

# ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

NIRPC Auditorium, Portage, IN

January 5, 2012

## MINUTES

### **Members/Guests Present**

Geof Benson, Jim Ton, Leslie Dorworth, Susan Mihalo, Nicole Barker, Lee Botts, Amber Winter, Jenny Orsburn, Amy Delahunty, Chandra Viswanathan, Maggie Byrne, Dan Plath, Nicole Messacar, Sherryl Doerr, Richard Morrisroe, Lauri Keagle, Sandra Rodriguez, Melvin Ward, Charlotte Read, Deb Backhus, Rev. Katurah W. Johnson, Tom Anderson, Kay Nelson, Daniel Goldfarb

### **NIRPC Staff**

John Swanson, Kathy Luther, Steve Strains, Bill Brown, Mitch Barloga, Joe Exl, Kevin Garcia, Lakisha Girder, Meredith Stilwell

### **Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Geof Benson called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **◆Approval of December 1, 2011 EMPC Minutes**

On motion by Jim Ton and second by Richard Morrisroe, the December 1, 2011 EMPC minutes were approved.

### **Presentations**

#### **◆ Local Food Plan – Kevin Garcia, NIRPC Data Resources Planner**

Writing of the first rough draft was completed in November 2011, distributed, and comments received. After reviewing comments and first draft again a second restructured draft is being worked on and an implementation section added. The implementation section will include goals, objectives, indicators, and recommendations on how to achieve the goals.

Next steps for the Plan are the finish the implementation section, distribute the second draft for comments, and present another update to the EMPC. *What connections have been made with Chicago was asked and Kevin responded he lives in Chicago and there could be a stronger connection. Communicating with Openlands was suggested and it was noted that discussions with them have already begun.*

#### **◆ Stewart House Urban Farm – Sandra Rodriguez, Purdue Economic & Community Development**

Kevin Garcia introduced Sandra noting her accomplishments as founder and manager of the Miller Beach Farmers Market; member of the CRP Implementation Committee; member of the Save the Dunes Board; and recent inductee into Society of Innovators. He then introduced fellow presenters, veteran and Gary resident Melvin Ward and Pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Gary, Rev. Katurah Johnson. Sandra provided information on her background as a Calumet City native who moved from the area to Chicago, eventually returning with intent to be of service and assist in the environmental movement. After establishing the Farmers Market and partnering with Marquette Park United Methodist Church whose pastor was a big a proponent of local foods and healthy eating, Sandra aspired to create an urban farm but needed land in order to accomplish the task. Sandra was introduced to Rev. Johnson, who also envisioned creating an urban farm, and they bonded over the need for healthy food in low income communities.

In 2004 two churches in the area with declining memberships merged to form the Christ United Methodist Church. One of the merging churches owned the better part of an entire block of property in the midtown area at Massachusetts Street which originally housed the Stewart Settlement House. Stewart House was established in the 1920's and focused on servicing African American migrant workers and whose mission was to promote racial goodwill, and was also a pioneer in the area of community farming and taught classes in canning, food preparation, and good health related areas. The building which was built for church services originally held in the Stewart House upper floor remains on the property today. One of the lots on the Michigan Street side of the property has been given by the City for the Urban Farm and all other lots have been acquired with the exception of three west side lots which are also being looked into for acquisition. An attorney is looking into the lots located on the right side of the property and acquisition of the entire block looks promising.

Currently the northern part of the block has been mostly cleared off with plans for a spring 2012 planting. The soil is mostly sandy and when tested by the EPA no hazardous materials were found. *It was mentioned that there are several families in East Chicago that have community farms and when asked if other groups had been found that*

already have projects in the works, Rev. Johnson related the first meeting for this project took place in March 2011 and even with minimal advertisement the response was good and have learned of several communities and individuals that are actively engaged in this type of gardening. Rev. Johnson also noted that a member of their team that is connected with the Indiana Landmark Society has taken first steps to have the area marked as an historical site. A recent cooperative event, sponsored by the Marquette Park United Methodist Church and Temple Israel in Miller, during which the Temple's gardening initiatives and their search to form a network of faith organizations to work together on providing food to urban populations was mentioned. Sandra expounded that a real difference can be made in terms of impacting and highlighting the cultural and ecological biodiversity in the region and this urban farm can be a pioneer by partnering not only with the local food movement but also with environmental organizations. Temple Israel has an environmental action committee and sustainability meetings have been held to promote greener congregations. Sandy brought up the idea of converting the farmers market to a food co-op to combat some of the challenges which include lack of coalitions in this area and difficulty in getting farmers to commit to the market. Chairman Benson brought up Purdue Cal's Hospitality and Tourism program which received an endowment and Sandy noted that lack of understanding of the food system and dependency upon processed and fast foods is contributing to rising rates of chronic obesity and diabetes. She then detailed a position statement she had written called "Inspiring Interest and Investment in Urban Agricultural Initiatives in Northwest Indiana", and spoke briefly about Pinney Farm which, although is the place that farmers turn to for knowledge, as a non-priority issue lacks funding to expand the facility.

