

NIRPC Executive Board Meeting
6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN
March 18, 2024 Minutes

Call to Order

Chair Tom Dermody called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

New Appointments to the Commission

Dave Hollenbeck announced the appointments to the Commission of Mayor Eddie Melton (Gary) and Mayor Angie Nelson Deitch (Michigan City).

Roll call - Taken by Candice Eklund.

Present

The 8 Executive Board members present at the meeting included Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), Tom Dermody (La Porte), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), Justin Kiel (La Porte County Council), Wendy Mis (Munster), Lisa Rosenkranz (LaCrosse), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), and Jim Ton (Chesterton).

The 8 other Commissioners present at the meeting included James Burge (Porter), Robert Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Eddie Melton (Gary), Angie Nelson Deutch (Michigan City), David Phelps (Beverly Shores), Mary Tanis (Dyer), George Topoll (Union Township), and Andy Vasquez. Also present was Matt Deitchley representing INDOT.

Absent

The 2 Executive Board members absent from the meeting included Denise Ebert (Wanatah) and Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee).

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

Staff present included Ty Warner, Tom Vander Woude, Charles Bradsky, Kevin Polette, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Public Comment – There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the February 15, 2024, Executive Board meeting were approved on motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Kevin Breitzke.

Report of the Chair – Tom Dermody

Tom Dermody reported on the meeting he had with Ty Warner to discuss restructuring NIRPC committees to make them more efficient and build attendance. Tom said he will be contacting the Commissioners who have not consistently attended the NIRPC Commission meetings to discuss if it would be in the best interest of the Commission to appoint another elected official. Tom would also like to engage with the rail community as a potential partner to discuss changes when it comes to railroad crossings and engaging with local communities' issues. The goal is to have conversations with them by summer and hopefully have them attend meetings to provide updates and address the rail crossings issues.

Report of the Executive Director - Ty Warner

Ty Warner appreciated Mayor Dermody taking up the issue of railroads again, adding NIRPC had a Rail Crossing Task Force that held four meetings in 2018. Ty noted the topic of blocked crossings and rail in general was one of the legislative items that was taken to the congressional visits at the NARC conference held in Washington, D.C. last month.

Ty further discussed restructuring NIRPC's committees with an updated slideshow presentation from 2021. NIRPCs structure is written into Indiana State Code that has an enabling statute laying out the agency's mission, purpose, and board structure. NIRPC develops plans and programs for: Transportation, Environment, and Economic Development. The current committee structure is made up of 14 NIRPC Committees, and they are faced with challenges in attendance and various degrees of involvement, and also require significant staff

time in agenda preparation and drafting of minutes. The proposal is to streamline NIRPCs Committee structure to basically have four mission areas: Transportation, Environment, Economy & Place, and Leadership. *NWI 2050* already focused on these four areas, and NIRPC's website has been organized around this structure for some time. Mayor Dermody is in support of this initiative. Restructuring NIRPC's Committees will need the approval of the Full Commission. Justin Kiel questioned where the Transportation Resource Oversight Committee (TROC) would fall in this plan. Ty stated that TROC has been an established and effective group and TROC would probably remain as the means of primary input for available transportation funding. It was also discussed that "proxies" might be allowed at these committees, whereas they are not allowed on the Commission itself as NIRPC's enabling statute does not provide for this.

Ty discussed House Bill 1120. NIRPC is governed by state statute and part of that statute sets the local match amount that NIRPC receives from individual counties. The per capita amount NIRPC receives from the counties – which NIRPC uses for its own local match for Federal funding for its MPO functions – has not changed since it was instituted in 1992. The House Bill 1120, approved at the close of the 2024 Session of the Indiana General Assembly, increases the \$0.70 per capita to \$1.50 over a five year period. Warner is grateful to Representative Hal Slager, who introduced the initial bill to the Indiana General Assembly and, three bills later, it was amended into House Bill 1120, where it was approved with no pushback. Warner also expressed his gratitude to the counties for being supportive of the increase. He thanked Justin Kiel, La Porte County Council; Andy Vasquez, Porter County Council; and Randy Niemeyer of the Lake County Council for helping obtain the endorsement of all three counties. This local share amount is necessary for NIRPC to function and to have access to additional federal funding. House Bill 1120 effectively right-sizes to near-current dollar value what was put into place in 1992.

Warner discussed the *Walkable USA* documentary that focuses on the plan for downtown Hammond and shared that it would be airing again on Lakeshore Public Media. It will be on Lake Shore PBS on March 22 at 4 pm and March 29 at 9 pm and PBS Michiana on March 28 at 8pm EST. There will also be an in-person screening at the South Shore Convention and Visitors Building on April 2. A notification will be sent to the Commissioners after the meeting with a registration link.

Warner noted that, as he had discussed last year at this time, there will be a Solar Eclipse on April 8 at 1:30 pm and the State of Indiana has encouraged communities to be prepared for an influx of tourists in order to avoid the myriad problems that were a result of the influx of people during the last solar eclipse.

