



**Community Relations Commission
CITY OF GOSHEN**

202 South Fifth Street, Suite I • Goshen, IN 46528-3714
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www.goshenindiana.org/crc

GOSHEN COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSIONS MEETING MINUTES – Oct. 7, 2025

Tuesday, Oct. 7, 2025 | 4 p.m.

Location: Council Chambers, Goshen Police & Courts, 111 E. Jefferson St.

1. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair **Michael Wanbaugh**, Director of Administrative Affairs, called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. He welcomed commissioners and guests and thanked them for their continued work to strengthen neighborhood connections and advance equity initiatives throughout Goshen.

Roll Call

- Members present: Lori Copsey, Angie Wentz, Tim Swartzentruber, John Dolezal
- Absent: E-Man Monge
- Guests: Mayor Gina Leichty, City Council Liaison Phil Lederach, Daniela Panetta (LaCasa, Director of Community Building & Engagement), Mike Keen (Hometowne Development LLC / The Bakery Group)
- Staff present: Michael Wanbaugh (Chair; Director of Administrative Affairs)
- Absent: Theresa Cummings (CDBG Administrator)

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion: To approve the Oct. 7, 2025, agenda as presented.

Outcome: Motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes

- a. Aug. 5, 2025
- b. Sept. 2, 2025

Commissioners reviewed the August and September meeting minutes included in the agenda packet.

Motion: To approve both sets of minutes as submitted.

Outcome: Motion carried unanimously.

4. LaCasa Report

Presenter: Daniela Panetta, Director of Community Building & Engagement

Panetta provided a detailed update on LaCasa's community-building work in the Chamberlain Neighborhood, focusing on the Chamberlain Gardens project. She said progress has been slow as LaCasa continues coordinating with residents and the City to determine the exact placement of raised beds on the site where the park is located. Panetta is working closely with Tanya Warren to finalize that location so planting can resume once grant funding is secured.

She reported continued collaboration with Purdue Extension, a longtime partner in the garden, noting that Purdue's financial changes have required new approaches to funding and support. Panetta said



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discussions are underway with 4-H participants to strengthen youth involvement and that she is also exploring sponsorship opportunities for long-term sustainability.

Panetta described progress in identifying potential funding sources, including LittleBig Idea Grants, for which the Chamberlain project appears to be a strong match. She said a \$500 grant and a \$2,000 grant with an \$800 match are under review and could allow for early-stage improvements once the final site layout is confirmed.

She also announced that LaCasa will lead a community delegation to the NeighborWorks America Community Leadership Institute in Minneapolis, bringing seven participants from the Chamberlain neighborhood, including Chair Wanbaugh. The three-day national conference allows local leaders to select specialized training in volunteerism, neighborhood development, and engagement strategies that can be applied locally after their return.

Commissioners expressed appreciation for LaCasa's persistence in rebuilding local partnerships and expanding leadership opportunities for neighborhood residents.

5. Presentation – Community-Led Development and Engagement

Presenter: Mike Keen, Managing Partner, Hometowne Development LLC / President, The Bakery Group

Keen, a South Bend resident and long-time neighborhood organizer, shared lessons from his "12 Steps to Town Making" model, which he has applied in redeveloping South Bend's Near Northwest Neighborhood. He described his current work transforming the Old Ward Bakery Building, now called Portage Place, into a multi-use community hub for local entrepreneurs, artists, and residents.

The 56,000-square-foot property at 906 Portage Avenue is being renovated in phases with an investment of about \$3 million to \$5 million. Keen said the goal is to create affordable, flexible spaces for small businesses and community organizations that strengthen neighborhood identity. He explained that the project builds momentum through visible, achievable progress rather than large one-time investments.

"I tell people not to wait for the big one," Keen said. "Start with something you can finish. A duplex. A storefront. Even a small corner of a park. You learn by doing, and the doing changes everything."

He emphasized local ownership and accessibility, noting that Portage Place is designed to keep opportunity within the community. "We want to make sure this stays a neighborhood project," he said.

"That means affordable rent, shared tools, and neighbors helping neighbors."

