

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, March 8, 2023
At 7:30 P.M.**

The Chairman, 3rd Ward Councilman Anthony Moore, called the meeting to order.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Shannon Laurenzi; Matt Smith; John Traxler; Liesa Wetzig; Anthony Moore, Chairman; Certified Arborist Richard Varga (Non-Voting Member)

CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Berges noted that Linda Heiden had sent a letter to the Tree Commission about why trees are good for your health and felt that they should acknowledge that.

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2023

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Wetzig to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, February 8, 2023, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, “abstain”; Mr. Boccabella, “yes”; Ms. Laurenzi, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Mr. Moore, “yes”.

The vote was 6 for and 1 abstention and the Chairman declared the motion passed.

UPDATE ON THE URBAN FORESTRY CONFERENCE – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated that Mr. Smith would talk about this item. Mr. Smith reported that he and Mr. Varga got to meet our new Region 3 Forester, Matt Leiden, at the North Coast Urban Forestry Conference. He is a very energetic young man and said he will do anything he can to help us. Mr. Smith forwarded an email from him to everyone and hopefully they all received that. In it, Mr. Leiden explaining his education and what he is involved with. At the conference the MC was Stephanie Miller, who has been our interim Regional Forester and she did a really nice job running the program. The first topic she presented was urban forestry’s historical and future roles in community health and equity. Mr. Smith said what he took from that was that your urban community’s socio-economic status determines how many trees you have. If you are in a community that has a lot of financial resources, you have a lot of trees. If you are the opposite end of the spectrum, you do not. The studies were done from just after the Civil War up to now. And these problems still exist but the U.S. Forestry Service is working hard with grants to try to rectify these situations. It was very interesting.

Mr. Smith said the next speaker talked about species diversity through master planting design. Mr. Smith said he knows that we need to get a planting design for the City of Avon and the object is you do not want one or two species planted throughout the City because then if you get a disease, it just wipes them out. You want a much more diversified tree canopy. And Mr. Varga and Mr. Traxler have made up some good lists of recommended trees with a lot of different species on them so that is going to be very helpful. The speaker was just emphasizing what we have been talking about already. And a worker from a nursery spoke and the talk was “A Grower’s Perspective in the New, Old, and What You Should Know” and this

person was saying that when a city wants to purchase different trees, a nursery likes to know a few years ahead what the plan is so they can grow the trees. So as we start our planning for the City of Avon, we want to get that information out to different nurseries.

Mr. Smith said that the keynote speaker at the conference was an Urban Forester from Oklahoma City, OK, named Mark Bayes and the title of his talk was, "The Oklahoma City Memorial Survivor Tree". This is the American elm tree that survived right next to one of the buildings that was blown up in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. Mark Bayes has spent all that time since then keeping that tree alive and propagated and they cloned it and had seedlings. It is a very emotional story; it was just amazing how touching his talk was. You can go on the internet and look up that story and there is a 10-minute video he has on YouTube that is really heart-warming and heart-wrenching to watch. Really, it was the healing power of one tree and how it has affected thousands of people in a positive way over the years. Just going to hear him speak made the whole day. Mr. Smith said if they get a chance next year to go this conference, he very much recommends it.

DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDED TREES FOR AVON – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated that he sent out a list of the recommended trees to everybody, with pictures and descriptions of the trees. He asked if anyone had any comments or noticed anything they would like to add? Mr. Smith said that the genus and species names were on the list but for the general public, we need the common name in parentheses. Ms. Berges said that she thought that the list was really good and she likes the pictures of the trees. She did not know if Mr. Varga meant this to be the full list because it does not have all the trees that we have previously listed; there are probably 80% of them. Mr. Varga explained that he and Mr. Traxler just wanted to get the list started so that everybody on the Tree Commission could take a look at it to see what they thought and if they thought it was a good idea, then we were going to expand upon it with the full list.

