

NIRPC Executive Board Meeting

Electronic Meeting via Zoom

September 16, 2021 Minutes

Call to Order

Chairman, George Topoll, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

This meeting was convened as an *electronic meeting*, in accordance with House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1437 as incorporated into Governor Holcomb's Executive Order 21-13. All persons were meeting remotely on a Zoom platform that allowed for real time interaction and supported the public's ability to observe and record the proceedings. When the agenda item provided for public comment, this was supported as well.

New Appointments to the Commission

Ty Warner 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 Tom Dermody (La Laporte), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), Richard Hardaway (Merrillville), Justin Kiel (La Crosse), Sue Lynch (Portage), Wendy Mis (Munster), Greg Stinson (Porter), James Ton (Chesterton), and George Topoll (Union Township).

The 10 other Commissioners present included Geof Benson (Beverly Shores), Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), Robert Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Joshleen Denham (Trail Creek), Jon Derwinski (Winfield), Daina Dumbrys (Michiana Shores), Jerome Prince (Gary), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), Gerald Swets (St. John), and Mary Tanis (Dyer).

Absent

The 3 Executive Board members absent at the meeting included Michael Griffin (Highland), Sheila Matias (LaPorte County Commissioner), and Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee).

The 28 other Commissioners not present for the Executive Board meeting included Kyle Allen (Lake County Commissioner), Duane Arndt (Kingsford Heights), Jeanette Bapst (Dune Acres), Janet Beck (Pottawattomie Park), Jim Biggs (Porter County Commissioner), Charlie Brown (Lake County Council), Bill Carroll (Lake Station), Anthony Copeland (East Chicago), Denise Ebert (Wanatah), Robert Forster (Kouts), Tony Hendricks (LaPorte County Surveyor), Eric Hull (Burns Harbor), Jack Jeralds (Schneider), Andrew Kyres (Crown Point), Robert Lemay (Long Beach), Tom McDermott (Hammond), Lori Mercer (Westville), Mike Mollenhauer (La Porte County Council), Edward Morales (Porter Township), Matt Murphy (Valparaiso), Duane Parry (Michigan City), David Peeler (Hebron), Bob Poparad (Porter County Council), Rick Ryfa (Griffith), Brian Snedecor (Hobart), Steve Spebar (Whiting), Sharon Szwedo (New Chicago), and John Yelkich (Lowell).

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

Staff present included Ty Warner, Kathy Luther, Mitch Barloga, Flor Baum, Meredith Stilwell, Denarie Kane, Peter Kimball, Kevin Polette, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the July 15, 2021 Full Commission Board meeting were approved on motion by James Ton and second by Greg Stinson. With Tom Dermody, Bill Emerson, Richard Hardaway, Justin Kiel, Sue Lynch, Wendy Mis, Greg Stinson, James Ton, and George Topoll voting in the affirmative, and no one voting in the negative, the motion passed.

Public Comment - There were no public comments.

Report of the Chair – George Topoll

George Topoll referenced the consent agenda items being presented at today's meeting and asked if a member on the Executive Board would like an item to be removed from the consent agenda vote, to please address it at the time the items will be voted on. George thanked all commissioners for their attendance and for obtaining a quorum of the Executive Board.

Report of the Executive Director - Ty Warner

Ty Warner introduced Thomas Dow, NIRPC's new Director of Transportation. Thomas said he is looking forward to working with everyone on the call. Thomas provided a quick overview of the upcoming schedule to update NIRPC's long range transportation plan, adopted as *NWI 2050*, that will be due May 2023. This long range plan requires updating every four years and was last adopted by NIRPC's Executive Board in May 2019. Thomas is developing a preliminary project schedule and will provide an update to the Full Commission at the November meeting.

Mr. Warner said NIRPC staff created an overview of the 2020 census data for the NIRPC region. Peter Kimball and Scott Weber presented on the census data stating the total population for Lake, Porter and LaPorte counties increased by 1.6%. Various graphs presented depicted changes in housing units, minority changes, population changes and density, with the Town of Highland now being the most densely populated municipality in NIRPC's region. The response rate for the census in Indiana was 70.3%, which is above the national response rate of 67%. The presentation can be found on NIRPC's website at <https://nirpc.org/2040-plan/economy-and-place/regional-data-maps/>.

Environmental Management Policy Committee (EMPC) – Bill Emerson

Bill Emerson reported the EMPC met on September 2, 2021 and included presentations from Dan Robinson with Solar United Neighbors and Kathy Sipple and Alek Thiesz for the NWI Greenhouse Gas Inventory project. During today's meeting, Kathy Luther provided an update on the NWI Regional Greenhouse Gas Inventory results, stating this is the first regional gas inventory in Indiana and one of very few across the county. In the fall of 2020, there was representation from all three counties in NIRPC's area, totaling 11 municipalities. This project would not have been possible if the communities that participated had not committed to helping with the cost of the interns as well as having the support and assistance of NIRPC staff. Kathy Sipple managed the interns and received support from the Indiana Environmental Resilience Institute and ICLEI (International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives). Results from the study performed in 2017 showed that carbon dioxide equivalents were nearly 40 million tons, with over 33 million tons being from industrial energy. Not counting industrial usage, 74% of carbon dioxide equivalents was from transportation and mobile sources. A final report will be generated in September for each of the municipalities that followed thru on their commitment.

Finance & Personnel Committee (F & P) - Greg Stinson

Greg Stinson reported the F & P Committee met this morning to review the financial reports, bank reconciliations, and claims registers for June and July. The F&P Committee favorably recommends Resolution #21-16, a request to the EDA to release the LaPorte County Revolving Loan Fund from certain federal requirements. The LaPorte County loan committee made this recommendation to the F&P Committee for the program to be defederalized. Denarie Kane said once this request is approved it would accompany a letter to the EDA with specifics about the loan program as well as the most recent financial report and audit.

