

Valparaiso Environmental Advisory Board – Working Session

Date: May 27, 2025

Time: 5:13 PM – 6:30 PM

Chair: Maureen Turman (meeting called to order)

Absent: Greg Quartucci

1. Midwood Terrace Annexation Discussion

- The Annexation will have two readings before City Council; the first is scheduled for June 9, 2025.
- Development includes ~300 homes (half single-family, half multi-unit) and a fire station at 500N175W near Brigatta Hills.
- Concerns were discussed about preserving a significant Burr Oak and other trees on the site.
- Environmental review noted a detention pond and wetlands delineation report, but no endangered species assessment.
- The board discussed submitting questions and recommendations to City Council, especially concerning tree preservation and sustainable development.
- Because this is just an annexation request, City Council (and the EAB) has limited power. However, ideas were discussed on how to further EAB's involvement regarding sustainability and preservation in these planning decisions:
 - Researching IDEM and DNR grading/classification levels for trees and wetlands
 - Adding broader environmental impacts to the review such as pollinator habitats, preserving existing vegetation, and wildlife
 - Require an advisory analysis to be submitted with the report
 - Updating the UDO
 - Tax abatements and incentives for developers (going directly to the developers to ask)
- Board to prepare focused questions and advisory comments for Council consideration.
- It was suggested that the board directly contact developers to encourage innovative, sustainable designs.
- Walt referenced a past success in preserving a notable Burr Oak during previous development projects. The tree, on Vale Park Road behind the Valpo Tech Campus, has its own timber easement that is registered at the courthouse. Unless it is terribly diseased or hit by a storm, it cannot be taken down.
- The conversation moved to the RFI's. It was discussed how sustainability is a much bigger issue than merely environmental. It also involves improving the quality of life and the city, which includes preserving existing vegetation and property value.
- Next Steps:

- Develop questions for City Council to ask the developers. They should be short and concise and focused on the tree preservation.
- Reach out to developers and ask if they would like to contribute to the EAB as a volunteer, on a subcommittee, or through grants/funds.

2. Round Table Update

- Tentative date set for August 21; confirmation email to be sent once a location is selected.
 - Introductions still need to be sent to Humane Indiana and NWI Food Alliance.
- Ellen sent out an invitation to board members for the Plastic Reduction Alliance Forum (June 18).
- Other municipal EABs will be contacted in a separate communication.

3. Recycling Grant

- June 18 application deadline for the IDEM Recycling Grant. It is tentatively planned to be used for permanent recycling bins in parks.
- To further a partnership with the Parks Department, a July trash pickup event for volunteer groups was discussed.

4. Carbon Neutral Indiana Book Discussion

- Book has many quick, actionable recommendations.
- Concern that the book does not address plastic waste.
- Board to focus on implementing introductory-level changes.

5. Department Leadership Responses

- Board to extract key points, documents referenced and identify follow-up questions from departmental input.
 - Ellen will send follow up questions after next meeting.
- The newsletter can highlight positive actions in upcoming editions.
- Ellen determined that we can include NIPSCO's energy efficiency programs as a resource for the public.
- The EAB was invited to be part of the UDO additions. Maureen will reach out to confirm next steps and involvement.
 - The board would like to push for native plants to be included in developments.

6. Goals

- Support for NIPSCO energy efficiency outreach and tree preservation programs.
- Walt expressed concern about overly manicured parks and natural area preservation, specifically at Rogers Lakewood Parks (tree understories trimmed)
- Rain gardens: discussed issues and highlighted successful examples. However, it was noted that past rain gardens in the city have not been taken care of.
 - Next Steps: Apply for the NIPSCO Environmental Action Grant to sponsor a rain garden.

- Ideas for community involvement events, such as Art Barn's vendor fair with environmental efforts, such as painting rain barrels.
- Next Steps:
 - Sara to circulate the most current goal document.
 - Subcommittee chairs will review their goals and adjust timelines and initiatives based on the RFI response.
- Update:
 - Farmers Market initiative stalled due to lack of insurance.
 - Board currently has \$300 in available funds.

Meeting Adjourned

- Meeting closed at 6:30 PM.