

Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, April 10, 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

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 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, March 13, 2024, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes", Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Laurenzi, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

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

UPDATE ON TREE ORDINANCES

Ms. Berges, Mr. Smith and Mr. Varga

Ms. Berges stated that this past Wednesday, April 3, 2024 at 2:30 p.m., Mr. Smith, Mr. Varga and herself were in a meeting with Mr. Streator, Safety Director/Public Service Director; Mr. Gasior, Law Director; Ms. Fechter, Planning and Economic Development Coordinator; Mr. Cummins, City Engineer; as well a law student from Case Western Reserve University, Alexander Bae, to go over some proposed changes to the current Tree Ordinances. She commented that we had a very good and productive meeting for about two and a half hours, and we have some ideas that we want to fine tune and be able to present to the Tree Commission. Ms. Berges believed that Mr. Varga sent out a highlight summary that Mr. Bae prepared from that meeting for review in case anyone had any questions or comments. Mr. Smith felt it was a good starting point as they got to meet with other City officials and were able to see their viewpoints and provide something to reflect upon. Mr. Varga stated what he would like to do is have everyone review what was summarized and let him know if they have any ideas that they would like to contribute or any takeaways. He noted it is important that everyone reviews the summary.

Mr. Varga stated that it has been over a year since the last time they had a meeting with other City officials, which occurred on April 13, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. in the Caucus Room in which Mr. Moore, Ms. Berges, the Mayor's Assistant, Mr. Gasior and himself were present. Mr. Varga commented that now there seems to be newfound interest and he would like to keep everything moving if possible. Mr. Varga stated if you look at our Tree Ordinances compared to all the other surrounding cities that have Tree Commissions that are part of Tree City USA, our ordinances are definitely lacking without a doubt, and so they are trying to update that especially with all the current new construction that has been happening in Avon.

UPDATE ON WORK GROUPS

Ms. Laurenzi

Ms. Laurenzi provided everyone with a sheet of all the work groups and members. She advised that next to each item there were a couple of responsibilities listed as well as to what they are working for in each group, as to who would be responsible for what. Ms. Laurenzi added as they move forward in the year, additional items will be added as they conduct these meeting and discuss in greater detail including ideas on what a particular group could work on further; however, she believes that it is not obvious in regards to grants and things of that nature. She stated if anyone has any questions to please let her know and that items can be added as needed to the sheet or they can keep track of it as they go as it does not necessarily all have to be on the sheet. Ms. Laurenzi thanked the group for signing up and for completing the sheet as all the spots were almost entirely full. She advised she rearranged a few items and made some phone calls to a few members of the Tree Commission and thanked everyone for being cooperative and for adding/modifying information along the way as needed. Ms. Berges was appreciative of Ms. Laurenzi incorporating the information into a spreadsheet. There were no further comments regarding work groups.

GROWTH AWARDS

Mr. Boccabella

Mr. Varga inquired if Mr. Boccabella could provide an update on the Growth Awards as he talked to the Urban Forester, Matt Leiden earlier in the day. Mr. Boccabella advised he spoke with Mr. Leiden earlier today and that he provided general guidelines on the procedures and processes including how to apply for the Growth Awards. He added he looked at the website today and the majority of it is all done online and it is submitted when they submit their Tree City application for re-approval in December. Ms. Laurenzi inquired if it is December 1, 2024, and Mr. Varga confirmed. Mr. Boccabella further advised that nothing is really submitted prior to that date. He added they can prepare all the documentation and ensure all the work is completed prior to that date. Ms. Laurenzi inquired if it is submitted when they apply for the Tree City Award at the same time and Mr. Boccabella advised that is correct as it is all tied into that application. Ms. Laurenzi stated that additional information on the website is helpful.

TREE ACADEMY HOMEWORK

Ms. Berges and Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated he would like to review the Tree Academy Homework so everyone has an idea of where the City is at as he was unsure if everyone is on the same page with the Tree Awards. He added this is the reason why we put this together, being Tree City USA, to provide this to City Council so they can review it as well. Mr. Varga stated it is very important that Council gets an idea of where the City should be at in reference to Tree City USA.

Mr. Varga advised it is important we go over this to be able to receive the optimum amount of the Tree Awards. Mr. Varga then discussed the Tree Academy Homework in greater detail:

- “Tree Commission Meetings; Tree Ordinance Review; Tree Risk Assessment; and Tree Removal,” - are areas they would be rated as “Optimal” and under this category we would qualify for with the City.
- “Mature Tree Pruning; Young Tree Training; and Tree Mulching” – are areas they would be rated under “Poor” and that is where we fall as a City.

Mr. Varga further added that some of this is a little subjective, but it falls into that realm.

