

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICY COMMITTEE

NIRPC- Lake Michigan Room

May 5, 2016

Members/Guests: Geof Benson, Susan Mihalo, Brenda Scott Henry, Deb Backhus, Kaitlyn McClain, Mike Molnar, Maggie Byrne, Dorreen Carey, Richard Morrisroe, Michelle Caldwell, Ashley Snyder, Beth Jacobson, Colin Highlands, Catherine Yoder, George Malis, Natalie Johnson, John Hardwick, Kris Krouse, Jennifer Gadzala, Kevin Breitzke, Kay Nelson, Tim Kingsland

NIRPC Staff: Kathy Luther, Joe Exl, Gabrielle Biciunas, Meredith Stilwell

Call to order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Benson called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance and self-introductions.

Approval of April 7, 2016 EMPC Minutes

On motion by Tim Kingsland and second by Susan MiHalo, the April 7, 2016 EMPC meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Presentations:

a. **Gary Green Infrastructure Efforts** – *Brenda Scott Henry, Director - Green Urbanism & Environmental Affairs, Gary Stormwater Management District*

The City of Gary's Green Urbanism division is relatively new and incorporates sustainable development practices into planning and implementation. The City has 12 neighborhoods with an abundance of natural and transit assets, over 50 parks and three major waterbodies. Some of the challenges faced in revitalization efforts include climate change, combined sewer overflow (CSO), urban run-off, degradation of water bodies, toxic air pollution, divested neighborhoods and dated land use policies and plans.

A climate readiness project grant was received from Great Lakes St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. An increase of wet weather events has been observed and there a lot of challenges still faced by the floods of 2007 and 2008. Many homes and businesses never recovered and have been abandoned. 97% of the area is a CSO which allows both wastewater and stormwater to go through the system, overtaxing it. With many building and impervious surfaces, urban runoff has caused eroded shorelines and waterways. The primary goal of the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project centers on vacant land reuse that incorporates green infrastructure practices in the City's overall planning and development processes. Since most green infrastructure grants require work be done on City owned property, it is challenging because there are currently over 7,000 abandoned properties and the City does not own all of the abandoned parcels. Some of the integrated neighborhood planning and strategies include Strong Communities, Strong Cities Designation; Gary Northside Redevelopment Project; Lakefront Development; Creating Livable Centers Planning Development; Choice Neighborhoods Initiative; FHWA Bike and Pedestrian Study and Green Infrastructure Project.

Along with increased land values, livability and cost savings, reduced energy costs and local flood protection are some green storm water management benefits.

Partnership for green infrastructure projects is important. Many avenues of funding have been explored and received for various projects. A \$6.6m grant received by the redevelopment department for demolition and end-uses for abandoned properties, however that is only enough money for about 400 homes. To complete the end-use portion of the grant a 3”–4” depression and low-mow grasses are used to keep stormwater on site and not runoff into the CSO. The \$1.3 Gary Green Link Trail Phase 2 is beginning and will run from 2nd and Polk to Broadway. The goal is to eventually connect to the Indiana Dunes Lakeshore Trail.

The structure of how a green infrastructure projects happens was discussed, beginning with site selection, design, construction and monitoring continuing through civic engagement and volunteerism to job creation and long term maintenance. Some projects were highlighted. The preliminary concept of the Grey to Green – City Centre Plaza project was shown and includes the area where the Sheraton was before demolition in 2014. The Mayor and Secretary of HUD were present for the demolition activities kickoff and a charrette activity was held with EPA and ideas were given for ways to renovate the area. The Aetna Stormwater Parks area is on a former dilapidated residential facility site. A community engagement process was held to identify how the desired space would look and now is a beautiful area for the residents to enjoy. Green infrastructure street designs are also being developed and rain gardens installed throughout the City using native plants. Some of the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Project outcomes include installing 43,200 square feet of infrastructure; removing 22,950 square feet of impervious surface; planting 85 native trees; adding 1.4 million gallons of stormwater retention within the Grand Calumet Area of Concern and increasing public awareness of stormwater management issues. USGS and the Cleveland Botanical Garden have installed stormwater monitoring equipment and a planning and evaluation project team to monitor sites and evaluate the projects.

b. Indiana Children’s Nature Park Program – *John Hardwick PE*

John is a retired utility director from the City of Valparaiso and has been a member of the Nature Conservancy for many years. One of the major projects developed as part of the Indiana bicentennial year is the Indiana Children’s Nature Park located in Centerville Indiana. The Park will open June 18, 2016 and was created for 1.1m Indiana children ages K-12 with the idea to get children back in nature. Libraries, schools, museums, YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs with outdoor programming are being targeted to join the efforts. A website is being developed for the Park and will be online June 18th as well. Children will get a deed for a parcel of land within the park and can visit the parcel in person or on the website. John or Melissa Moran may be contacted for more information.

