

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, March 13, 2024**

The Chairman Rick Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges, Alex Boccabella; Megan Engelmann; Shannon Laurenzi; Matt Smith; John Traxler; Liesa Wetzig, Chair Richard Varga (non-voting Member)

Others in Attendance: Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council, Barbara Brooks, Clerk of Council

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024

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 14, 2024, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges “abstain”; Mr. Boccabella “yes”, Ms. Engelmann, “yes”; Ms. Laurenzi, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”.

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

TREE ACADEMY UPDATES/ HOMEWORK – Mr. Varga and Ms. Berges

Ms. Berges stated that she knows we have passed the homework out last year, but it has been a while so Ms. Markovitz was kind enough to re-copy and distribute this in case you misplaced the one you had in addition to Ms. Englemann who has not seen it. What we are looking to do is have you complete this, if you have not done that already and then we will discuss at our April meeting. Ms. Berges stated she believes that on the right-hand side the type of Urban Forestry there are two columns theoretical and social. She advised you do not need to worry about that and if you want to answer the decision-making part on how your community makes decisions about action activity, just fill that out the best that you can. There are no right or wrong answers. We are really trying to see where the city is right now, what is our community, and that is going to form the baseline so that we can see where we are and work towards improving that level. It is good to look at it a year from now, two years from now, three years from now, just to see what kind of progress we have made. If you have any questions about this, we can discuss it or you can ask me or Mr. Varga after the meeting.

URBAN FORESTRY CONFERENCE– Mr. Varga and Mr. Traxler

Mr. Varga advised that last Thursday, quite a few of us from the Tree Commission were able to attend the Urban Forestry Conference, at Tri-C Eastern Campus. It was very informative as far as the discussion about native trees and tree selections of native trees that are adaptable to our area, also about the encouragement on how to plant certain trees and how to stake them. It was quite informative so that is always good. He stated that he was glad Ms. Berges, Ms. Laurenzi, Mr. Smith and Mr. Traxler were all able to attend it. It was quite a turnout for our Tree Commission.

GRANT UPDATES - Ms. Berges and Mr. Varga

Ms. Berges stated at the last meeting Ms. Laurenzi told everyone that we communicated with, that the Tree Commission, had applied for a Healthy Places Grant with the Lorain County Public Health Department. It was for \$10,000 and the project is for a walkway to the pedestrian bridge at the Traxler Family Arboretum. We are hoping to hear any day now whether the City received a grant or not, but so far no news is good news.

UPDATE ON THE TREE GROWTH RING PROJECT – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated what we as the Tree Commission were trying to do, is to try to get a tree ring from a tree that is native to Avon and identify with the rings a history of Avon and put it on display. As of right now, we are having beginning discussions with this gentleman on Jaycox, his name is Ron, and he does woodworking and finishing. We are communicating with him to help manufacture this ring and epoxy it. Ms. Laurenzi inquired as to when we could expect that project to be completed? How long? Mr. Varga advised that right now it would not take long, we are just waiting on this gentleman from Jaycox Road about the information to proceed and the price and then it would be one to two weeks. It will not be long at all once we get that finalized.

GIRL SCOUTS – Ms. Englemann

Ms. Englemann began by saying thank you for having the Girl Scouts here. We are celebrating World Thinking Day. She welcomed everyone to the Tree Commission. She suggested each member tell everyone how long they have been on the board and something that they learned or that they enjoyed.

Ms. Berges stated that she has been with the Tree Commission since it was formed so this is our third year and that she was appointed by the Mayor. When she first heard about the Tree Commission, she had an interest to be part of Tree City USA. Ms. Berges added that she started doing research about Tree City USA just to find out everything that she could. She stated that it is surprising to her that Tree City USA has been around for a long time. We just had not been aware of it, at least most of us on the Tree Commission. Mr. Varga had been aware of Tree City USA. Ms. Berges stated that we have hit the ground running, we have wonderful people on the Commission that have embraced it and the residents have embraced the idea of the Tree Commission. She added that she is fortunate she gets to stay on for the next couple years as the Council Representative for the Tree Commission.

Mr. Boccabella stated he has been with the Tree Commission for approximately two years and has certainly enjoyed giving back to the community and doing his civic duty. He noted that one of the things that he has enjoyed most is being able to explain to the residents of Avon how important the tree canopy is and how it affects our community as a whole.

