

NIRPC Full Commission Meeting

6100 Southport Road, Portage, IN

Minutes of the September 19, 2024 Full Commission Meeting

Call to Order

Chair Tom Dermody called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was streamed live on YouTube.

New Appointments to the Commission

Ty Warner announced the appointment to the Commission of Dwayne Halliburton (Gary).

Roll call - Taken by Candice Eklund

Present

The 33 Commissioners present at the meeting included Kyle Allen (Lake County Commissioner), Jenny Beier (Schneider), Thomas Black (Highland), Austin Bonta (Portage), Kevin Breitzke (Porter County Surveyor), James Burge (Porter), Bob Carnahan (Cedar Lake), Tom Dermody (La Porte), Daina Dumbrys (Michiana Shores), Denise Ebert (Wanatah), Bill Emerson (Lake County Surveyor), J.D. Haley (Long Beach), Dwayne Halliburton (Gary), Bonnie Hawksworth (Dune Acres), Josh Huddlestun (Hobart), Lori Hunt (Westville), Peter Land (Crown Point), Wendy Mis (Munster), Edward Morales (Porter Township), Angie Nelson Deutch (Michigan City), Randy Niemeyer (Lake County Council), David Phelps (Beverly Shores), Linda Pompeii (Pottawattomie Park), Lisa Rosenkranz (La Crosse), Rick Ryfa (Griffith), Warren Schacht (Trail Creek), Tom Schmitt (Schererville), Sharon Szvedo (New Chicago), Mary Tanis (Dyer), Jim Ton (Chesterton), George Topoll (Union Township), Andy Vasquez (Porter County Council), and John Yelkich (Lowell). Matt Deitchley, representing INDOT, was also present.

The 17 Commissioners absent included Duane Arndt (Kingsford Heights), Bill Carroll (Lake Station), Tim Clayton (Winfield), Jon Costas (Valparaiso), Connie Gramarossa (La Porte County Council), Keesha Hardaway (Merrillville), Tony Hendricks (La Porte County Surveyor), Vanessa Hernandez Orange (East Chicago), Justin Kiel (La Porte County Council), Scott Kingan (Ogden Dunes), Tom McDermott (Hammond), Jack McGraw (Burns Harbor), Jim Pressel (Governor Appointee), Barb Regnitz (Porter County Commissioner), Steve Spebar (Whiting), Gerald Swets (St. John), and CJ Wittmer (Kouts).

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

Staff present included Ty Warner, Tom Vander Woude, Stephen Hughes, Denarie Kane, Flor Baum, Candice Eklund, and attorney Dave Hollenbeck.

Public Comment – There were no public comments.

Approval of Minutes

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

Leadership– Tom Dermody, Mayor of La Porte

Tom Dermody reported on the discussions with the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) to build positive working relations and see how they can help us by listening to our concerns and how we can help them in return. Tom introduced the four members from the SBOA who attended today's meeting to discuss their roles and responsibilities, provide feedback on [Resolution #24-07](#), and field questions from the Commissioners. In attendance were Paul Joyce, State Examiner; Beth Kelley, Deputy State Examiner; Tammy White, Deputy State Examiner; and Kendra Leatherman, General Counsel. Paul Joyce, who has been the State Examiner for 11 years, stated the SBOA was established in 1909 and created by the legislature; their office reports to the Legislative Audit Committee. State statute dictates reviews and examinations occur every four years, and then are based on the community's needs. It is mandated that whoever receives federal funding will have a federal audit to ensure funds are being spent appropriately. In 2027, the federal government will implement the Financial Data Transparency Act (FDTA), which will require all financial records to be in a specific language and will be costly.

Kendra Leatherman discussed resolution #24-07, which was approved by the Commission earlier this year. She addressed how the SBOA audit cycle works, what their agency is required to do, additional outside factors that determine an audit cycle, and what determines audit costs for all local governments. If their staff isn't sufficient to meet the local government's needs, they contract with private examiners to audit on their behalf. The contractor rate is more than the SBOA can recoup from the local unit of government, so their budget fills that monetary gap and almost always pays 50% of the financial portion of the audit. Beth Kelly explained that the auditors are there to help the local governments and should always feel free to ask questions and reach out to her if they think the audit is not going well. Tom Dermody thanked the members from the SBOA for attending the meeting and announced there would be a meeting with the Clerk-Treasurers today after this meeting for further discussions.

Tom Dermody recognized Ann Weitgenant and Lisa Todd, NIRPC, for their work and involvement in the bus maintenance and Federal Transit Administration drug and alcohol audits. Ty Warner added this was the first time any current staff member had experienced a drug and alcohol audit. The FTA randomly selected NIRPC for this audit to ensure the transit operators are compliant and monitoring possible substance abuse issues.

Transportation – Kevin Breitzke, Porter County Surveyor

Kevin Breitzke reported the Technical Planning Committee met on September 10, where they heard presentations on the 2024 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) and the 2nd quarter Safety Travel Time Reliability Freight and Congestion plan. The committee brought the action item below to the Full Commission with a favorable recommendation. The next meeting is scheduled for October 1, 2024.