Mr. Boccabella asked if all these trees on the list are readily available? Mr. Varga said, yes, Willoway has all of them; if they do not have the exact variety cultivar, they have the same genus and species but a very similar cultivar. They can substitute something that is similar enough for us. Ms. Laurenzi asked if the trees were available at nurseries because the public does not have access to Willoway. Mr. Varga responded that some of them are but not all and they are working on this now. He stated that Willoway wants to collaborate with the City and propose to the residents that they will come out and plant trees in the tree lawn for a price, which would be a great thing for the City and for the homeowners.

Ms. Laurenzi asked if it would it be a variety of trees they would plant or would it be all one tree and Mr. Varga said that it would be everything that is going to be on our list. Ms. Laurenzi noted so a person will be able to choose which tree they want. Mr. Varga said, yes, but we want to have the individual choose three trees and then we can go out to see which would be best because if everybody in the neighborhood chooses the same tree, then we are back to that scenario where we have all Bradford pear or all crabapple and we want to have some diversity like Mr. Smith was talking about. Ms. Laurenzi stated that she did not want any diversity in her neighborhood; she wanted all the trees to look the same. Mr. Varga said the problem with that is if you had all the same trees and then there was a disease that attacks that tree, all the trees in the neighborhood are dead. The whole idea behind urban forestry, and they are big about it, is that they want diversity for that reason. Diversity is a recommendation from the Urban Forestry Dept. and also from the Ohio Landscape Association. So we want diversity but we also do not want a hodge-podge of things; we want species that are similar.

Mr. Moore said he almost agrees with Ms. Laurenzi there. He gets what Mr. Varga is saying; in referencing the Bradford pear, we know that this is a bad tree for a region. So if we are looking for trees that are good for a region, he thought it would be smart to talk to a neighborhood's HOA and see what rules they have established about trees and what they are doing because he does not want the Tree Commission dictating that they have to be diversified. If an HOA said they wanted the same tree and the tree is conducive to their area, he thought they should have some say in that in keeping that same vibe of trees for their neighborhood. Mr. Varga said, yes, but the problem is that since we are a Tree City USA, our Urban Forester would not agree with us at all and would not agree for us as a Tree City to do that because the whole thing behind urban forestry is what they are recommending. So they could come to us and say that we are a Tree City USA but we are not following any of their principles as far as urban forestry is concerned.

Mr. Moore said that diversity could come with some subdivisions choosing diverse trees and some choosing trees that are all the same, so we are still being diverse with segments that are saying they want to have all the same trees. So we could still achieve, he thought, what urban forestry wants us as a City to do overall vs. demanding subdivisions to be diverse.

Mr. Varga said that he is on the Board of an HOA and has been dealing with HOAs throughout the City and there is no HOA that he has come across yet that has specifics as far as trees in the tree lawns. They call him asking what trees to plant. Originally Avon Planning Commission (and this goes back 20 years), gave all the homeowners a list of trees that they recommended and the homeowners chose. We finally tried to make sure of their similarity so they all look somewhat uniform on certain streets so that is what our intent is right now. Diversity has always been an issue as far as the U.S. Urban Forestry Dept. is concerned for a lot of reasons. So that is what we are trying to achieve as a Tree Commission. That is why he wants everybody to look at these tree recommendations and then we can start talking about it and choosing trees for their particular aspects and go from there. We need to talk with Willoway and figure out what we need to do and how to progress and also talk to the Law Director about Willoway planting trees. So this is just starting; we thought it would be a good relationship having Willoway, a nursery in Avon, collaborating with the City and helping the residents. We thought it would be a win-win for everybody. But we have to think about all these things and there were good questions tonight. Ms. Laurenzi said she thought the involvement with Willoway was a great idea and it is really nice that they are wanting to do that.

Mr. Traxler said that he liked the trees that are on the list but there are certain trees that are very slow growing and he does not know how suitable they would be. Also, there is such a difference among the different trees; some are very small and he does not know if they would be appropriate for a tree lawn. Mr. Varga stated that there are some tree lawns that are very narrow and there is no room so maybe that tree would fit in that particular area. That is the reason why he wanted the list to be extensive because there might be a situation where a slow-growing tree is needed; there is always a niche for every tree.