A presentation on the Stewart House Urban Garden Project was made to NIPSCO and Congressman Visclosky has been spoken to as well. Sandy suggested a demonstration gardens (i.e. rainwater and butterfly gardens) by environmental and garden clubs at the site as a way for environmental organizations to help with this project. A Committee Member cited the region restoration movement that is underway and suggested linking up with the numerous organizations involved in the effort to brainstorm on how to promote urban gardening and inform the public of the importance of restoring native species to this area. Joe Exl spoke about a recent Donnelly Grant awarded to NIRPC to do greenway and linkage planning with local communities tying in projects such as the Stewart House Urban Garden while also addressing subjects such as CSO issues, connecting with natural lands, and beautifying and enhancing communities. Geof Benson stated Daniel Goldfarb received a Donnelly Grant to retrain out of work steelworkers on planting, native landscaping, and being land stewards and suggested using his knowledge on how to train out of work groups to become local gardeners. He also suggested speaking with Save the Dunes regarding their work with the prison.

Reaching out to young people about urban gardening and farming was addressed and led to Melvin Ward speaking of his background and his great-grandfather's garden as inspiration and a model of supplementing the family diet with homegrown food. He was also able to work on an organic farm and greenhouse operation which supplied about 70% of the food to the dining hall of the university he attended. He stated that Sandy has provided a stable foundation in working toward the goal of the local food movement, and cited leadership, community development, sustainability, and moving forward in an innovative and creative way as things valued and is proud to see the movement in that direction. Lastly, he stated that Stewart House Urban Farm and Garden is all about seeing the value in what is in the community and maximizing the human and intellectual capital, and underutilized resources available and being good stewards of that. Joe Exl questioned and mentioned the potential of connecting with the Charter Schools in Gary that might have small parcels of land and have an interest in being on board with the urban garden efforts. Sandy mentioned there is a garden currently located at one of the Charter Schools and the teacher in charge is interested in being on the Stewart House Board. The initial efforts have been made to reach out to schools and other organizations to involve youth.

Phase I of the vision for this project is urban farm and gardens that will include demonstration gardens, permaculture gardens, as well as extended season growing. Phase II will include a learning center for sustainable living practices with workshops for education and incorporating creative arts into the farm. Job training is also a huge piece of the project and a grant program for veterans was briefly discussed. Weekly meetings will be held and more information can be obtained and ideas submitted to Sandy at [millerbeachfarmersmkt@gmail.com](mailto:millerbeachfarmersmkt@gmail.com). Hopes are to be able to sell at market in summer 2012.

## **Member Initiatives:**

- Indiana Coastal Cooperative Weed Management area will be hosting invasive plant management training sometime in February.
- Save the Dunes will be attending Great Lakes Lobby Day on February 28 and 29 and will be speaking to elected officials about Great Lakes Restoration initiative funding, Asian carp, and other efforts. There is a particular focus

on businesses that can speak in regard to the economic benefits to restoration. If interested in attending email Nicole Barker.

- The LaPorte Soil and Water Conservation District new supervisor election will be held February 11<sup>th</sup> at their annual meeting. Further information is available in the announcement section.
- Tom Anderson reported there is currently a shoreline ownership challenge issue which could affect beach communities, property owners, and public access rights. The November minutes of the Natural Resources Commission covers the issue extensively.
- NIRPC is partnering with Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant in producing a natural lawn care guidebook as part of a GLRI project. It is in the second draft stage and is intended to be a guidebook for the general public on things they can do for sustainable lawn care such as composting, integrated pest management practices, etc.
- The 2040 CRP Executive Summary is now in print currently and is worth the time to read it.
- Joe Exl will be presenting a Watershed Framework Update at the Executive Board/Commission Meeting on January 19.
- NIRPC will be partnering with Coastal on inventorying cultural/historical significant sites and looking at public access opportunities at those sites. There is also follow-up full proposal for Coastal to put more planning into specific sites in their community and economic development potential within the Marquette area.
- The Porter County Chapter of the Isaac Walton League is taking the initiative to pick up the interest in the Hobart Marsh mitigation and monitoring. The land has been purchased, but mitigation is lacking. Restoration was promised to the community for the damage to the wetlands that construction of the west branch levees have brought on the area.
- There will be a Lawn to Lakes full-day workshop March 20 at IUN for municipal officials and landscape architects to learn about natural landscaping, sustainability, etc. There will also be a half-day workshop in Hammond at the environmental center on March 21 for individuals who maintain the lawns around schools to inform them how and when to apply any "icides" (i.e. insecticide, pesticide).
- Purdue University is organizing a one day workshop in March on ethics in profession for a continuous learning credit. Dates will be provided at a later day when decided.
- Wildlife Habitat Council is looking forward to many projects in the coming year including site specific ecological restoration projects and several projects with Arcelor Mittal. They are hoping to continue with the BP Whiting Refinery Initiative on native gardens on schools. Two gardens have been installed; one at Franklin Academy in East Chicago and another at the Hammond Academy of Science and Technology. Both were designed and built by students and have been very successful. Another garden is planned for Calumet College. There is an increased interest for other industrial facilities to do more native gardens, and conservation issues as well.