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

Wendy Mis thanked Ty Warner and the efforts of everyone involved in getting House Bill 1120 passed. As head of the F&P Committee, it is very important and helps them as they look at the upcoming budget. Wendy Mis reported the F&P Committee met this morning to review financial reports, bank reconciliations, and claim registers for December 2023 and January 2024. The F&P Committee voted to approve a presentation at the Full Commission meeting on April 18 to recommend a resolution to NIRPC's General Assembly to address the cost of the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) audits to our local units and ask for detailed invoicing from the SBOA.

Resolution #24-04: Authorizing Payment of Remaining Non-Award Funds in the La Porte County Revolving Loan Fund to La Porte, Indiana, and Michigan City, Indiana, and cessation of the La Porte County Revolving Loan Fund Program for New Loans – Wendy Mis reported the F&P Committee heard a presentation from Denarie Kane who answered all of their questions satisfactorily and the committee approved this resolution with a favorable recommendation. On motion by Bill Emerson and seconded by Jim Ton, the Executive Board approved Resolution 24-04.

Technical Planning Committee (TPC) - Kevin Breitzke

Kevin Breitzke requested the next TPC meeting be held on April 9 instead of April 2, 2024. Breitzke also referenced the article that was written by Ty Warner, "NIRPC projects have transformed NWI" that was published in *The Times* on March 10, 2024.

Charles Bradsky reported on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) workshop for newly elected and appointed officials. The topics covered for transportation projects were NIRPC's organizational structure, its responsibilities and roles in regional planning and transportation funding, the various federal and state funds

available for transportation funding, and the timelines and administrative requirement for federal-aid transportation projects. The meeting materials and link to the video will be sent to the Commissioners.

Tom Vander Woude provided updates and timelines on the lifecycles of *NWI 2050+* and the 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) approval because the two items were approved conditionally at the Commission meeting last month. Tom provided the background on why those were approved conditionally and gave an update on where we are now on meeting those conditions and status of final approvals. The two processes were conducted simultaneously while also updating NIRPCs travel demand model used to demonstrate our Air Quality Conformity. NIRPC cannot invest in projects that create more pollution than the EPA allots them. As of March 19, 2024, the FHWA initiated the formal consultation, asking all of the other relevant agencies to comment on our Air Quality Conformity Determination in our *NWI 2050+* and FY 2024-2028 TIP. The deadline for comments from that group is April 15 and if no comments are received, the FHWA will issue a conformity determination letter and the *NWI 2050+* and the 2024-2028 TIP will be in effect.

INDOT – Matt Deitchley

Matt Deitchley reported INDOT has a robust program for construction season. They are also working very hard to remove the construction project restrictions, as they are able, during the total solar eclipse on April 8. Deitchley relayed that Commissioner Mike Smith, INDOT, had discussed the state's initiative, [INDOT: Buckle Up Phone Down](#), at the Purdue Road School last week. This movement is to help reduce injury crashes and fatalities on Indiana's roadways by 25% over the next 10 years. As part of the statewide safety summer initiative, the La Porte District Safety Summit will be held on May 29 this year.

At the Executive Board meeting last month, it was requested INDOT provide a presentation on their I-80/94 Borman Expressway FlexRoad project that was awarded a mega grant of \$217 million in federal funding. Toby Randolph, Sr. Director with Parsons, presented a project update and discussed the Traffic Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies. This is one of the busiest corridors in Indiana and extends from Illinois 394 to I-65. The goal of the project is to improve traffic flow and safety and reduce crashes and accidents that currently occur every day along this corridor. Construction will begin late 2026 and last up to two years. The goal is to maximize safety and efficiency along the existing corridor within the existing footprint. A few of the strategies discussed were dynamic shoulder lanes / lane control, variable speed limits, ramp metering, real time queue warning and event management. It is anticipated public meetings will be held this summer. For project strategies, visit [80/94 FlexRoad - Home \(indianaflexroad.com\)](#). To submit questions or comments go to [Customer Service Portal - Customer Support \(service-now.com\)](#).

Other Business

Bob Carnahan raised questions regarding various lane or bridge closures in the region. Matt Deitchley noted a complete listing of lane closures can be found at [IN.gov | The Official Website of the State of Indiana](#). Mary Tanis announced there will be a presentation on the Monon Corridor tonight at the Dyer Town Hall. David Phelps raised a question regarding the safety of the bike path at the start of Michigan City that comes onto US 12. Mitch Barloga offered to speak with David further after the meeting.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan relayed announcements of various events in Cedar Lake and Lake County.

Adjournment

Hearing no other business, Tom Dermody adjourned the meeting at 10:36 a.m. The next meeting on April 18, 2024, will be a Full Commission meeting.

The livestream video recording of this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Executive Board Meeting 2-15-24 \(youtube.com\)](#)