Ms. Laurenzi asked Mr. Varga if he and Mr. Traxler could come up with a list of 20 trees that would be appropriate for tree lawns and Mr. Varga said that is what that list is that he sent out. And the trees are all sizes and widths so there is a lot of diversity. So if everybody can look at that list, at the next meeting we can have more comments. Mrs. Laurenzi said that when she looks at the list she does not have a clue what tree would be best for her tree lawn. She felt that some guidelines should be set for what makes sense in a neighborhood. Mr. Varga said, yes, and that is why they wanted to have the residents pick three trees so when we go in a neighborhood we can have some uniformity because we do not want to have any more than four different varieties in a neighborhood; we want to have some mixture because of the problems with disease and insects.

PLAQUE FOR EAGLE POINT PARK – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga said he thought that a plaque for Eagle Point Park would be a great idea. He brought this up before and just wanted to follow through with it to see if everybody still agrees. The plaque would be placed over where he planted all the seedlings from Arbor Day. If somebody wants to come up with some type of verbiage for it that would be great but it could be something like, “In recognition of the Tree Commission planting the seedlings from the first Arbor Day in Avon, November, 2022”. Just something simple but showing some recognition, and then 20 years from now when those trees are hopefully about 20 ft. tall, people will go through and be so impressed that those are the first trees planted by the Tree Commission. He asked if everybody thought that the plaque was a good idea and that we should go forward with it.

Everyone agreed that it was a great idea and Mr. Moore said that he would check with the Law Director to see if the Tree Commission has to formally vote on it. Mr. Varga said, and then every year we could add more seedlings. Ms. Berges said, and to add to that, the City is still planning to put plaques next to the tree that was planted for the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony and also for the official City of Avon redbud tree so that people know this is the City of Avon’s tree and it was planted in 2022 by the Tree Commission. She thought they were working on the verbiage for that and hopefully we will see that this year.

DISCUSSION OF ARBOR DAY 2023 – Ms. Laurenzi

Ms. Laurenzi said that she just thought she would check about a few things as far as the planning part for Arbor Day. After tonight’s meeting, we have six meetings until Arbor Day since it is in October this year. The first thing is she is working on is a sheet to provide to people for donations, what the donation is, what we are looking for, etc. so we can get that out there with some contact information and when we are going to need things. She asked Ms. Wetzig how much money they donated to the Leo Club; she thought it was around \$300 and Ms. Wetzig confirmed that. Ms. Laurenzi said she was going to put that information on the sheet. She said that we need to come up with a group that we donate proceeds to from this year’s Arbor Day event, so maybe in April or May we will have a couple ideas and vote on that.

Ms. Laurenzi said that they had talked about doing some basket raffles for next Arbor Day and she wanted to see what everybody thought about that. We could still do the door prize but we could also have people purchase tickets and put them in a box for us to announce winners at the end. The only reason she was asking now is because she wanted to be able to put that out there for donations if they want to donate a basket, etc. Mr. Moore asked what they would do with the money and Ms. Laurenzi said it would go to whatever group they decide to donate to. And we will do the same if there are any gift certificates or gift cards.

Ms. Laurenzi said that she wanted to do an Arbor Day bag for this year, a specific Arbor Day bag and she would like to put a deadline of July 15th to receive information from any of the companies in Avon that want to make donations, so she would then put their names into a logo on the back of the bag. So it would say “Avon Annual Arbor Day, 2023, Tree City USA”, and some things like that on the front and the sponsors on the back. And we can talk about the date of July 15th. She thought that would be enough time but it is not set in stone. And of course she will put in the letter that we are looking for some sponsors for food and beverages. She will put the letter together and then we can finalize it next month and have it available for everybody to start passing out, etc.

Ms. Laurenzi said that she edited the planning list from this past year just to keep us organized. One of the questions she had was the time of Arbor Day. It was noon to 3:00 P.M. last year and she wondered how they felt about changing the time. She felt that the noon start was good but even as beautiful a day as it was, 3:00 P.M. seemed a little long. However, she felt like noon to 2:00 P.M. seems a little short. Maybe 11:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. would be good. She thought that they had plenty of time in the morning to get set up. Also, did they want to come up with a theme for this year? We talked about it for 2022 but it did not really happen but if we had a theme that we would gear everything toward, she thought that would be a nice way to keep the whole event focused on one or two things.