Keen's slides showed before-and-after photos of the bakery, where small studios and retail spaces are already active. He called it "a nest for up to sixty new ventures" and said the project's success depends on shared responsibility. "You can't build community from the outside," he said. "You have to do it with the people who already live there."



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He outlined several principles from his “12 Steps” framework:

- **Start where you are.** “Pick your farm,” he said. “Walk the same streets until you know every sound and smell. That’s how you learn what a place needs.”
- **Build trust through consistency.** He encouraged residents to be present and dependable. “Relationships are the real infrastructure.”
- **Keep investment local.** Work with neighborhood lenders and small developers so money stays in the community.
- **Lead with care.** “Clean, clean, clean,” he said. “If you want people to believe in a block, start by caring for it.”
- **Activate improvements quickly.** “A well-chosen tenant can do more for a block than a mural or new streetlights,” he said.

Commissioners connected Keen’s examples to Goshen’s own work. Angie Wentz said CRC’s neighborhood micro-grants play a similar role by giving residents their first chance to test an idea. Keen nodded in agreement. “Exactly,” he said. “You’re priming the pump. Once people see something working, others want to join in.”

Mayor Leichty thanked Keen for showing how incremental, resident-driven progress can build economic strength and community pride. “It’s inspiring to see what South Bend is accomplishing,” she said, “and even more meaningful to see how those lessons can help Goshen grow from within.”

6. CRC Financial Report

Chair Wanbaugh reviewed the most recent departmental budget summary through Oct. 1, 2025.

- Total 2025 CRC budget: \$206,050
- Expenditures to date: \$77,258.79 (37.5%)
- Remaining balance: \$128,791.21 (62.5%)

He noted that personnel and insurance costs remain the largest expenditures, while funds for education, promotion, and event support are largely unspent. Commissioners agreed this provides flexibility for end-of-year programming and community events. No action was required.

7. Indigenous Peoples Day Recap

Commissioners discussed the City’s 2025 Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration, held Oct. 3 in downtown Goshen as part of the First Fridays “Harvest” event. The celebration moved outdoors this year, with performances and presentations held along Main Street and inside Ignition Garage.

Lori Copsey began by noting that the event felt “very successful” and “had a different tone” than previous years, drawing in passersby who might not have entered the theater in the past. Others agreed the new location created a welcoming, open atmosphere.

Chair Wanbaugh said that while setup brought a few stressful moments, “once everyone arrived, everything fell into place.” He described the performances, traditional dress, and storytelling by **Madeline Big Bear** as “casual, engaging, and fun for everyone.” Commissioners estimated attendance at about 200 people outdoors and roughly 50 inside Ignition Garage.



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Members praised the program's interactive nature and Big Bear's ability to connect with the audience. "People stayed," Wanbaugh said. "They didn't just drift in and out. They listened, asked questions, and learned." Commissioners highlighted her discussion of local landmarks, her outreach to fourth-grade students statewide, and her reflections on how current events continue to affect Indigenous communities.

Chair Wanbaugh thanked the commission for its support and recognized **Angie Wentz** for coordinating partner tables with the Goshen Public Library, the Elkhart County Historical Museum, and Goshen College. He also thanked **Lori Copsey** for assisting with booth operations and logistics.

Commissioners agreed the event succeeded in creating a stronger connection between the City, local institutions, and residents. They credited the accessible downtown location, collaboration among partners, and the authenticity of the presentation for making it "one of the most engaging Indigenous Peoples Day events to date."

8. Looking Ahead

a. First Fridays – CRC Participation in November Light Parade (Nov. 7)

Commissioners discussed plans for CRC participation in the upcoming Goshen Light Parade, held during the November First Fridays event. Members agreed to enter a parade unit emphasizing neighborhood inclusion and community pride. Angie Wentz and Tim Swartzentruber volunteered to coordinate decorations and logistics. Commissioners discussed theme ideas and the use of a CRC banner and glow lights.

Chair Wanbaugh encouraged members to invite local youth and neighborhood representatives to walk with the group to highlight community unity.

9. Privilege of the Floor

No additional comments or public input were offered.

10. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:17 p.m.