NIRPC Business:

Kathy Luther informed the group that a survey was sent out to determine what is being done regarding urban forestry in the communities. Joe Exl commented that the survey is intended to refine what is needed, and a GLRI/US Forest Service grant application is going to be submitted to establish a regional urban forestry plan.

Kathy stated that in partnership with the City of Portage and NIPSCO, paperwork has been signed for an EV charging station to be installed at NIRPC. Two carpool spots will be replaced with EV station installations most likely before the end of May.

Kathy announced the Deep River-Portage Burns Waterway Watershed Restoration and Management Plan was approved by the NIRPC board at their April meeting.

a. Solar Project Wrap-up – Kathy Luther, NIRPC

The two-year Solar Ready project with the National Association of Regional Councils has been completed and there is 74 kW of new solar capacity in the region as a direct result from the Solarize campaign or earned media. The cities of Gary, Hobart, Valparaiso and Dyer committed to implementing additional solar BMPs. Over 19 municipalities participated in training events and/or had a solar installation. Kathy thanked South Shore Clean Cities for their in-kind match. As a result of the City of Gary's solar program, Brenda Scott Henry stated she now will be going to the White House to talk about clean energy. Moving forward, the Department of Energy will now be focusing more on a technical support/recognition program for local communities can apply to become a SPARK community. More information will be distributed at a later date. It was noted that Tri Creek School District (Lowell) is trying to go to all renewable energy and have a team working on the efforts.

Public Comment:

- George Malis commented on the Great Lakes Basin Transportation Inc. proposal to build a 278 mile rail line part of which will run through the region. He indicated his desire for NIRPC to consider the positive and negative aspects of the line and asked for the EMPC to address the proposal on an upcoming agenda to be discussed and investigated. Chairman Benson stated that the project was discussed at the NIRPC Executive Board meeting and since it has been stated that this is a privately funded project and is not using federal funds does not fall under NIRPC's jurisdiction. Since the proposal is in the early scoping phase and is not yet in the environmental impact study it is a good time to ask questions and oppose the project if individuals want. Chairman Benson pointed out that while the project is proposed not to use federal funds, the line would cross many roads that receive federal transportation dollars and would have an impact on the roads NIRPC does have jurisdiction over. If the project moves forward there will need to be a discussion regarding those impacts. There is a project website that allows for comments to be submitted. The comment period for the draft scope of study for the environmental impact study (EIS) has been extended until June 15.

Announcements:

- Natalie Johnson announced that revisions were received from the National Park Service on the environment assessment on the east branch of the Little Calumet River and are currently being taken care of. The final public comment meeting will be held in June. She also commented that a celebration of the River is being talked about for some time in August. More information will follow.
- Dan Plath announced that a Chi Cal grant was awarded to build two public access sites on the East Branch in Chesterton, one of which will be ADA compliant as a Shirley Heinze Little

Cal Wetland Site. The Northwest Indiana Paddling Association (NWIPA) received a grant from NIPSCO to help hire a contractor for chainsaw work to clear the area. Dan announced NWIPA also received a \$25k grant from the Legacy Foundation to install an ADA launch at Marquette Park. \$32k is needed and the Rotary Club has offered to match any dollars raised for the project. Several applications have been submitted for more funding. Dan asked for suggestions for funding sources. The City of Hobart has two launches slated for installation this year, an ADA launch on Deep River in June and a launch on Lake George later in the summer. By year end there should be five ADA compliant launches in the region.

- Kay Nelson gave updates on several upcoming retirements which included Vince Griffin (IN Chamber), Bruce Palin (IDEM), and Roy Duff (Corps of Engineers). Kay announced that she is one of the workgroup members of the above ground storage tank rulemaking process. 10 entities, 6 from northwest Indiana, have submitted reports to IDEM for the reporting deadline. She also commented on her attendance in Chicago for the Waukesha Wisconsin diversion application discussion under the Great Lakes Compact. Many questions and concerns were raised and the Wisconsin representative will have to respond. The meeting was suspended and will reconvene May 10 and 11, but the process will still not be in a position for a vote to be held. The biggest issue is the expansion of the water service area in the original application.
- Additional meeting, event and funding announcements will be forwarded to the Committee by email.

When was asked if there was any discussion regarding lead and water quality in reference to the issue that occurred in Flint Michigan, Kathy Luther remarked that while the EMPC has not had the discussion, the Purdue Water Institute held a World Water Day panel with IDEM, Citizens Energy, Senator Charbonneau, and Indianapolis Water on the issue and very few people attended. Kay Nelson stated the Great Lake Commission is working on a resolution that the State of Michigan asked for with regards to Flint Michigan. The resolution is focused more on the need to create a national process to upgrade water infrastructure. There is currently not a funding source for this and there are serious concerns from communities. Creating local outreach and education is desired.

Meeting adjourned at 10:39 a.m.