Resolution #24-11: Non-Profit Transportation Feasibility Study. Stephen Hughes reported this resolution went out for a 21-day public comment from August 21 to September 9. One comment was received asking why La Porte County was not involved in this study. NIRPC responded, stating the local match for this study was provided by the Crown Point Community Foundation, the Legacy Foundation of Lake County, and the Porter County Community Foundation, which became the focus areas of the study. This study outlines a pilot program that could be expanded based on its success as it moves forward and if it will be extended into La Porte County. NIRPC worked with the TranSystems team to better understand non-profit transportation providers needed in NWI and develop a plan based on those needs. The study is also being conducted in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Northwest Indiana and Goodwill Industries. The six non-profit agencies selected to discuss the next steps in this process are Pines Village Retirement Communities, Maria Reiner Center, Opportunity Enterprises, HealthVisions Midwest, Porter County Aging Community Services, and Goodwill Industries. This initiative is not intended to replace or become a part of the public transportation network and would not remove anything from existing transit operations. While NIRPC may facilitate some meetings to start the process, NIRPC is not funding this initiative. Ty Warner underscored that NIRPC is engaged in this study because the Boys and Girls Club and Goodwill Industries approached them after noticing their buses were often sitting vacant and in trying to maximize their available resources. On motion by Jim Ton and seconded by Mary Tanis, the Full Commission approved Resolution #24-11.

Tom Vander Woude presented the draft Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Performance Period Mid-Point Performance plan. This plan is a technical report NIRPC provides to INDOT and the FHWA. This report does not require any action from the Commission but provides insight into some of the work done as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to continue funding projects in Northwest Indiana. When the federal government passed the Federal Transportation Authorization Bill in 2012, it required recipients of federal transportation funds to track performance measures, including the CMAQ program. By receiving this funding, the MPO and the state will use it to improve air quality to reduce congestion in the area. This four-year plan was last adopted in 2022 and needs to submit a mid-point performance plan every 2 years.

INDOT - Matt Deitchley

Matt reported INDOT is continuing its goal of reducing severe injuries and fatal accidents by 25% over the next 10 years. As a result of this initiative, INDOT announced a commitment of \$50 million in Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds to support safety improvement projects on local roads across Indiana. The call for projects opened on September 3 and will close on October 11; it is expected to be highly competitive. It was announced that US 30 would be under construction near the I-65 exit for the next three weeks for concrete patching.

Economic Development District Report – Denarie Kane

Ms. Kane reported that NIRPC hosted the EDA's Economic Development Representative, Darrin Fleener, in July to host meetings with several communities contemplating potential EDA grant applications, focusing on grant eligibility and competitiveness. Ms. Kane provided information to interested parties about two national EDA grant competitions: the Good Jobs Challenge grant is due September 27, and the Build to Scale grant is due October 28. Bonus points are newly available for strategy alignment with EDA's Tech Hub designees. Two responses were received from the RFP regarding the consulting services needed for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update.

ENVIRONMENT – Bill Emerson, Lake County Surveyor

Bill Emerson reported that the Environment Committee met on August 1st and heard a presentation on the final Coastal Hazard Resiliency Needs Assessment report. This assessment was an initiative of the DNR state-wide safety cleanup, and it asked communities for an internal assessment of their needs regarding the Lake Michigan Coast and watershed waterways at risk of increased water damage.

Other Business

Ty Warner noted the changes to the commission meeting agenda, as it now directly reflects the new committee structure being phased in. The structure was simplified from twelve committees to four and will be more streamlined, effective, and easier for the public to understand how to get involved in the process.

Warner thanked the Commissioners who responded to the survey that asked for their committee preferences. The committee assignments will be discussed at the Executive Board meeting on October 17. Copies of an article that Ty wrote 10 years ago were provided at the meeting to reference what has happened in the region since then. In 2014, there were 130 miles of paved trail in Northwest Indiana, and now there are over 200 miles. In 1990, there were only 13 miles of paved trails.

George Topoll reported he met with the Indiana Office of Technology to discuss their opportunities and pricing and asked if they should be considered for a presentation on their services. Ty noted that the Indiana Office of Technology, of which NIRPC only became aware relatively recently, provides many services available to local governments at little or no cost, and that the IOT had assisted with the creation of NIRPC's new website.

Announcements

Bob Carnahan announced today was Constitution Day.

David Wright, Gary Public Transportation Corp. (GPTC), distributed a flyer for America Walks, which is sponsoring the 2nd annual Week Without Driving challenge.

Ty Warner thanked [FLUID Coffee Roasters](#) for providing the coffee at today's meeting.

Hearing no other business, Tom Dermody adjourned the meeting at 10:37 a.m. -The next meeting on October 17 will be an Executive Board meeting.

The livestream video recording for this meeting is available on NIRPC's YouTube Channel at [Full Commission Meeting 9-19-24 \(youtube.com\)](#)