

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
MICHIGAN CITY PLAN COMMISSION  
JULY 27, 2021**

The Michigan City Plan Commission held their regular monthly meeting in the Common Council Chambers, City Hall, 100 E. Michigan Boulevard, Michigan City, Indiana, on Tuesday, July 27, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting. This meeting also being available via Zoom and streaming live on My Michigan City, Indiana Facebook. Zoom was hosted by Kaleb Goodwin, City IT staff.

Note: Public had the option to attend, participate, and/or observe the meeting via Zoom, Facebook, or calling in.

**CALL TO ORDER**

President Lawrence Zimmer called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Mr. York called the roll with attendance noted as follows:

**Present:**

Bryant Dabney (in person); Christina Espar (in person); Daniel Granquist (zoom with audio & video); Michael Gresham (in person); Fred Klinder (in person); Andy Sperling (in person); Lawrence Zimmer (in person); Jeffrey Wright (zoom with audio only) – 8

*Note: Jeffrey Wright not eligible to vote participating by audio only – all votes were stricken from the record but no outcome was affected because there was a majority affirming the actions without including his vote.*

**Absent:**

Braedan Gallas – 1

**Staff Present:**

Planning Director Skyler York (in person); Attorney Steven Hale (in person); Administrative Assistant Debbie Wilson (in person)

**Staff Absent:**

None

**POLICY OF CONDUCT AND PROCEDURES**

The Policy of Conduct and Procedures for the Michigan City Plan Commission states that the Commission is composed of nine persons. By statute, five must vote affirmatively to approve a petition. Thus, whenever less than a full board is present, the

petitioner may wish to continue his/her hearing. Anyone wishing to speak on a petition or to the board in general at the end of the meeting may do so by approaching the speaker's roster and giving his/her name and address. Comments should be addressed to the Plan Commission, not to a petitioner or remonstrator or others in the audience. The Plan Commission vote is based on the evidence presented.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The chair entertained a motion for approval of the agenda as presented.

***Motion made and seconded approving the July 27, 2021 agenda as submitted. The roll was called, and the vote taken: (Ayes) Commissioners Dabney, Espar, Granquist, Gresham, Klinder, Sperling, Zimmer – 7; (Nays) None – 0. With a vote of 7 ayes and 0 nays, the MOTION CARRIED.***

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

President Zimmer entertained a motion for approval of the minutes of the regular Zoom meeting of June 22, 2021.

***Motion made and seconded approving the minutes of the regular Zoom meeting of June 22, 2021 as submitted. The roll was called, and the vote taken: (Ayes) Commissioners Espar, Granquist, Gresham, Klinder, Sperling, Zimmer – 6; (Nays) None – 0; (Abstain) Commissioner Dabney – 1. With a vote of 6 ayes, 0 nays, and 1 abstention, the MOTION CARRIED.***

**PETITION(S)**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS / OLD BUSINESS**

**(Presentation – Carbon Neutral Indiana)**

Commissioner Zimmer opened discussion indicating that he invited Daniel Poynter from Carbon Neutral Indiana to speak about the issue of carbon neutrality and how each of us as individuals and as a community can start taking some decisive action about how to reduce our carbon footprint. He said we are now seeing results from decades of fossil fuel consumption. Everybody has a footprint and contributes to it without exception from the car you drive, the house you live in, the food you eat, the clothes you wear; everything around us being a product of fossil fuel or consumption. Either fossil fuels are in the product or the fossil fuels were used to transport the product. He said there are many things we could be doing, and as a Commission he felt they should start thinking and doing more about this issue as a city. He introduced Daniel Poynter who is the Executive Director of a not-for-profit based in Indianapolis that is attempting to take decisive action to reduce our carbon footprint.

Daniel Poynter (appearing via Zoom with video and audio) displayed a shared screen, noting that their tagline is fun and effective climate action; stating that in order to be successful it has to be fun. He explained that the problem is people want to help with the climate crisis but don't know how, so they either do nothing or try random things which are both equally as bad. Carbon Neutral Indiana helps households and businesses measure and cleanup their carbon footprint, and over time helps them reduce their emissions. Along the way they increase awareness of carbon neutrality and they translate that awareness into action, and long-term the real power is to change what is seen as normal.

