

Valparaiso Environmental Advisory Board (EAB) Meeting Minutes

Date: September 8, 2025

Time: 5:20 PM – 6:17 PM

Attendees: All board members present

Meeting Called to Order: 5:20 PM

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 5:20 PM with all board members present.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Ellen Kapitan and seconded by Malorie Medellin. The minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Membership Updates

Naia remains an active student member. Malorie has been in communication with Heidi Krause regarding new student applicants. Counsel will need to review applications. Ellen suggested potentially extending the deadline for high school applicants, noting that only one application had been received to date. The deadline is the Wednesday prior to a meeting for inclusion on the City Council agenda.

4. Unfinished Business

1) Subcommittee Status Updates

a) Community Outreach & Education Committee

i) Updates

- (1)** Discussion included tree ordinances across municipalities, funding for tree planting, and wetland ordinance limitations under state law. Valparaiso's ordinance from the early 2000s was referenced. Members discussed how Porter County requires contiguous open space for subdivisions, a practice Valparaiso could adopt.
- (2)** Comprehensive Plan: No updates were available from Mr. Thompson. The Board discussed potential overlap between the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) and comprehensive plan updates.
- (3)** Action Items: Plans included signage, a letter of recommendation for National Wildlife Federation (NWF) wildlife certification for the Valparaiso Native Plant Group, creating a quarterly roundtable event, posting to Facebook about the roundtable, contacting Humane Indiana for data regarding wildlife crossings, and preparing the newsletter.

(4) Outreach:

(a) PCMGA Booth: A motion to reserve a booth spot for \$50 was made by Ellen and seconded by Greg. The booth is currently on a waiting list.

(b) Owl Booth: Maureen and Bonnie will lead coordination.

(5) Education: The Board discussed challenges engaging Valparaiso schools in environmental education initiatives. Naia will connect with her teachers regarding opportunities.

ii) Environmental Roundtable Summary & Action Items

(1) An overview of the roundtable, results, and next steps were given. All participants voted on:

(a) *3 initiatives they'd like to see included in a comprehensive plan update*

(b) *1 communication channel*

(c) *1 shared project*

- Initiative ideas

- Wetland Protection Ordinance (1)
- Junior Master Gardener Wildlife Gardener Curriculum (2)
- Zoning and HOA rules that are supportive of sustainable land use (food growing, native plants, remaining invasives, rain collection, etc) and phasing out of existing restrictive land use rules (4)
- Programming that is "eco-preneurial" (example: Gary flower gardens) (3)
- Rules for runoff and enforcement (2)
- Encourage native gardens (mow, ordinance) (4)
- Wildlife bridge/connection to the parks (6)
- Establish community hub for tool sharing, repairing, composting, seed/plant swaps (physical place for various groups to use) (4)
- Bike lane connectivity and lane dividers (0)
- Incentives for positive management practices and resources for alternatives (2)
- Wood lot/ tree offset mitigation program: similar to wetland mitigation when clearing wood lots for development, must pay per tree or plant a tree somewhere else (5)
- Demonstration gardens on city property (2)
- Ban HOA's (2)

- Tax incentive structure for naturalized yards or turf management promoting infiltration (3)
- Promote restoration of otherwise unused space throughout the city (2)
- Communication Channels
 - In person meetings and resource bank (11)
 - Environmental or green section of city website (1)
 - Multiple modes to reach across age and technology ability (email, social media, podcasts, hub meet-ups, neighborhood associations) (3)
 - Publicly available notes (shared google doc or site) (2)
- Shared Projects
 - Invasive tree/shrub swap (2)
 - Neighborhood green competitions (0)
 - Science fair (5)
 - City-wide shared read with meet-ups (3)
 - Knowledge diagram that shows how and where each organization is active (4)
 - Getting Valpo NWF Community Wildlife Habitat Certified (3)
 - Rain Gardens (3)

b) Business Engagement & Incentives Committee

- i) Greg confirmed his role but reported no new updates. He plans to reconnect with his subcommittee soon.

c) Policy, Operations, & Review Committee

- i) Continuing review of old ordinances with plans for an additional meeting. Discussions focused on strengthening ordinances, identifying gaps, and exploring a shift from advisory board to commission status. Questions were raised about mayoral versus council appointments. The group discussed the need for a dedicated MS4 coordinator and arborist involvement in tree mitigation plans.

d) Grants & Advancement Committee

- i) Report out on meeting with Parks Grants Staff
- (1) The Board met with the Parks Department to discuss grant opportunities. Members highlighted the need for improved interdepartmental communication, noting that Parks was unaware of an IDEM recycling event. Future grants will be tracked in a shared folder.

e) Governance & Administration Committee

i) Status on Student EAB Application Process

(1) The Board discussed filling Austen's vacant position and extending outreach.

f) Newsletter Items

i) Newsletter topics include the Festival of Owls, Izaak Walton programs, native seed collection, monarch information, and fall garden clean-up. Parks Department updates will also be included. Malorie emphasized maintaining quarterly roundtables and improved local collaboration.

5. New Business

- a)** Data Centers: Michigan City and Hobart have both passed recommendations for data centers. Michigan City's ordinance was noted as weak, but Valparaiso may consider its own recommendations for council review.
- b)** Pollinator Protection: Following recent honeybee losses at a downtown business, the Board explored ideas for code enforcement, beekeeper relocation, or city proclamations. Members agreed to consider adding pollinator protection to comprehensive plan requests.
- c)** Recycling Services: Concerns were raised regarding the potential elimination of the city recycling program. Ellen will share recycling dates with the community. The Board expressed interest in participating in focus groups, though they have not been specifically invited.

6. Public Comment

- a)** Bonnie raised concerns about runoff issues and suggested future discussion with Walt.
- b)** Dr. Julie Peller will present *The Story of Plastic* at 6:00 PM on Friday at the Neal Science Center. The event is free and open to the public, drawing participation from local environmentalists and Valparaiso University students.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:17 PM.