The Economic Resiliency Plan is seeking authorization for NIRPC's Executive Director to negotiate and sign this contract. Three firms submitted full proposals after being invited to do so following NIRPC's Request for Qualifications for this project. Two of these firms were selected to be interviewed. It is being recommended to hire TIP Strategies Inc. located in Texas. Approval of this plan would authorize the Executive Director to negotiate the final terms of the contract, in coordination with NIRPC's attorney, and allow him to execute the final contract on behalf of the commission in an amount not to exceed \$112,000, the sum of the grant.

Mr. Stinson reported the F&P committee will meet on October 21, 2021 to consider the preliminary 2022 budget.

Technical Planning Committee (TPC) - Kevin Breitzke

Kevin Breitzke reported the TPC met on September 14, 2021 and recommends for consideration the adoption of Resolution #21-17. The next TPC meeting is scheduled for October 12, 2021.

Charles Bradsky stated Amendment #2 to the FY 2022-2026 TIP was released for a 21-day public comment period from August 19 to September 9. There were no comments received from the public or the Inter Agency Consultation Group (ICG). NIRPC is still awaiting approval on the FY 2022-2026 TIP from the FHWA and the FTA. There are seven new INDOT projects in this amendment.

Legislative Committee – Justin Kiel

Justin Kiel stated the Legislative Committee met on September 7 for a kickoff meeting for the upcoming legislative session. The primary topic discussed was the proposed Calumet National Heritage Area (CNHA). Gary Johnson, Director and Indiana Vice President of the Calumet Heritage Partnership and Mark Bouman, Chicago Regional Program Director with the Field Museum, provided a presentation on this initiative. There are 55 designated National Heritage Areas in the United States, but none currently in Indiana. The Calumet Heritage Area (CHA) boundaries include Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties of Indiana, as well as the southern portion of Chicago and south suburbs in Illinois. A CHA exhibit is scheduled to open at the Field Museum November 2022. This exhibit is currently at the Gary Public Library and will be at the Porter County Museum next year. Some of the benefits of National Heritage Areas are increased attendance, supporting integration of NWI into the metropolitan economy, and a high return on investment. The CHAs also aligns with NIRPC's NWI 2050 plan and is complementary to NIRPC's Economic Development District designation. Mark Bouman noted that the Calumet Heritage Partnership will hold their annual conference virtually on October 12-13. Justin Kiel said Resolution #21-18, Calumet National Heritage Area, comes with a favorable recommendation from the Legislative Committee.

By virtue of the Executive Board of General Consent to allow all items to be Consent Agenda matters, and there being no objections to all items being voted on under one consent agenda, George Topoll asked for a vote on the three matters below:

- Approval of Resolution #21-16, LaPorte County Revolving Loan Fund Defederalization
- Approval of Resolution #21-17, FY 2022-2026 TIP Amendment #2
- Approval of Resolution #21-18, Calumet National Heritage Area

A motion was received and seconded to adopt the matters of the consent agenda. Roll call was taken by Candice Eklund for these three matters. With Tom Dermody, Bill Emerson, Richard Hardaway, Justin Kiel, Wendy Mis, Greg Stinson, James Ton, and George Topoll voting in the affirmative, and no one voting in the negative, the motion passed.

Economic Development District Report – Denarie Kane

Denarie Kane stated NIRPC is continuing to have discussions with interested parties that want to learn about the EDA grant funding. It was encouraged of those who want to learn more about this grant funding to contact her (dkane@nirpc.org), so she could arrange those discussions with NIRPC's EDA representative. Matt Paskash, NIRPC's new Economic Development Specialist, has been working with municipalities regarding the NWI revolving loan fund and assisting people with questions and applications. NIRPC is investigating the Build Back Better Regional Challenge to formulate a grant application associated for this EDA grant.

INDOT - Matt Deitchley

Matt Deitchley discussed the Restore 94 project and said it should be complete by the end of October. There will be a lot of projects on the Boreman Expressway in 2021 and 2022. INDOT will also be working on an Intelligent Transportation System along I-94 and I-65 with hopes of eliminating congestion. Planning & Environmental Linkage (PEL) meetings are ongoing with more meetings scheduled in October. The Flex Road study will be approximately a \$30 million project but is in the early stages. Construction is scheduled to begin on this project in 2024. Lastly, INDOT will be having a statewide job fair beginning September 30.

Other Business

Ty Warner noted NIRPC met with the FHWA and FTA this week to discuss NIRPC's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) transportation processes, a review which occurs every four years. Robert Dirks, with the FHWA, stated the USDOT requires the review of the transportation planning processes for Transportation Management Areas, or MPOs that are greater than 200,000 in population. The prior certification was completed December 2017. Robert stated the FHWA does not anticipate any problems with certifying NIRPC's planning processes, but still needs to meet with his team and the review team for a summary of their findings. Robert suspects there will be some recommendations in the report as well as commendations. The FHWA will compile a report for NIRPC's review, with hopes to finalize the report and certify NIRPC's processes by December 2021. Robert thanked Ty and NIRPC staff on their preparation for the review.

Robert Dirks announced he will be retiring from the FHWA after working there for 33 years. Erica Tate will be his replacement. Ty wished Robert well in his retirement and that he appreciates the partnership that NIRPC has with its federal partners.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan announced the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority is holding their Recognition of Service Excellence (ROSE) Award on September 22 at the Barbara and Dean White Community Center in Merrillville.

Hearing no other business, George Topoll adjourned the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

The livestream video recording of this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNNcs0qlC78>