- “New Tree Watering; Site Preparation; Tree Planting; Systematic Planting Plan; Utility Relationship; and Marketing” – are areas where they would be rated as “Moderate” and is where our City falls under that particular area.
- “Relationship with Council and Mayor” – is an area they fall under a “Poor” rating.
- “Strategic Planning” – is an area they fall under a “Poor” rating.
- “Regional Urban Forestry Conferences” – is an area they fall under a “Moderate” rating.
- “Tree Commission Academy” – is an area they fall under the “Poor” rating.

Mr. Varga advised that this worksheet gives City Council a basic idea of where the Tree Commission were are overall.

Ms. Berges stated she thought the category of “Relationship with Council and Mayor,” they had a “Moderate” rating. Mr. Varga responded he had it as “Moderate” and then he switched it to “Poor” and had alternated back and forth some. Ms. Berges stated it is difficult to rate as it lumps the Mayor and the Council together. She further noted that if you had to pick one, she would say the Mayor as he absolutely knows about the Urban Forestry Conferences given his background. Mr. Varga advised that is why it was a little tough on some of these categories due to its subjectiveness and they wanted a baseline and that would be our baseline for the Tree Commission. Mr. Varga stated if everyone agrees they plan to present this to City Council.

DISCUSSION ON TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga advised in regards to the Traxler Arboretum, work is being done on the bridge to make it suitable for walking and they are tentatively hoping to have the river further developed in July. In addition, he noted the other thing he looked at, and one in which we were not aware of, are Certifications for Arboretums. Mr. Varga noted that they have categories numbered one through five to be a Certified Arboretum so we are looking into that as well. Mr. Varga stated that one direction we are going in addition to looking at different websites for donations to assist us further in that area as once we have more information on that we are going to present it at another Tree Commission Meeting. Mr. Varga noted that we just started the process today as far as looking at websites to assist us with donations for everything from Memorial Trees to Arbor Day, and the Arboretum, essentially everything across the spectrum. He stated that once we get additional information we will be getting back to everyone on that and send it out. Ms. Laurenzi inquired when the bridge work will be completed and Mr. Varga responded that Mr. Streater would be the contact and the Streets Department oversees that project although they have tentatively advised that it would be completed in May.

ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE - ROCKY RIVER

Mr. Smith and Mr. Varga

Mr. Smith stated that Mr. Varga and Ms. Berges attended the Round Table Conference with him at the Rocky River City Hall and it was interesting to see people from surrounding cities and who had city workers dealing with their Administrations and so forth on what to do with the trees. He added one thing they emphasized was that 90% of the available land in the city with trees is private property. Mr. Smith commented that Rocky River does a really nice job working with the citizens to get trees planted on their property. He further noted that the Rocky River Administration will buy the trees, contact all the homeowners, and have City workers put in the trees which is good. Mr. Smith added that the key word he kept hearing repeated over and over was communication. He had observed through the discussions that when these City workers can become frustrated as they are in the chain of command, which is why when you are working on projects you must be very concise to get the job done and communicate. Mr. Smith concluded by saying it was an interesting meeting.

Mr. Varga stated the interesting part about that is that there were at least 20 communities there from Sandusky to Norwalk to Beachwood to Pepper Pike, and there were Council Representatives including Arborists from those cities, so it was interesting to hear all their ideas and how they present them. Mr. Varga presented an example being how the City of Hudson taxes residents if they do not have enough trees on their property to complete the tree canopy and those taxes goes into a fund to buy trees for the City or other property. He commented that the point is the tree canopy in Cleveland 20 years ago was 40% and now it is down to 18%. Mr. Varga stated you could see drastically the result, and with talk of global warming as you are removing all your air conditioning by removing the trees and that is the reason why he started thinking of inventive ways to get people to plant trees. Mr. Varga mentioned that no matter what happens, there are people that say "I hate leaves in my gutter, I'm not cleaning another leaf out of my gutter. I don't want a tree in my yard." Mr. Varga stated in response to that it is fine because then you are going to be taxed so we can plant trees to re-establish the canopy. Mr. Varga added that was their perspective and that is an example from the City of Hudson hence it is great to see all these different cities and how they approach different things. He added that in addition, they talk about the City sidewalks and the different ideas they have as well as how they should be applied including different specs. Additionally, Mr. Varga noted they also talk about everything from chainsaws, such as how every city is looking to go towards electric battery powered chainsaws rather than gas for a lot of different reasons.

Mr. Varga stated it was very informative because we were able to see what other cities are really doing. Mr. Smith stated that he recalled they discussed instances in which you are dealing with utility companies. He added that the utility companies come right in and roughly trim the trees by the wires. Mr. Smith added that it is important to have City Officials monitor those projects, if you are there just talking to them and they see you standing there, the workers tend to do their job a bit better. Mr. Smith noted that it was kind of an ubiquitous thing between cities as utility companies will skew what they want unless you guide them. Mr. Smith also noted that previously they touched on deer conflicts during the discussion at the Round Table Conference.