Mr. Poynter shared a vision for Indiana stating that through positive ripple effects people can take 200,000 cars off the road and the emissions associated with that or plant trees to cover 100,000 football fields preventing \$217,000 in social damages. He said when 1% of Hoosier households are carbon neutral it is equivalent to planting 100,000 football fields of forest. Mr. Poynter shared some case studies.

Mr. Poynter referred to a graph, explaining that in 2018 the IPCC who is the largest group of scientists, put out a report which includes this graph showing greenhouse gas emissions going up, indicating that by 2050 we need to get to zero, although carbon neutral means being net-zero. This is accomplished by individuals and organizations investing in projects that soak up the same amount they emit. He referred to a chart of where greenhouse gas emissions come from, stating that half of those emissions come from ten states, Indiana being one of them along with Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio.

Mr. Poynter continued sharing examples of testimonials. He stated that to clean up carbon trash, people make a financial investment of about \$15/person per month. He explained how it works, stating that once someone measures their footprint and wants to clean it up, they take the total and multiply it by \$15/ton, divide that by 12 months per year, which gives them the monthly cost to clean up their carbon footprint. Carbon Neutral Indiana takes 60% of that and buys wholesale carbon offsets in bulk. Some examples of cost effective ways to reduce carbon emissions could be planting trees; feeding cows garlic to reduce methane; retrofitting a cement factory to reduce emissions they produce; or covering a landfill with a tarp to capture the methane, burn it, and generate electricity. If it is verified by a third party they get carbon offsets, each one representing a ton of carbon dioxide they reduced. Then they sell them. When buying carbon offsets it is buying a negative ton and is essentially paying people to reduce emissions or pull them out of the atmosphere. The other 40% is used for Carbon Neutral Indiana to grow, to educate more households, do presentations at schools or Earth Day fairs, help them reduce their footprint for free, and then help them reduce their emissions. Mr. Poynter stated that after a year he has done about 300 phone calls for free helping people measure their footprint. The phone call takes about 15 minutes. The result is Carbon Neutral taking the money and investing it to a portfolio of different projects paying for a negative ton and reinvesting the money to grow. Mr. Poynter talked about what they have accomplished in a year, stating that there are about 200

households and businesses in Indiana doing this; they are in about 32 counties. He said people put up yard signs and according to INDOT 200,000 people drive by those signs every day, so that is why the word is spreading so quickly. He talked about the media coverage they received and their market potential. He said when 1% of the Midwest is carbon neutral it is over a billion dollars over five years. He reviewed their portfolio, noting that so far they have invested in four different projects in three categories – a forest in Alaska, a landfill in Virginia, and a nitrous oxide project in Mississippi. He discussed those projects in detail.

Mr. Poynter played a video explaining what his fifteen interns achieved in one week last year. He said last year Carbon Neutral also helped facilitate Indiana's first bipartisan carbon market climate legislation. He said it passed at the Senate, but even though it failed at the House the spirit of their legislation lives on. He is in a working group with the State Department of Agriculture and DNR to explore carbon markets and how forest owners and farmers in Indiana can get paid to do this.

Mr. Poynter continued showing case studies. In closing, Mr. Poynter displayed their team, advisors, and board of directors, stating that they are part of a larger non-profit called Indiana Forest Alliance. Mr. Poynter pointed out that they are creating a forest project in Indianapolis and when it is successful they can replicate it in Michigan City.

*Note: Commissioner Sperling left the meeting early.*

President Zimmer asked if there were any questions for Mr. Poynter.

Laura Henderson, 510 E. 9<sup>th</sup> Street, asked Mr. Poynter to expand on the Indianapolis forest project.

