

Minutes of June 22, 2026 South Bend Ecological Advocacy Committee Meeting

Members present:

Lori Checkley
John Hamilton
Clay Kusbach, Chair
Andrew Schnabel
Brian Will, Acting Secretary
Diana Zebroski

Others present:

Barbara Dale, South Bend Office of Sustainability
Garry Harrington, VPA, Director of Rum Village Nature Center
Michael Schmidt, Assistant City Attorney
Erin Thornton, Executive Director of Venues Parks & Arts

- I. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 8:32 a.m. by Clay Kusbach.
- II. **Approval of Minutes:** Lori Checkley moved to approve the minutes, seconded by John Hamilton. The motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Privilege of the Floor:** There were no comments made or questions asked by members of the public at today's meeting.
- IV. **Old Business:**
 - a. Diana Zebroski, a student at Indiana University South Bend and a McKinney Family Fellow working as an intern with the Office of Sustainability, was introduced as the newest member of the EAC. Erin Thornton was also introduced as the newly appointed Executive Director of Venues Parks & Arts.
 - b. No update on the status of the Potawatomi Park improvements was provided because John Martinez was absent.
 - c. Committee updates were provided. The Aquatic Resources Committee (formerly known as the Wetlands Committee) is working on herpetology. The Education Committee is interested in helping to distribute free trees this fall and setting up an education table to help the public understand how to plant their saplings. Possible event at Rum Village on October 10 might provide another education outreach opportunity.
 - d. The recently finalized Rum Village Master Plan was discussed. The proposed mountain bike trail through the old growth forest area of the park has been removed from the plan because of public feedback. Members of the EAC have attended parks board meetings and master plan open house events to provide their individual feedback on the proposals with the master plan.
 - e. Each member of the EAC is asked to bring ecological improvement ideas for improving their "focus park" to the August 3rd EAC meeting. Members are encouraged to sketch a simple diagram and/or bring pictures with a short written summary for improvement ideas,

especially for areas of a park in need of repair or under-utilized areas of the park. During the June 22nd EAC meeting, Lori Checkley shared a one-page diagram of her ideas for Ponader Park.

- f. Barbara Dale provided an update on the Half Moon Tree Nursery project and invited the EAC to attend an open house for the nursery on June 29. Diana Zebrowski will be spending much of her internship supporting the rollout of the tree distribution strategy that will include Tree Ambassadors. Barbara also reported that a number of trees have been planted in several parks around town as well as City Cemetery.

V. New Business:

- a. Clay Kusbach is working on an update for the upcoming Parks Committee meeting.
- b. The Rum Village Park road will be repaired in October.

Brian Will moved to adjourn the meeting and Andrew Schnabel seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m. The next meeting will be held on Monday, August 3, 2026, at the Rum Village Nature Center.