Ms. Laurenzi stated that she thought that the scavenger hunt that we did last year was a huge success. She wondered if we wanted to do that again or do something different. Is it possible to do the scavenger hunt in the same fashion with different things to find or what are the thoughts on that? Mr. Varga said, yes, he thought the scavenger hunt was fabulous and he has heard that, and one of the reasons was that the Leo Club helped on that. There is a copious amount of oak trees back in the woods there and he suggested looking for acorns because every acorn is different for every oak tree and it would be an educational-type thing. We could have pictures of the acorns and then they find them and match them up; the sheet could have information about each oak tree.

Mr. Boccabella asked if the scavenger hunt takes people off from the walking trail? Mr. Varga said that he could collect different acorn species and put them in different areas so as they walk along the trail they can find them. Mr. Traxler said that he thought that they have to do a better job with the identification of the different trees; to have pictures of the leaves, and make it fun. He said that Mr. Varga pointed out that the Leo Club really made a difference and that was true; having the young people makes it entertaining and he thinks they need to address that. We need to have a group of young people or people that are fun to be with for kids. The Leo Club did a great job and without them, it would not have been as successful. Ms. Laurenzi agreed that the Leo Club did a great job and hopefully, they will come back this year and help us again. She said she thought that was all she had as far as changes. She will pull all this together and have it to pass out to everybody next month.

Ms. Laurenzi said that there were two other things that she wanted to discuss. The first one was that she thought she would see about getting involved with one of the schools early in the school year, either getting them involved to participate or talking with the science teachers to see what is in their curriculum around that time where students might earn extra credit if they went to Arbor Day and turned in the acorns they collect, or something else if we could incorporate that. The other thing that she thought about as they were talking about the plaque at Eagle Point Park was that we might dedicate some of those trees to the third grade class or the graduating class, etc. She could get some kind of involvement from them and then say we are going to dedicate a row of trees from this Arbor Day that would always represent that class.

MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Berges passed out an ordinance from Westlake. She said she thought that Mr. Varga had brought up the fact that Westlake had an ordinance for developers or builders that if they cut down a tree, they had to replace the tree so she thought it would be helpful if we looked at the ordinance between now and next month to see what they have in their ordinance that might be helpful for the City of Avon. Ms. Berges then said she had something else to pass around. She had mentioned earlier tonight the fact that Linda Heiden had sent an article to the Tree Commission about how trees are good for our health. Ms. Heiden

also sent Ms. Berges the “Feathered Flyer” newsletter and in there was an article about trees that Ms. Heiden thought they should have as well.

Ms. Berges asked about the Tree Commission Academy as there are seats available March 29th and 30th in Fairview Park. She said that she wanted to get a sense from Mr. Varga of what they do at the Academy. Is it worthwhile for them to try to go? Mr. Varga responded that the Urban Forester and everybody involved with Tree City USA have said that it would be advantageous for any Tree Commissioner to go; that is part of maintaining our Tree City USA designation, so, yes, we should sign up. Because we did not have an Urban Forester, we were not being informed about the Tree Academies but now that we do have an Urban Forester, we are going to become more involved with the Tree Academies and can start signing up to attend some of them.

Ms. Laurenzi reminded everyone that Avon Planting Day is May 20th and hopefully, a couple of us are able to attend. She said that she is planning to be there. Also, there was some discussion last month about a couple people attending the Planning Commission meeting and she wondered if that had happened. Mr. Varga said that he had attended and introduced himself to Planning and indicated that if they needed any advice about trees or had concerns about builders tearing down trees or about landscape, that we are available as a Tree Commission to help them through their planning. So all it was was an introduction to make them aware that we are here to help them as a City entity to promote the tree canopy and make sure that everybody is abiding by some type of regulation as far as tree removal and replacement. We are just waiting to hear from them now and see if they need to do anything.