Mr. Poynter stated that in Indianapolis they identified 4,000 parcels of forest that are 1 acre or more. He pointed out that every year we lose 40 acres of an urban forest because of development. He said if there is a conservation easement on the urban forest and there is a third party like a land trust or the city itself managing it, you can generate carbon offsets. He said you could do a pilot test at a small scale that generates \$100,000 for the city, but it can get much bigger than that. He gave another example, stating that the State of Michigan has 20 million acres of forest with 4 million acres of forest being managed by Michigan DNR. They did a small pilot project setting aside 100,000 acres of forest, and it will generate \$5-10 million for the DNR. Large corporations are paying for the carbon sequestration.

Nancy Moldenhauer, 107 Kaye Lane, said she is proudly carbon neutral and that the Michigan City Sustainability Commission came on board with Carbon Neutral Indiana one year ago, stating that it is amazing how much has happened within that period of time. Besides Laura Henderson, she acknowledged Andy Janz Davis and Daisy Lee as

being carbon neutral as well. She asked Mr. Poynter what city government and citizens in a community can do to help advance carbon neutrality.

Mr. Poynter replied that you can measure your carbon footprint, you can have neighborhood competitions, or Michigan City could work with Carbon Neutral Indiana to generate carbon payments. He said it is good to start with individuals measuring their carbon footprint and cleaning it up if they want, then expanding out to the corporations. For households it is about \$15/person per month; for businesses it is about ¼ of 1% of their annual revenue per month.

President Zimmer asked if anyone had thoughts or ideas about how the city could be advancing this move.

Commissioner Klinder recalled that last year there were a few trees in his neighborhood cut down, but the Forester indicated that there was no money to replant trees. He said that is something the city could mandate and appropriate funds to go toward trees and having them planted on city property. He also pointed out that there are constantly petitions about people making changes to vacant lots and cutting down the trees to put in a house. He said he was not sure what requirement the city could have to only cut down what is necessary. He noted there are huge areas in town that are being cleared out.

Commissioner Zimmer asked Mr. York what the requirement is for that.

Mr. York replied that the Plan Commission already approved a tree protection ordinance a couple years ago. It protects large unsubdivided lots and exempted certain single-family lots. It doesn't allow you to clear cut but allows you to cut 12' out from the footprint of the house to build around. He commented that it may offer up an opportunity for easements to be placed on those trees and sell them as carbon offsets.

Commissioner Zimmer agreed with Commissioner Klinder in that there are a lot of open areas in the city where trees could be planted. He said if it is not city property, maybe property owners could be encouraged to plant trees.

Mr. York commented that the key is who then manages it and takes care of it from then on.

Commissioner Zimmer questioned how the City Council could get on board and help promote this.

Commissioner/Councilman Dabney said it would be hard for him to speak for the City Council. He said the first thing that came to his mind was using neighborhood associations as the platform to get involved.

Mr. York noted that there is a Stormwater Advisory Group (SWAG) that gets together monthly. One of the first projects they worked on was a riparian corridor and they identified all the pieces of land that are in a floodplain. He explained that the floodplains can't be built on and are left alone but they are still privately owned. He said that might be an area to look at for putting in conservation easements and people getting paid to offset carbon.

Commissioner Zimmer asked Mr. Poynter what Michigan City could do to become carbon neutral and what other communities do.

Mr. Poynter said Michigan City could easily be the first carbon neutral city in the Midwest. They would need to find out what their carbon footprint is. The dollar amount would be per month per citizen for the city to be carbon neutral. The other thing is to generate more money. He explained that when you take an acre of urban forest and you put an easement on it, you get about 120 carbon offsets; assuming it is \$10/ton you would get about \$1,000 per acre, then every year after that you get a fraction of the first payment. He talked about how you create carbon offsets. (Most of this was inaudible due to poor internet connectivity).

Commissioner Zimmer asked Commissioner Dabney as the Council representative, if this is something he would be willing to address with the Council and possibly coordinate a presentation by Mr. Poynter.

Commissioner Dabney stated that this is something he needs to understand first and needs more information, although he said he would be willing to request bringing Mr. Poynter before the Council with his presentation.

Nancy Moldenhauer pointed out that in 2019 Indiana University did measure the carbon footprint for both the city government and for the City of Michigan City as a whole, so that data is available. The report can be found on the City's website under the Michigan City Sustainability Commission.

