

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, February 11, 2026
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chair ProTem Mr. Smith, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Megan Engelmann; Mary Johnson; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member); Matt Smith; Liesa Wetzig; John Traxler

Others in Attendance: Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - Chair, Richard Varga (non-voting Member); John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2026**

A motion was made by Ms. Wetzig and seconded by Mr. Traxler to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, January 14, 2026, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

The vote was 7 for and 0 against and the Chair ProTem declared the motion passed.

UPDATE ON ARBOR DAY 2026

Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith opened the discussion about Arbor Day 2026 planning by asking for suggestions for improvements or changes to activities from previous years. He noted that having a tent available as a weather contingency for the jazz band had worked well last year, even though it wasn't needed, and suggested keeping that arrangement. Mr. Boccabella agreed, expressing that the option provided reassurance to the band, as they could perform rain or shine.

Ms. Berges recommended bringing back the Metro Parks program designed for young children, which had been successful last year. She mentioned that it created enthusiasm among the kids and was well-received. Mr. Traxler echoed this sentiment, noting that the children were very engaged last year. Ms. Berges volunteered to contact the Metro Parks to arrange this program again. The Commission agreed this was a good idea, recognizing the benefits it had offered previously.

Mr. Boccabella suggested changing the food service approach. He pointed out that last year's pizza was cold and not well-received. He proposed that Tree Commission Members could grill hot dogs and hamburgers, volunteering himself to help with this effort. He noted that grilled food would be more appealing and that the logistics wouldn't be overly complicated. The Commission discussed expanding beverage options beyond just water, potentially offering hot chocolate or cider as additional choices. They considered it crucial to provide a variety of options given the past feedback.

Ms. Engelmann touched on the tattoo station, which had been popular with children, and proposed additional educational components. She suggested organizing a guided "tree walk and talk" through the area. This walk would aim to educate participants about significant tree species and proper planting techniques. She felt that such an initiative could enhance the educational aspect of Arbor Day.

Additionally, she proposed a craft activity for children in addition to or instead of tattoos, to further engage the younger attendees with creative and educational activities.

The Commission was receptive to these ideas. Ms. Engelmann indicated that the walk could showcase unique trees and highlight what makes them special or scientifically interesting. The Commission agreed to continue developing these Arbor Day plans, recognizing the combination of learning and fun as essential to the event's success.

UPDATE ON TREE CAMPUS AT AVON HIGH SCHOOL

Ms. Pajak

Ms. Pajak reported that she had met with the SAVE Club and their adviser, Mr. Simon, in December to discuss the courtyard tree planter project at the High School. She explained that the project involves installing four tree planters in concrete courtyards to provide shade and make these areas more usable for classes. The principal of the school is supportive and has assured that funds will be allocated as needed for the project. They are currently in the process of identifying specific requirements regarding the styles of planters, the types of trees to plant, and other installation considerations.

Ms. Pajak mentioned that Lowe's is being considered as a source for the planters, due to its proximity, and Willoway Nurseries Inc. has been suggested as a supplier for the trees. She expressed that they are not quite sure which approach to take next, highlighting the need for guidance on planning and moving the project forward. The aim is to transform the two hot, cement-laden courtyards into more inviting spaces with shade, thus encouraging their use by classes. There are already benches in these courtyards, but the lack of shade makes them largely unusable in their current state.

Ms. Pajak plans to coordinate with Mr. Smith to solidify the next steps for implementation, ensuring that they move forward efficiently. Additionally, she has maintained communication with Mr. Simon to explore local suppliers and further define project strategies. The SAVE Club's involvement will be pivotal in planting the trees, and it is hoped that their initiative will inspire more widespread environmental projects within the school.

UPDATE ON TREE CANOPY PROJECT

Mr. O'Donnell

Mr. O'Donnell provided an update on the tree canopy analysis. At the last meeting, he shared his findings, revealing a calculation of 28.15% tree canopy using 2023 USGS data, which is the most recent available dataset. This figure shows an increase from the 25.83% previously reported. However, Mr. O'Donnell highlighted a challenge in confirming the exact year of the earlier measurement, leaving a gap in understanding the timeline of the changes.

Mr. O'Donnell expressed some skepticism about the possibility of a 2.3% increase occurring in a short timeframe, and he emphasized the need to verify the dates of the measurements for an accurate comparison. He shared that the data from the USDA website indicated a gap since 2021, the previous dataset year. To synthesize the new data, he ran a GIS software to analyze the information, supervised by Mr. Jenkins from IT, resulting in the updated percentage.

He reasoned that it would make more sense if the 25.83% measurement was taken closer to the present, which would align with the observed changes. Recognizing the importance of accurate records, Mr. O'Donnell plans to keep digging for more thorough and precise data to better understand the current state of Avon's tree canopy.

THE GOLD LEAF AWARD

Ms. Berges

Ms. Berges announced that the Tree Commission had received the Gold Leaf Award from the International Society of Arboriculture, which recognizes individuals, groups, or businesses for outstanding Arbor Day recognition activities and community forestry efforts. The award was granted specifically for the City's successful implementation of the land disturbance fee and the shade tree plan

initiatives. Highlighting the significance of the accolade, Ms. Berges remarked that it was a considerable achievement for the Commission. She passed around the award certificate for other Commission Members to examine and clearly acknowledged the hard work put in by the entire team. Ms. Berges confirmed that the award would be prominently displayed in City Hall, ensuring the wider community could appreciate this honor.

The Commission extended their heartfelt thanks to Mr. Varga, who took the time to submit the application that led to this prestigious recognition. This accomplishment underlines the dedication of the Commission to enhancing community forestry and promoting environmental stewardship. The Commission collectively congratulated each other and expressed pride in their efforts that led to winning the award. Additionally, there was brief mention of potentially considering similar initiatives in the future to further bolster their community impact and to continue aiming for excellence in their endeavors.

