

Transit Development District Steering Committee meeting minutes March 18, 2026

Location

Purdue Tech Center, 9800 Connecticut Dr., Crown Point, IN 46307

Present

Chris Harris, Bob Thompson, Brian Poland, Geof Benson, Angie Nelson Deutch, Tammy Watkins, Milton Reed

Minutes

Minutes from the November 12, 2025, meeting were approved.

Discussion

Election of a chairperson was tabled due to lack of a quorum.

RDA economic development director AJ Bytnar provided an overview of the new Development Catalyst Grant (DCG) program. This is designed to help communities develop and implement the tools needed to ensure that they are ready for development now that the rail projects have wrapped.

RDA communications director Dave Wellman gave an update on the RDA's new US 12 scenic byway initiative. This initiative seeks to better integrate the Lake Michigan shoreline, the National and State parks and local communities to maximize the economic value of tourism in the region. It will also seek to address traffic mitigation and access issues to the park.

John Morris from the IFA's brownfields program was the featured speaker. He spoke extensively about the programs offered through his organization and how it partners with local communities to clean up environmental contamination, conduct assessments and issue comfort letters, among other things.

RDA economic development director AJ Bytnar gave an update on HB 1001. He noted that the legislation asks for housing updates from municipalities by 2027, and that there were planning and zoning changes they should be aware of.

A quorum having been achieved, Bob Thompson was elected as the 2026 chairman of the steering committee

Community Updates

Michigan City Mayor Angie Nelson Deutch noted that the city's TDD had received 8 liquor licenses in the last legislative session. She highlighted the upcoming Power Breakfast in Michigan City where RDA President & CEO Sherri Ziller would be moderating a discussion between Mayor Angie and Mayor Tom McDermott Jr. of Hammond, the two gateways on either end of the South Shore line. She spoke about the upcoming ribbon-cutting for the Franklin Tower. She said the city was looking at ways to better connect the train station and the National Park. She also spoke about the city's new permitting software and systems, which are allowing them to issue more permits than ever before.

Chris Harris from Gary noted that his city had received 10 new liquor licenses for their TDD, and that it had an RFP out for ideas repurposing or reusing the Genesis Center site downtown. The city is also working with the RDA on demolitions. He expects this will be a transformative year for downtown Gary. Also working to better connect both downtown and Miller to the National Park. He notes that Gov. Braun had made his appointment to the new downtown station board.

Brian Poland noted that the city was looking forward to the groundbreaking for the downtown Hammond station and continued to work on its RFP for the gateway site.

Bob Thompson from Valparaiso noted that later that day they were holding a visioning session inviting public input for work around the city. The city is also working on its comp plan and was already looking at incorporating revisions due to HB 1001. He noted they are converting the old rec center into offices for the parks department and a senior center. The city is also looking at ways to get more high density housing.

Tammy Watkins from Pines said they continue to work with the RDA on the scenic highway and sewers.

Milton Reed from EC said the city is ramping up. Looking at integrating affordable housing, workforces and the TDD, and how they scale to meet the needs of transit and business. Trying to be smart about how we do things because we have one chance to get it right.

AJ Bytnar added that the new Land Development Entity should be holding its initial board meeting soon, and that the RDA is working toward some new incentives such a credit enhancement fund to help catalyze the opportunity we have due to the rail investment. He added that by the next meeting the RDA will have an update on the TDD increment amounts.

The meeting was adjourned.