Commissioner Zimmer commented that this will take more public relations, advertising, and getting the word out in the community on a larger scale to get the ball rolling, and suggested businesses that are carbon neutral need to start touting it.

Commissioner Wright stated that the presentation was interesting and informative. He shared information, stating that he teaches mathematics and physics at Ivy Tech. As part of that program they do a climate change demonstration using solar collectors. One collector is just pure atmosphere, which is 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, .9% argon. 99.9% of the atmosphere is made up of those three elements; .1% makes up the 25 gases that exist in the atmosphere. He explained that they let the gases come to equilibrium at room temperature, and put energy into them in the form of light, and

without fail every time the solar collector that has 100% carbon dioxide is 2° cooler than the solar collector that has atmosphere.

Commissioner Klinder said he did not hear specifics in the presentation on what the city and individuals can do to accomplish this; he heard a sales pitch. He stated that he did not get any detailed information concerning it and that is what is needed before a presentation can be made before the Council.

Commissioner Zimmer encouraged everyone to go to the website at [carbonneutralindiana.org](http://carbonneutralindiana.org) and then go through the process for their household.

Commissioner Granquist spoke but it was inaudible.

To clarify, Commissioner Dabney said what they would need for a Council meeting is for Mr. Poynter to present what this is about; how it works; what the city can do for this program and how it benefits the city; and any investment, time, money, resources be laid out to the Council.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

(None)

**COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Commissioner Gresham revisited the former St. Anthony Hospital rezoning, reporting that after a workshop and Council meeting in addition to the Plan Commission's work on this, the ordinance passed on first, second, and third reading at the Council's last meeting. The households surrounding the former St. Anthony Hospital should now be back to a state that they should be in – either residential or business. He thanked everyone, including staff in getting this done.

Commissioner Gresham commented that during the workshop one of the Council members seemed to feel that the St. Anthony site itself (especially some of the outer older areas making up the parking lot) might not be correctly zoned and should be changed back to the zoning it was before the County-wide Zoning Ordinance happened in 2010-2011. He said he does not agree with that assessment but wanted to pass this information onto the Plan Commission because any changes would start here.


Mr. York reported that Greenstreet Ltd. is almost at the end of the county-wide housing study. There was a pre-final presentation a couple of weeks ago. These presentations can be seen at [vibrantlpcounty.com](http://vibrantlpcounty.com) under the people pillar. The report should be complete by the end of August and they will start making presentations to the County Plan Commission, Michigan City Plan Commission, County Council, and City Council, etc. He said this study will guide some of the future land decisions the city makes.

Commissioner Gresham asked if there are any walking orders for the Plan Commission, specifically any changes the Commission will potentially be looking at in the future.

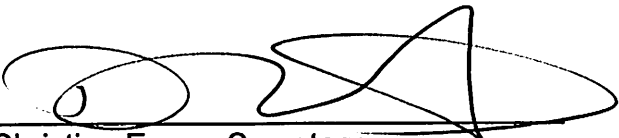
Mr. York replied affirmatively, stating that they might see some tweaking of our residential code, possibly adding density or allowing twin (duplex) homes. He said the study shows that there is a demographic change in what people are looking for in housing. It is an interesting shift with people looking for attached single-family housing or apartments; it is shifting more toward rental than ownership. He said that comes with a different list of issues for the city to deal with. The report is very detailed and simple to understand. He said it might help drive some policy in the city. He encouraged everyone to look at the report. There will be recommendations coming out of this for the Plan Commission to look at. Some things looked at include a housing trust fund to make sure there is enough housing provided and provided at an affordable rate. This report is not only for Michigan City; it also includes LaPorte County, City of LaPorte, and Westville.

**ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to come before the Commission, President Zimmer declared the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:10 p.m. He announced the next regular meeting is scheduled for August 24, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

  
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Lawrence Zimmer, President

ATTEST:

  
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~~Christina Espar, Secretary~~  
Daniel Granguit, Vice President