Ms. Englemann stated that she is a Multi-Level Girl Scout Troop Leader here in Avon, and her role here actually started with the Girl Scouts, a couple months ago. She stated that she was looking for things for her Troop to do and remembered that she had volunteered with the Tree Commission at Arbor Day a couple years ago with her family. She added that they really enjoyed it and thought it would be a good opportunity to bring her Troop here, so she reached out to Council Member Mr. Moore. Ms. Englemann and Mr. Moore discussed the Girl Scouts attending a future Tree Commission meeting. Mr. Moore advised that Ms. Englemann should also join the Tree Commission. Ms. Englemann stated that she loves trees, loves planting, that joining the Tree Commission sounds great. She stated that is how she got here, and

she thinks it is really cool. Ms. Englemann added that she thinks it involves volunteerism, activism, and being out in your community and meeting new people who can really help you connect the dots and come to a place that you can do good for your community. She stated that's how she got here, and she is really enjoying it.

Mr. Varga stated that he is the Chairman of the Tree Commission and is a Certified Arborist. He advised that his background is the greenhouse and nursery business. He further added they call a Track- Qualified person and that his degree is in Environmental Studies. In addition, he is a certified commercial applicator, and he has been with the Tree Commission since the start. Mr. Varga also noted that about 3-4 years ago the Mayor wanted him to talk to City Council about Tree City USA. He added that is how it all started by the Mayor initiating me to discuss the Tree Commission to City Council and to get things moving.

Ms. Laurenzi stated she has been part of the tree commission since its inception about 3 years ago. She has a daughter that is a Daisy and she is excited to be here today and although her daughter is not part of the Troop, she wanted to check it out. Ms. Laurenzi stated that her favorite thing about the Tree Commission is the involvement with the community and helping educate all age levels. In addition, how important it is to care for a tree, plant them and help them grow and increase our trees, growth, and healthy atmosphere in Avon.

Mr. Smith welcomed the girl scouts, and stated his background includes being a retired High School Biology Teacher. Mr. Smith added that he has been an outdoors person his entire life. Mr. Smith noted that he grew up in Avon and has been on the Tree Commission since it started about three years ago and what he has enjoyed the most about it is trying to give back to the community, the tree canopy and working with the City on the Traxler Family Arboretum. It's just a great experience giving back to the community.

Mr. Traxler welcomed the Girl Scouts here and stated it is exciting to have young people to become involved with what we are doing and noted that the Commission is a recommending body to City Council and the Mayor and that City Council and the Administration are very supportive in what we do. The Tree Commission is excited with our Arbor Day and the recommendations with our different tree plantings. Mr. Traxler added we are also excited to have all the Girls Scouts here and thanked them for coming.

Ms. Wetzig stated she has been with the commission about a year and a half or so, and she grew up in Avon, so she has been here a long time, through a lot of changes. She stated that she has enjoyed learning about the different trees, which ones are native, which ones we do not want and then there is also the pests, animals and butterflies that are also a part of it. Ms. Wetzig added that she enjoys making Avon a better place.

Ms. Englemann spoke to the Girl Scouts on the following topics:

- What does the Tree Commission do?
- Urban Forest Discussion
- Impact on Community
- Importance of Tree Selections
- Avon designated as a Tree City; Arbor Day Event
- Community Involvement, Volunteer Engagement
- Tree Canopy Discussion
- Save Our Soil Day Event; Composting Discussion

- World Thinking Day
- Avon's Official Tree – Hearts of Gold Redbud; Tree Measurements Activity with the Girl Scouts
- Closing Activity – Photo Opportunity, Girl Scouts Patch, Board- Thoughts and What Was Learned

TREE CITY AWARDS DAY IN ROCKY RIVER – May 16, 2024 – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated that for the Tree City Awards we could all go, we just have to make sure we register early, the time is from 9-3 pm. Ms. Laurenzi stated she would like to go. Mr. Varga advised that he gets all the information from Rocky River Tree Commission and will be meeting with them on March 28th. Mr. Varga advised that he will try to get as much information as he can. Mr. Smith indicated he could go with Mr. Varga to that meeting.

