

# NIRPC Executive Board Meeting

6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN

May 18, 2023 Minutes

## **Call to Order**

Chairman Richard Hardaway called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

## **New Appointments to the Commission**

Dave Hollenbeck announced there were no new appointments to the Commission.

**Roll call** - Taken by Candice Eklund

## **Present**

The 9 Executive Board members present at the meeting included Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), Tom Dermody (La Porte), Denise Ebert (Wanatah), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), Richard Hardaway (Merrillville), Justin Kiel (LaPorte County Council), Sue Lynch (Portage), Wendy Mis (Munster), and Jim Ton (Chesterton).

The 9 other Commissioners present at the meeting included Robert Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Don Craft (Porter), Ellen Hundt (Beverly Shores), Jane Jordan (Burns Harbor), Randall Niemeyer (Lake County Council), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), Sharon Szewedo (New Chicago), Mary Tanis (Dyer), and George Topoll (Union Township).

## **Absent**

Executive Board members Kyle Allen (Lake County Commissioner) and Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee) were not in attendance.

Kingsbury and The Pines have appointed no representatives to NIRPC.

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

**Public Comment** – There were no public comments.

## **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the April 20 Full Commission meeting minutes were approved on motion by Tom Dermody and seconded by Sue Lynch.

## **Report of the Chair** – Richard Hardaway

Richard Hardaway had no updates to report.

## **Report of the Executive Director** - Ty Warner

Ty Warner introduced NIRPC's newest staff members Tom Vander Woude, Director of Transportation, and Ann Weitgenant, Transportation Programming and Grant Assistant. NIRPC is now fully staffed.

Ty introduced Ryan Lisek, Drive Clean Indiana (DCI), who NIRPC has a strong partnership with to help support congestion and air quality initiatives. Ryan Lisek discussed the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Discretionary Grant Program that is a 5-year grant with a total of \$700 million in available funding. This funding and the additional tax credits associated with this infrastructure will cover 80% of the total cost of charging and fueling stations equipment. The deadline to submit a grant application to DCI for review is May 22, with DCI submitting all grant applications received by the due date of June 13, 2023.

Ty continued to shine a spotlight on the very challenging issue for the region regarding blocked rail crossings, which has recently received new attention. Previously, NIRPC formed a rail crossing task force that met several times to try and explore all facets of the issue of trains blocking crossings after the Indiana Supreme

court struck down the ability to ticket trains that blocked a crossing for more than 10 minutes. Since that court decision, some trains have been blocking crossings for hours, which is a nationwide issue. The region received national attention from the ProPublica article that was published earlier this month. The article not only addressed the specific situation in Hammond, but their online version had a video showing children climbing through and under train couplings when trying to get to school. The same story made headlines on the front cover of the Post Tribune and was the national feature story on Apple News Today. Ty has contacted our congressional delegation leaders and NIRPC is continuing to look for solutions on ways to move forward. Mayor Dermody echoed the City of La Porte was experiencing the same issues and is willing to help. For years, Carolyn Jackson has introduced a bill at the state level asking the railroads to notify a community when they will be blocking a crossing for more than 10 minutes, but the bill did not proceed past the committee.

#### **Environmental Management Policy Committee (EMPC) – Bill Emerson**

Bill Emerson reported the EMPC met on May 4, 2023 and reviewed the Climate Action plan and *NWI 2050+*. They also discussed trying to make a move towards being a clearing house for grant opportunities so the municipalities could get the word out to their communities. Bill discussed the two-stage ditch project in Dyer that partnered with the Lake County Surveyor's office and others, to improve water quality and flood storage. This project was awarded for excellence and best management practices at the Indiana MS4 partnership annual meeting. The next EMPC meeting is scheduled for August 3 at 9:00 a.m.

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

Wendy Mis reported the F&P Committee met this morning to review financial reports for December 2022 and April 2023 as well as the bank statements and claim registers for April 2023. The F&P Committee brought the two action items below to the Executive Board with a favorable recommendation. The next F&P meeting is scheduled for July 20 at 8:00 a.m.

- Resolution #23-08: Authorizing the submittal of the EDA FY 2023 Partnership Planning Grant Application to Administer the Economic Development District. Denarie Kane presented stating this resolution pledges the local match for the partnership planning grant that is available to the Economic Development Districts (EDD) in Indiana. The local match is \$70,000 and will allow NIRPC to continue to advance their EDD efforts. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Justin Kiel, the Executive Board approved Resolution #23-08.
- Resolution #23-09: Authorizing the execution of a grant agreement with the U.S. DOT and INDOT under the FY 2021 RAISE Grant Program for the Marquette Greenway Project. This resolution authorizes Ty Warner to enter into an agreement with INDOT. Ty said there's been a challenge with the Marquette Greenway RAISE grant funds that NIRPC received and being able to orchestrate how the funding moved through the system so NIRPC could allocate the funds according to the grant agreement. As a result, INDOT has agreed to be the pass-through agency to receive the RAISE grant funds from the federal government and pass them on to NIRPC as a financial mechanism to meet the goal of the grant. On motion by Kevin Breitzke and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution #23-09.

#### **Technical Planning Committee (TPC) – Kevin Breitzke**

Kevin Breitzke reported the TPC met on May 9, 2023 and discussed future funding projects, that included the transformative projects to be considered for funding priority in FY 2029. The TPC favorably recommended the two action items below to the Executive Board for consideration and approval. The next TPC meeting is scheduled for July 11 at 10:00 a.m.

- Resolution #23-06: FY 2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment #22-09. Charles Bradsky stated there were no comments received during the 21-day public comment period or from the Interagency Consultation Group. Charles noted the various projects included in Amendment #22-09. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Tom Dermody, the Executive Board approved Resolution #23-06.
- Resolution #23-07: FY 2024 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Tom Vander Woude presented the highlights from the FY 2024 document stating the UPWP is a core planning document required by the U.S. Department of Transportation for all Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). The plan includes an approved work plan for all MPO staff, program of planning tasks over the next fiscal year, and is a financial planning document linking staff activities to funding sources for the federal funding received. Tom provided a brief explanation on each of the seven funding chapters as well as the new required element of ensuring the plan includes 2.5% (\$53,000) of the planning funds to be allocated towards Complete Streets activities. This

funding will be allocated for the Complete Streets corridors and the Gary Elevated Trail Study. On motion by Kevin Breitzke and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution #23-09.

### **Other Business**

Mary Tanis reported a situation with Lake County Community Services having eight buses out of service that have outlived their useful life. At the moment, the only replacement alternatives are electric or propane vehicles, but they need the response fuel buses. Lisa Todd, NIRPC, responded there has been a supply chain shortage nationwide since the manufacturers shut down their plants during the pandemic. The plants are now picking back up but are back logged and focusing on electric vehicles. Electric vehicles are nearly three times the cost of gasoline vehicles and gasoline vehicles have gone up 50%. NIRPC recognizes the issues and is working towards a resolution.

### **Announcements**

Bob Carnahan relayed announcements of various events in Cedar Lake.

Ty Warner noted that with the approval of the Unified Planning Work Program today (Resolution #23-07), the meeting in July will have on its agenda the other two federally-required documents for MPOs: the Long-Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan, *NWI 2050+*, and the 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program on the agenda for approval.

### **Adjournment**

Hearing no other business, Richard Hardaway adjourned the meeting at 9:44 a.m. The next meeting on July 20 will be a Full Commission meeting.

*The livestream video recording of this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Executive Board Meeting 5-18-23 - YouTube](#).*