

Sep 16, 2025

Bianca Tirado
City Clerk, South Bend, IN

Fw: EAC Support Letter for Office of Sustainability

Dear Members of the South Bend Common Council,

We, the members of the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC), write to express our deep concern regarding the proposed cuts to the City of South Bend Office of Sustainability. In particular, we ask that the Council reject the proposal to eliminate the "Project Manager for Sustainability." The Office plays a critical role in helping the EAC to realize our vision for ecological health of the environment and the well-being of our residents, as outlined in the Venues, Parks, and Arts Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP). The Office is also essential for realizing the goals of the South Bend Climate Action Plan, adopted by the City in 2019. We recognize that the property tax cuts resulting from Indiana SB 1 create a very challenging environment for building a budget. However, the people and programs of the Office of Sustainability drive economic and environmental wins that benefit everyone in South Bend, and as such, the work of the Office should be prioritized in the City budget.

Established in 2016 by Park Board Resolution 0004-2016, the Ecological Advocacy Committee (EAC) serves as an advisory committee to the South Bend Board of Park Commissioners and VPA staff. At the request of the Board of Park Commissioners, the EAC oversees the formulation and updating of the NRMP and functions as the City's Tree Advisory Committee, tasked with supporting the City in maintaining recognition as a Tree City USA and promoting the planting and care of trees within the City.

The Office of Sustainability implements and promotes programs and creates community collaborations that are invaluable to EAC, enabling us to achieve the strategic priorities identified in the NRMP and carry out our duties as the City "Tree Board." Of note, the Office of Sustainability has:

- 1) increased public awareness and outreach through the creation of an Environmental Research Coalition where local universities implement research in support of NRMP goals,
- 2) implemented Project Learning Tree to train teachers and students in environmental stewardship and tree care,
- 3) secured a USDA Community Forestry grant to help the city achieve its goal of planting 100,000 trees by 2050,
- 4) administered programs that promote transition by businesses and non-profits to solar energy, an initiative supported by two Common Council resolutions, and
- 5) promoted the implementation of the City's Real Time Air Quality Map.

These and other programs are at risk under the proposed cuts to the Office of Sustainability budget.

Please prioritize funding for Sustainability in our City budget.

On behalf of the entire Ecological Advocacy Committee -

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Schnabel, Chair, Ecological Advocacy Committee