2025 TREE CITY USA AWARDS DAY IN AVON – Mr. Varga and Ms. Laurenzi

Mr. Varga stated that in 2025 Avon will host the Tree City USA Awards and it is going to be tentatively at Tom's Country Place in Avon. Mr. Varga also advised that we will have more details and information as it is passed along to us about the awards. He further added that we will discuss this more in the future as we are going to be communicating with the Urban Forester, Matt Leiden. Mr. Leiden is going to be giving us all the information, as they have a whole package that they put together, so we will let them roll with it and we are basically going to supply the place. Ms. Laurenzi stated the Tree City USA Awards were supposed to be held in 2026 in Strongsville, but they had to back out. The Tree Commission then swapped with Strongsville. Mr. Leiden asked us while we were at the Urban Forestry Conference so the Tree Commission agreed. Ms. Berges stated once we heard 2025, as that is pretty soon, she made a list of different things that we can add to it. Ms. Berges noted that it was just different things that we need to start thinking about in anticipation of that event because for instance, Save the Date cards. Ms. Berges added that last year we got the save-the-date cards in Beachwood the year before, so if we want to have those ready for May 16th in Rocky River, we have to at least have the date so that is one of the things to have printed out and have available. Mr. Varga stated he would be confirming that with Mr. Leiden.

DISCUSSION OF FORMING WORK GROUPS – Mr. Varga and Ms. Laurenzi

Ms. Laurenzi stated that her and Mr. Varga were talking about all the exciting things going on here with the Tree Commission. Ms. Laurenzi mentioned that she really wants this year to be as productive as possible, especially now that we added an awards event, even though it is not until 2025. She advised that we still need to do some planning. Ms. Laurenzi added that with some discussion with Mr. Gasior, the City Law Director, they decided to come up with some work groups to really focus on making sure we are getting all the things connected. Ms. Laurenzi further added that there is a lot of loose ends that have not been wrapped up such as the plaque at Eagle Park and things like that. In reference to the work groups, she noted that we just need to get somebody to say they are going to do it, talk to who we need to talk to and if you need to come back to the commission and ask for money etc. Ms. Laurenzi stated that we want to assign some responsibilities and get some things completed so that we can have a successful year. In addition, Ms. Laurenzi noted that we would get what we want done and so that it is not falling on the shoulders of the same people all the time. She stated that she gave everybody a list of some suggestions that her and Mr. Varga came up with and that we can discuss the work groups as well as the things she put on the list. Ms. Laurenzi advised if anyone has any suggestions or anything like that, we can change them, but she would go over them real quick.

ARBOR DAY AND TREE CITY AWARD EVENTS

Ms. Laurenzi stated that for Arbor Day and the Tree City Award event in 2025 both events are straightforward. She further added that the Tree Commission Awards that we were potentially eligible for include the awards through the Tree City USA, the Growth Award and there are several others. Ms. Laurenzi stated that we really just need a group of people to keep track and stay focused on what we are completing and what we need to complete, sometimes they are fairly simple things that we just missed by accident. Like we could have done this, we could have qualified for this award and helped us with the Growth Awards so we need a couple people to really focus on keeping track of that, bringing suggestions to the group about how we can accomplish it. Ms. Laurenzi noted that if we do this particular thing it will help us work towards the Growth Awards. There's a whole list of awards and things like that, that are available, and I would like to us to be recognized in Avon for our hard work at the Awards ceremony next year. She added she believes that it really needs to be a big focus and we think so we can be successful in that.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

Ms. Laurenzi advised that the community focus of the Tree Commission would include things such as the workshops where we talk about what we do, provide education for different groups, be involved in workshops to teach those interested how to plant trees and things like that. Ms. Laurenzi added we would also be able to do different workshops for different age groups, for the Girl Scouts, or any age group. She further noted an opportunity to really put it out there and get involved in the community, maybe partner with the library, YMCA, or a couple other of those things in the area that draw families and children. Ms. Laurenzi stated we could see what kind of things the community has going on, a possibility of purchasing something towards this, or put together a small presentation or something. Ms. Laurenzi advised that it could be something to really spread the word that could also involve the schools as well. In addition, what kind of things they have going on that we might be able to physically purchase or provide some literature and information about what we have going on here at the Tree Commission.

GRANTS

Ms. Laurenzi stated the grants are straightforward and a group of people can focus on writing the grants and getting grants processed. Ms. Laurenzi noted that she is not familiar with the Grant process. Ms. Laurenzi added she knows Ms. Berges, Mr. Smith and Mr. Varga have worked very hard on that grant process and she just wants to make sure that we continue and keep it moving forward. In addition, she stated the other reason for this work group session is so we can all see what everybody is doing and make sure we are all helping and sharing the workload.

