability through industry collaboration, focusing on reducing emissions and promoting environmentally friendly practices. Mallorie spoke on the importance of cooperation between environmental organizations, community groups, and researchers to address sustainability challenges, highlighting legal limitations on remote meeting participation. Challenges in managing environmental impacts from contractors and vehicle emissions testing, particularly affecting low-income individuals, were discussed, highlighting the need for better communication and support. The discussion highlighted the need for financial support for low-income individuals facing environmental challenges and emphasized the importance of collective action alongside industry particularly in addressing air quality issues. Community members can engage in advocacy regarding consent decrees and industry impacts by monitoring case dockets and participating in public comment opportunities when available. You can sign up for updates on environmental issues, receiving numerous daily notifications about changes and opportunities for public comment.

New Business

Bill Emerson spoke on Resolution 25-12: A Resolution supporting NWI Environmental Initiatives. The committee discussed funding challenges due to recent EPA grant cancellations, which may impact their environmental initiatives and ongoing projects. The committee aims to reaffirm its commitment to enhancing environmental quality in Indiana through various initiatives, including air quality improvement and environmental justice, and plans to present this resolution for endorsement at the next commission meeting on May 15th. Upcoming brownfield grants will be announced soon, while existing funding sources for climate planning and environmental justice initiatives remain stable. The discussion emphasizes the importance of addressing air quality and greenhouse gas reduction commitments without specifically mentioning electric vehicles, while also noting changes in project language and community benefits due to political shifts. On motion by Reggie Korthals, seconded by George Topoll, the Environment Committee approved recommending Res 25-12 to the Commission, clarifying their status as subgrantees of EPA grants.

Reports from Planning Partners

Ryan Lisek (DCI) reported on Green Fleets. New funding for electric vehicle charging stations and ongoing projects to reduce emissions were discussed, alongside upcoming events and initiatives promoting clean energy in Northwest Indiana.

Katherine Balkema reported on the Lake Michigan Coastal Program. The 2026 budget will mirror 2025, but specific details and federal grant information remain uncertain, with an application deadline in early October. The Great Lakes coastal resiliency study is progressing, and stakeholder input will be crucial. Meanwhile, the draft 309 document for coastal program enhancement, focusing on coastal hazards, has been submitted for review.

Announcement

Announcements were made.

Adjournment

The Next Environment Committee meeting is scheduled for August 7, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. in the NIRPC building. Hearing no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:13 a.m.

References

1. EC Meeting Agenda



2. YouTube Meeting Recording



3. Partners for Clean Air

