

Valparaiso Environmental Advisory Board

Meeting Minutes | August 4, 2025 5:00 PM

1. Call to Order / Attendance

- The meeting was called to order at 5:03 PM.
- Greg Quartucci was not in attendance.

2. Approval of Minutes

June 2025 Minutes:

- There were no comments or questions regarding the June minutes.
- Maureen Turman moved to approve.
- Ellen Kapitan seconded.
- The motion passed unanimously.

July 2025 Minutes:

- Similarly, there were no changes proposed.
- Maureen Turman moved to approve.
- Ellen Kapitan seconded.
- The motion passed unanimously.

3. Subcommittee Updates

a. Community Outreach & Education

Board members discussed the best strategy for increasing engagement with local schools. It was agreed that reaching out to the Assistant Superintendent might help facilitate connections, but contacting individual superintendents directly could potentially hinder progress.

There was consensus on trying alternative approaches such as connecting through Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) or teachers, including one at Benjamin Franklin Middle School.

The board will reach out to Mrs. Sarkisian for help in connecting to others in the district.

Concerns were raised about a previously mishandled grant application for butterfly gardens in elementary schools, which appeared poorly coordinated and raised red flags due to perceived budget overlaps and rollout issues. The board agreed that better planning and communication with upper-level administration are necessary for broader school partnerships.

For the upcoming Roundtable, board members will:

- Sara McKelvey will forward planning materials to Malorie Medellin.
- Follow up with special interest groups that have not yet confirmed attendance, such as Shirley Heinze Land Trust and the Living with Lakes Initiative.
- Finalize the final attendance numbers for food count for Malorie.
- Identify a scribe, name tags, volunteer roles, and confirm the agenda.
- Walt Breitinger volunteered to bring pizza.

b. Business Engagement and Incentives

- Greg Quartucci was not available to report on this subcommittee. He has not yet reached out to interested volunteer members.
- Malorie Medellin will step in to begin leading efforts related to local business engagement and incentive programs.

c. Policy, Operations, and Review

The subcommittee, composed of three members, is currently reviewing existing city ordinances, the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), and building codes.

Accessing building codes has been challenging, but they are in the early stages of identifying what ordinances are in place and determining potential additions.

Their goal is to suggest small, targeted, and implementable changes.

The group is gathering examples of model ordinances and policies from other municipalities.

The City of Valparaiso is revising its comprehensive plan to be shorter and more user-friendly (target: 50–60 pages).

Porter County is also updating its plan and has hired a consultant.

Surveys are now live for public input and will be promoted in the EAB newsletter and on the website.

The EAB wants to provide input before public feedback is solicited later in the process.

Kathy Sipple emailed Malorie links from NIRPC’s “Sensible Tools” toolkit for policy reference.

Survey: elevateportercounty.com

d. Grants and Advancement

The City applied for an IDEM Community Grant to fund a vegetation compactor. The equipment will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by compacting organic matter, requiring

fewer disposal trips. The grant request was \$100,000, with a \$60,000 city match. The EAB submitted a letter of recommendation.

Ellen Kapitan will confirm whether the Parks Department has applied for the CommuniTree grant.

The board discussed the need to coordinate with Public Works and City Arborist for future tree-related grants.

Maureen Turman made contact with two Parks staff members who coordinate grants and may follow up with Steve afterward.

The newsletter will include:

- A promotion for the tree reimbursement program (removal of invasive trees qualifies residents for free native trees).
- Updates on the ozone garden.

The EAB noted that some Tree City USA programs may inadvertently distribute invasive trees. A vetted tree list from the Parks Department will be referenced.

The City Arborist will be invited to a future meeting to discuss collaboration.

A NIRPC environmental meeting is scheduled for August 7 at 10:00 AM.

The board discussed creating a 501(c)(3) to increase grant eligibility but determined this would not be legally possible under their current city-chartered status.

Alternatives such as using the Porter County Community Foundation for financial administration were discussed.

Two new members have joined the Grants Subcommittee.

Grants will now be added to the EAB's recurring planning calendar.

e. Governance and Administration

With Austin Sabec's graduation and departure for college, his position must be filled.

Although Austin began in January, the board agreed to treat the term as a one-year academic appointment.

Recruitment for student members will open in August and run through the beginning of the school year. Teachers will be contacted for student recommendations.

Ellen Kapitan will bring a proposal to the City Council in August to open up applications, with the aim of appointing a new member at the first September meeting.

Annual application cycles may be introduced to keep the committee dynamic and diverse.

A presentation for the annual report is in development.

4. New Business

The board is preparing the next **newsletter**, which will feature content on:

- The tree reimbursement program
- The ozone garden
- Seed collection
- Air quality alerts
- Upcoming survey links

The **Climate Leadership Summit** will take place September 5. Members are encouraged to attend.

The **City's Sustainability Plan** was not shared with the board prior to this meeting. Ellen Kapitan will follow up and request a copy before the next meeting.

Website Updates: Samantha Camp made recent edits. Members are asked to submit agenda items two weeks in advance and final drafts one week ahead of the meeting.

Event Planning:

- Booth pricing for the Porter County Master Gardeners Association (PCMGA) is being finalized.
- The EAB will participate in the Earth Day event and is considering a booth at the Owl Festival in October.
- Discussion about banners and display materials is ongoing.

5. Public Comment

Joe Kurtis addressed the board as a representative of the solar industry. He holds a certificate in renewable energy and has worked part-time in solar for over 10 years.

- He noted recent rate changes by NIPSCO have frustrated many residents.
- He is working with Green Alternatives and Northwest Indiana Activists to sponsor solar education programs.

- He proposed a seminar on solar energy, potentially hosted or co-hosted by the EAB, with features such as testimonials, virtual tours, and educational content.
- Joe emphasized the need for non-partisan and unbiased presentation and stated other solar providers may also want to be involved.
- The EAB agreed to conduct a base-level interest poll and will discuss collaboration logistics and timeline at a future meeting.

6. Additional Announcements / Roundtable

Resources for the **Roundtable** are being collected and finalized.

Concerns were raised about a housing development northwest of town, which has reportedly removed large tracts of vegetation and caused runoff into Salt Creek.

- IDEM was contacted for fugitive dust violations.
- The board discussed advocating for stormwater management and environmental monitoring.
- It was noted that the site may fall under city jurisdiction through annexation.