NEWSLETTER

Ms. Laurenzi stated in reference to the newsletter, the possibility of doing a newsletter has been discussed. She added she thinks it could probably be bi-annually or quarterly but bi-annually should be good. Ms. Laurenzi further noted that with some of the updates going on in publishing some of those workshops if we are going to be doing them, Arbor Day information and things such as posting pictures of us with the Girl Scouts. She mentioned if anyone has any interest or talent for doing things like that to let her know.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WITH TREE COMMISSION

Ms. Laurenzi responded that would be other entities that are involved with the Tree Commission. Ms. Laurenzi further advised that she does not know if we have anything quite yet; however, things like the Garden Club as well as some larger scale options like the library, new partnerships and corporate sponsors, etc., just for some involvement in a larger scale with the community.

TREE ORDINANCES AND THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Ms. Laurenzi thinks we need to focus on a plan whether it is something that the Tree Commission does or is a part of such as something the City appoints as in a group or maybe one or two of us. Ms. Laurenzi mentioned she knows Mr. Varga has had some discussion with the Mayor on putting something together so that we can get that Arboretum up and running, usable to the community and a success as quickly as possible.

Ms. Laurenzi advised that we need to get some other grants, possibly for donations and things of that nature. She further added that she thinks it is a great opportunity for the Tree Commission to reach out to the large corporations here at Avon and ask them to contribute donations to the Arboretum and informing them of how important it is to the City of Avon and that we are very happy they are here in our City. Ms. Laurenzi added that we would really like to make a big focus on that and as she mentioned previously Mr. Varga has talked to the Mayor. She stated that she is not quite sure if that will fall completely on us or if we'll be part of a big plan of how things go. Lastly, she mentioned that was my idea, in case anyone has any comments or suggestions of a different work group.

Mr. Varga responded to Ms. Laurenzi that he has a handout and in the back of the handout, it has all the Growth Awards information. Ms. Laurenzi thanked Mr. Varga. Mr. Varga then added that somebody could look at that reference to get an idea about what we are looking for with the Growth Awards. Ms. Berges stated that she just wanted to say that for the newsletter the Mayor has committed to doing one Tree Commission newsletter a year. She further added whether that would be expanded or not is to be determined, but right now the idea to is place it between the second newsletter for the City and the third one, so it would be the summer around July/August and the more pictures the better that's why tonight was perfect. Ms. Laurenzi added it was a good thought. Ms. Berges stated they will still be in the City newsletters and that there is still information from the Tree Commission so we are happy for that because I think that is coming up pretty soon as far as the deadline. Ms. Laurenzi added that she does have a sheet here with all of the work groups that she put on here, everyone can sign up on a couple, it doesn't have to be one. Then she is hoping that at the April Meeting we can hear feedback from all of the work groups about who is going to be the lead for the group, what the goals are, project progress and any new projects that are already in the works. Ms. Laurenzi further noted that we can get a quick update on all the things we have going on here in the Tree Commission.

MEMBER COMMENTS –

Ms. Berges stated that everybody knows that we did get the Tree City USA Award again this year and she just want to make sure we give a shout out to Michelle Morahan in the Service Department because she really is the one that assembles all of the information, data, and records that goes into that Tree City USA Application and she is the one that is going to help with the Growth Award occasion as well so we should just thank her because she is amazing. Ms. Berges also noted we have a lot of handouts tonight. This is great but I do want to thank Ms. Markovitz for printing this article in color. Ms. Berges stated that she

received this article from Linda Heiden, who sent this to her and Ms. Markovitz researched it and was able to find the original in color, so it's something useful to have, educational and maybe we can look at something like this for Arbor Day, such as mounting it on a board or just have it available to the residents. Ms. Laurenzi added it is a great idea.

Mr. Varga stated that we should start thinking about a possible student member and advised that he talked to the Law Director. Mr. Varga confirmed that it would be a high school student and it would be for one year designated as a non-voting member and stated if anyone knows anybody that is in high school or a Girl Scout that is in high school to let the Tree Commission know. Ms. Laurenzi stated she talked to Mr. Gasior as well about a student member and that it might be a good idea to put some publications out such as the newspaper, Social Media, and ask them to submit an application, then we can go through them and depending on how many applicants we receive we can select maybe 3 to come to the meeting and state why they want to be a part of the Tree Commission and then make that decision. Ms. Laurenzi added that the only requirement is that the student applicant lives in Avon and they are in high school. Mr. Varga confirmed the requirements.