DISCUSSION OF TREE CITY USA – ROCKY RIVER / AVON

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga noted he handed out a flyer to everyone for the Tree City USA in Rocky River on May 16, 2024 and advised that the City will pay for your fee but he would need to know as soon as possible who could potentially attend this event. Ms. Berges stated the Mayor's Assistant stated she would like to know after tonight's meeting who is going to attend so she can send in the registration as a one-time submission vs. sending the registration multiple times. Ms. Berges commented that if the Tree Commission members could look at their schedules after tonight's meeting then hopefully they can make a decision as the latest to submit is tomorrow morning.

Mr. Varga added that even if hypothetically, you can only make it in the morning timeframe, that would still be great. He noted that a lunch is included and the City will compensate you for the \$35, you do not have to worry about that additional cost. Ms. Laurenzi stated she believes she can attend and would like to go. Mr. Smith stated Rocky River's officials advised us that each municipality can only send three people and we have been in this situation before. Mr. Smith added for anywhere else you have to get on a waitlist and he was on that last year yet still was able to go. Mr. Smith noted that we spoke with Mr. Leiden and inquired if all eight of our Tree Commission members would be able to go to this event as we are hosting a Tree City USA award next year. Mr. Leiden responded that it should not be any issue. Mr. Smith noted it is truly worth going to as it is highly informative. Mr. Varga added especially for the work group that is listed for our Tree City USA awards next year. Mr. Smith added for other members who have not gone they can experience it as well since we have been to two of them already.

Mr. Varga mentioned in reference to next year, we met with Mr. Leiden, about next year's Tree City USA awards in Avon and we were able to temporarily secure Tom's County Place for the Awards location which is going to be on held on May 15, 2025. He added we had to secure a date and could not wait but we have plenty of time. Mr. Varga advised we do have a work group for that and we need to discuss what we need to do but the most important thing is that we want to get established with Mr. Leiden a solid date for next year and that the facility was secured. Mr. Varga added that there is a handout today and Ms. Berges confirmed yes. Mr. Varga requested that the group start looking that so we can evaluate it as we have a year now to start working on this. Mr. Varga emphasized that we absolutely must secure things in approximately November and stated if they could review that handout at their convenience it would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Varga added that he will be available for any work groups since he is a non-voting member. Mr. Varga further added that if anyone needs his assistance on any work group at any time, he is available as needed.

MEMBER COMMENTS –

Ms. Berges stated that one of the things Rocky River did a year ago at Beachwood is that they gave Save-the-Date cards on the tables. She added that this would save on mailing and postage so we want to be prepared to do the same thing at Rocky River. Ms. Berges advised now that we have a date, she has an example to present of the proposed postcard in addition it has the trees that they would like to try to use. Ms. Berges stated the postcard reads: "Avon's Roots Run Deep- Save the Date," please join us (front of card) and the address is listed (back of card), which would be very similar to what Rocky River had on the back of their postcard. Ms. Berges further explained that it is fairly simple as the City logo would be there in addition to the Tree City USA logo on the other side. Ms. Laurenzi thanked Ms. Berges and stated it sounds great and hopefully everyone is okay with this and then we can get it printed and ready in time.

Mr. Traxler stated he would like to attend the Tree City USA event in Rocky River on May 16, 2025. Ms. Laurenzi noted to Ms. Berges that she made a list for reference.

Ms. Wetzig requested a status of the banner and Ms. Laurenzi responded that the status has not changed as she trying to get access to Canva.

Mr. Varga had a comment on the Tree Ring Project and stated there is a gentleman on Jaycox Road, that does refinishing work and he mentioned this project to him and this gentleman advised that he could absolutely do the Tree Ring project. Mr. Varga showed him pictures of the bloods tree (*Dracaena Cinnabari*) that we have in Beachwood and at Holden Arboretum and he is working on it as we speak. Mr. Varga stated that hopefully he will have more of an update and it will be almost finished. Mr. Varga noted that the gentleman mentioned he would have to apply a type of epoxy on it that takes approximately 10-14 days to cure, then he would need to sand it then re-apply the epoxy so there is a bit involved, but the bottom line is that he is currently working on it so it is in motion. Mr. Varga further added that ideally we will see something here shortly. Mr. Varga advised that he will probably stop over there and take pictures to see how the process is coming along. He added that we just have to figure out the timelines next, but the main thing is that it has been cut into pieces and they are being processed which is the hardest part of this entire project and the rest we can work on it as we go.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS – There were no comments from the audience.

ADJOURN: 7:55 p.m.

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council