Ms. Berges also shared an interesting anecdote about the award ceremony. She described a remarkable demonstration at the event involving a tree taller than the ceiling, used in a pruning demonstration, which left a vivid impression on those in attendance. This element allowed members who were unable to attend the ceremony to enjoy the experience vicariously and fueled enthusiasm about the potential for hosting a similar demonstration locally. This discussion sparked ideas for future projects and educational opportunities, with an emphasis on continuing to elevate Avon's community forestry profile.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges shared several updates and announcements during the meeting:

1. The Tree Commission newsletter is set for publication in April. In preparation, she requested that all Commission Members make it a priority to attend the March meeting for a group photo which will be featured in the newsletter, adding a personal touch to the publication.
2. She highlighted an important development regarding the Traxler Family Arboretum concept. Ms. Berges reported that at the upcoming Monday Council Meeting, there would be a discussion on an Ordinance authorizing the Mayor to enter into a contract with MKSK. This firm is tasked with developing a conceptual plan for the Arboretum property. The urgency of this plan is underscored by the April deadline for a state grant application, for which this conceptual plan is a critical piece.
3. Regarding memberships, Ms. Berges reminded the Commission about the need to renew Arbor Day Foundation memberships at the March meeting. She proposed that all renewals be collected together to facilitate issuing a single check for the memberships, ensuring the process is streamlined and efficient.
4. Lastly, Ms. Berges drew attention to an upcoming significant event — the Tree City USA award ceremony scheduled for May 14th in Strongsville. She noted that invitations were expected to arrive soon and encouraged all Commission Members to mark their calendars. This event is a prime opportunity to celebrate and further encourage the community's dedication to forestry excellence.

These updates reflect the various ongoing activities and future plans that the Tree Commission is engaged with, emphasizing both logistical planning and key community outreach efforts.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann shared several thoughtful ideas aimed at increasing educational outreach about the Tree Commission, with a strong focus on community involvement and public education.

She discussed the potential of connecting with an existing Garden Club at the elementary school, identifying this as a direct way to engage younger audiences and foster early interest in environmental stewardship. By collaborating with the Garden Club, the Tree Commission can provide educational resources and support, potentially leading to joint initiatives that emphasize the importance of trees within the school environment.

Additionally, Ms. Engelmann proposed organizing a series of free seminars at the Avon Library on various subjects, including "Trees as Infrastructure," "What Tree City USA Means for Our City," and "Who Takes Care of Our Trees." These topics aim to enhance public understanding of the Tree Commission's role and the broader environmental and economic benefits of urban forestry. The seminars would serve as a platform to explain the impact of trees on property values, stormwater management, and urban heat reduction, bringing awareness to the community about why Avon takes pride in maintaining the Tree City USA designation.

Ms. Engelmann also mentioned engaging with the community at large by setting up information tables at various community events. These tables would be tailored with activities suitable for the target audience, whether for children or adults. By participating in local events, the Tree Commission would increase its visibility and provide both educational and interactive experiences related to tree care and urban forestry. To further involve the community in a practical way, Ms. Engelmann suggested the implementation of regular guided "tree walks and talks" throughout different seasons. These guided tours would educate participants about local tree species and the significance of their proper planting and care, enhancing public appreciation for the local ecosystem. Such activities would offer tangible learning experiences and strengthen community ties to local green spaces.

Finally, she proposed developing a more comprehensive and detailed plan for these outreach initiatives in the coming months, indicating her commitment to creating a coherent strategy that maximizes community engagement and educational impact.

Ms. Johnson had no comments.

Mr. O'Donnell expressed his willingness to assist with the planning and outreach for Arbor Day, stating that he was not involved in these activities during the previous year's event. He reached out, seeking opportunities to contribute and collaborate with others in these efforts. Mr. Smith assured Mr. O'Donnell that he would coordinate with Mr. Varga to facilitate his involvement and ensure a comprehensive approach to planning.

Ms. Pajak had no comments.

Mr. Smith had no comments.

Mr. Traxler had no comments.

Ms. Wetzig had no comments.

Mr. Varga was absent.

AUDIENCE:

Leo Wible, a resident from 3450 Long Road, introduced himself during the meeting and offered his assistance to the Commission in mapping tree canopy changes over time. Mr. Wible noted his expertise, highlighting his experience with GIS, remote sensing, and fieldwork. He shared that he previously completed a project analyzing land cover changes in Avon from 2002 to 2024, which could provide valuable insights for the Commission's efforts.

Mr. Wible proposed conducting a comprehensive research project aimed at mapping tree canopy changes in Avon on a detailed year-by-year basis. His approach would leverage the availability of satellite data and aerial photography, going as far back as these resources would allow to ensure a thorough analysis of the trends over time. He expressed his enthusiasm for creating a methodical record of the changes in Avon's tree canopy.

Moreover, Mr. Wible offered to collaborate with Mr. O'Donnell, focusing on cataloging trees located in tree lawns and various parks to construct a comprehensive tree database for the City. His initiative extended to potentially working with Mr. Varga and the Mayor upon their return to develop the project further. Mr. Wible's proposal underscores his commitment to enhancing Avon's tree canopy analysis, with the goal of fostering a rich and accessible resource for tree management and urban forestry efforts.

ADJOURN: 7:56 p.m.

A motion was made by Ms. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Berges to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission, and the vote was: : Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes": Ms. Berges, "yes".

The vote was 7 for and 0 against and the Chair ProTem declared the motion passed.

The Chair ProTem announced that the next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission is
Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

PASSED: _____

SIGNED BY: _____
Rick Varga, Chair

ATTEST:

Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council