Ms. Wetzig stated that she likes the diversity for the trees for the tree lawns; it will be interesting to go through that, and the plaque for Eagle Park is good idea. Also, she said that she was walking behind Avon Isle and asked how far the City owns that into the woods? Mr. Varga said that the City is trying to purchase that property. Mr. Traxler said, either the City or the Lorain County Metro Parks. Ms. Wetzig noted that there is really a lot of undergrowth and twigs in there and she just worries about walking in there. Mr. Varga said that the City had been trying to purchase the property but it fell through and then the Metro Parks was getting involved. Mr. Smith said that the latest that he heard from Rose Seighman, the Mayor’s Administrative Assistant, just last week is that it is looking like Lorain County Metro Parks is going to acquire the property. Mr. Moore added, yes, there is a grant that they are working on so that they can acquire that for the trailhead.

Mr. Varga said that when they went to the Urban Forestry meeting he obtained a copy of a city tree plan that a suburb of Toledo put together. He is going to send this out to everybody to look at and start getting ideas about it so we can discuss it at the next meeting. There is an app that we can use to find out where we are as far as our tree canopy is concerned. It gives a score and that is part of our Urban Forestry and Tree City USA project that we have to be somewhat working on.

Mr. Varga said that, also, he put together a video about tree pruning and he thought it should be close to being up on the City website. He sent the video to Ms. Seighman last week so he has to talk to her again.

Mr. Moore asked Ms. Berges to thank Linda Heiden for sending that newsletter; it is nice to see some of the residents recognizing what the Tree Commission is doing and sending us information like that.

Mr. Moore mentioned the idea of obtaining a banner that was discussed previously. When we do events we want to have some type of banner so maybe we can come up with some ideas and talk about it and see if we can get something by summer.

Mr. Moore asked Mr. Varga if he knew when we would be presented with the Tree City USA designation because he is going to talk to the Mayor about what he wants to do from the City's perspective. Mr. Varga said that they indicated that they are going to inform us more specifically so we are still waiting for that to happen. Mr. Moore stated that it is awesome that we got that designation. We can see the signs when we come from other cities into Avon and knowing that we all did that is really cool. It is a legacy that we should all be really proud of.

Mr. Moore asked if we are still going to get some trees on the website and a list of the trees, as well as the video and Mr. Varga said what we are going to start putting on is the list that he sent out. And that is why he was asking everybody to look at that list and get ideas before we put it on the website. Mr. Moore asked if we are going to include more than just the tree lawn trees and Mr. Varga said that eventually we will, but right now he thought we just have to start with that list because that is the one item that comes up that everybody calls the City about is tree lawn trees. That is the number one thing. So that is where we need to start as the Tree Commission and then we can expand upon that once we get that resolved. What we want to do in conjunction with that, is to promote trees that establish a canopy quicker than other trees. We want to recommend those trees to builders and landscapers as well, to try to plant these varieties of trees that are going to establish a canopy quicker than other trees because that is going to be part of our Tree City USA and being part of an urban forestry city. It is all about the canopy.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Nancy Haas said that she was there with two other members of the Avon Garden Club, Cynthia Murnyak-Czarnecki and Deb Morris, and the reason they were there is because it is the 25th anniversary of the Avon Garden Club and they wanted to look into the possibility of having a tree dedicated to that. They would like the advice of the Tree Commission on the selection of a tree. Also, they would like the Tree Commission to know that they are interested in working with them if there are some opportunities where they can mutually cooperate. The Garden Club does have a plant sale the third week in May and maybe they can help out with a basket for Arbor Day. Ms. Haas thanked the Commission and said it was very interesting watching their meeting and she will be reaching out to their experts to come to a Garden Club meeting which is the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 P.M. and they do have scheduled speakers. Both Mr. Moore and Mr. Varga are scheduled for this year. Mr. Moore thanked them for coming and told them that Ms. Laurenzi is the lead on Arbor Day and that the Commission would love to have them there; they appreciate their support and would love to work together.

ADJOURN

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council