Ms. Laurenzi mentioned what a great experience the Urban Forestry Conference was and how much she learned. She added that she was really not sure what to expect as maybe some of it may be over her head or more in Mr. Varga's world, but it was very informative. Ms. Laurenzi also stated that there was a lot of information that she already knew but it was nice to sit down and listen to it all educationally such as how one thing affects another. Ms. Laurenzi commented that it was very informative, and she was glad she went and thanked the committee.

Mr. Smith inquired if it was Ms. Brooks who sent out the email in regard to the Bicentennial Tree for the County. Ms. Brook advised that she thinks that she did send it out. Mr. Smith stated he read it about 4 :30 this morning when he gets up and it is to celebrate Lorain County's Bicentennial, so the county is supplying one tree to all 34 municipalities throughout the county and they want to know where we want to plant it. Mr. Smith advised he thinks the landscaper Don Mould's Plantation is going to do this project but if he recalled on the data, Ms. Seighman would have needed that information by February 29th. Ms. Brooks responded February 27th. Mr. Smith added he brought it up because we need to find the place where we would like the tree to be and voted, he noted he would like to tell Ms. Seighman tomorrow.

Mr. Varga inquired since it's a Bi-centennial tree- we should probably think about the History Walk. Mr. Smith stated he thought the park since it gives the most foot traffic. Mr. Varga stated that the tree they are planting is a Kousa dogwood. Mr. Smith asked who he talked to about this tree and Mr. Varga responded Ms. Seighman.

Mr. Smith mentioned he just found out about it today as he spoke with Mr. Streater about it as well. Ms. Brooks inquired as to City Hall as a location. Ms. Berges stated that she thought of that as well but what if City Hall moves? Mr. Smith inquired as to the park and stated he believes there is going to be a plaque on it. Ms. Laurenzi asked how about the Police department or Post Office? Mr. Varga stated he would like it back towards the playground or History Walk. Ms. Laurenzi inquired about how big does the tree get? Mr. Varga advised that it's a multi-stemmed Dogwood and it gets about 30 feet tall maximum (confirmed with Mr. Gaisor. Mr. Varga stated that it is not a very big tree and has white flowers that bloom in late May/Early June with full opens. Mr. Smith asked what the plaque would look like how big is it? Mr. Varga stated he has no idea other than that there is a plaque that will be supplied that states Bi-centennial tree. Ms. Laurenzi inquired of its location near the entrance of the History Walk and asked Mr. Varga if that is what you are thinking, and Mr. Varga confirmed. Mr. Smith stated the Urban Tree Conference

referenced that the dogwoods grow by a certain number of inches (10)? Ms. Laurenzi confirmed they did. Mr. Varga stated yes but he added that this is a Kousa Dogwood, it is more versatile, adding that it is more adaptable to different environments, it can tolerate a little more sun.

A motion was made by Ms. Berges and seconded by Ms. Laurenzi to Adopt the History Walk as the Location of the Bicentennial Tree.

The vote was as follows: Ms. Berges, "yes", Mr. Boccabella, "yes": Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Laurenzi, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

Mr. Varga approved the motion.

Mr. Traxler stated it was very great turnout when we went to meeting and it was really nice to hear input from different cities. Mr. Traxler noted that he got a lot out of it. He also added that Rocky River had a program where they tried on a small scale to plant trees that they paid for on the tree lawns and they had positive results with it. In addition, he also heard that Vermillion, who is a small city with a small budget was kind of innovative with what they did, and overall it was nice to hear from different communities.

Ms. Wetzig stated Ms. Englemann did a great job and she was glad the Girl Scouts could join us.

Ms. Laurenzi added she had an additional comment regarding the Urban Forestry Conference, she would say the biggest impact was how amazing Avon is to have so much support from our community, from our Council and Mayor and to have an Arborist on staff. It was mind-blowing to hear of the struggles the other cities have to be honest with you. They have to do fundraisers to get money to do anything, they are trying to raise a \$1,000 for their Tree Commission to plant trees and how they cannot do things because they do not have an Arborist on staff and it really restricts them. She added how lucky we are to have such an amazing supportive city and group here. Mr. Smith added that they had the \$1,000 from the grant but they could not spend it because they did not have an Arborist.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS –

ADJOURN: 8:24pm

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

The vote was 6 for and 0 against and the Chairman Pro Tem declared the motion passed.

The next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission will be held on Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council