Kay Nelson gave an update on the latest legislative session indicating there are a number of environmental bills being introduced from the Senate side. One bill involves a proposal to consolidate environmental boards. Kay shared her concern in taking technical expertise from specific boards and placing them on a general board. Another bill is being introduced looking at how to improve upon accountability and measurement of the solid waste districts. The original statute on these districts was started 20 years ago in response to out of state waste coming into the state and the concern with landfill space. Since then it has been learned that interstate waste cannot be stopped, but long-term disposal facilities are available in the state and there has been a lot of education work done on reduction and recycling. There is significant disparity in how the districts are funded, staffed, and operated and there is some concern as to whether this bill can create a more consistent approach with the districts throughout the state.

Two bills are being presented on underground storage tanks, as well as a regional sewer and water district bill. This particular bill is calling for numbers to be reported annually to the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission. Potable water supplies are already being reported to DNR on a regular basis. This bill also contains the Avon Supreme Court decision ruling the Town of Avon's City ordinance stating that no one could drill into their water course within a 10 mile radius of their community without their approval, was permissible. There is the possibility of fixing the definition of water course within a state statute and there will be more on that to come.

This session is very controversial with Right to Work and will be a short session made even shorter by a one week dismissal. Kay welcomes the Committees thoughts on this issue and anyone wishing to can email or call her with their concerns.

## **Announcements:**

Jenny Orsburn announced she has been appointed the City of Portage's new Park Superintendent by Mayor Snyder and will be leaving her position with DNR in approximately two and a half weeks.

### ➤ **Northwest Indiana Paddling Association Winter Rendezvous**

When: Saturday, January 7, 2012 / 12:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.

Where: Redmill County Park

0185 South Holmesville Rd., LaPorte, IN 46350

Contact Info: Dan Plath [dplath@nwipa.org](mailto:dplath@nwipa.org) (219)871-9559

### ➤ **Asian Carp Public Meeting**

**Organization: Asian Carp Response Coordinating Committee**

When: Thursday, January 12, 2012 / 2:00 p.m.

Where: NIRPC Auditorium

6100 Southport Rd., Portage, IN 46368

Contact Info: Kay Nelson [knelson@nwiforum.org](mailto:knelson@nwiforum.org) (219)763-6303 ext. 186

### ➤ **SWCD Annual Business Meeting & Election**

**Organization: LaPorte Co. Soil & Water Conservation District**

**Speaker: Lisa Holscher of the West Central Indiana Watershed Alliance**

When: Saturday, February 11, 2012 / 11:30 a.m.

Where: Best Western

444 Pine Lake Ave., LaPorte, IN 46350

Contact Info: Nicole Messacar (219)326-6808 ext. 2115

### ➤ **South Shore Clean Cities Annual Meeting**

When: Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Where: Avalon Manor

3550 U.S. Highway 30., Merrillville, IN 46410

Contact Info: Carl Lisek / Deb Zorich [SouthSCC@comcast.net](mailto:SouthSCC@comcast.net)

### ➤ **NW IN Steelheaders Spring Fever Show**

When: Saturday & Sunday, January 14 & 15, 2012

Where: Marquette Mall, Michigan City

Corner of US 20 & Ind 421

Contact Info: [www.nwisteelheaders.org](http://www.nwisteelheaders.org) (219)926-7938

### ➤ **Save the Dunes 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

When: Saturday, October 27, 2012

Where: Sand Creek Country Club

1001 Sand Creek Drive S., Chesterton, IN 46304

Contact Info: Nicole Barker [nicole@savedunes.org](mailto:nicole@savedunes.org) (219)879-3937

The next EMPC meeting will be February 2 and will feature IDEM Commissioner Tom Easterly.

Meeting adjourned at 10:42 a.m.

#### Reasonable Accommodations

Requests for alternate format materials or interpreters may be made 48 hours in advance to Kathy Luther:

(219)763-6060, Ext. 127 or e-mail [kluther@nirpc.org](mailto:kluther@nirpc.org)

#### Non-Discrimination

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