

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, May 11, 2022
At 7:30 P.M.**

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

PRESENT:

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

Clerk of Council Barbara Brooks

ABSENT:

Commission Members: John Schwartz; Matt Smith

Law Director John Gasior

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022

A motion was made by Ms. Berges and seconded by Ms. Laurenzi to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, April 13, 2022, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Laurenzi, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Mr. Moore, "yes".

The vote was 5 for and 0 against and the Chairman declared the motion passed.

DISCUSSION OF ENHANCING THE TREE CANOPY OF AVON IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE METRO PARKS

Jim Ziemnik, Director of the Lorain County Metro Parks and also a resident of Avon, 39074 French Creek Road, said that he was there at the request of Mr. Moore and Mr. Varga. As the Tree Commission knows, the Metro Parks has the presence in Avon at Miller Nature Preserve and also their newer facility at Jaycox and Riegelsberger Roads, which is a wetland and a large stormwater filtration basin. He knows that Mayor Jensen and City Engineer Ryan Cummins were submitting another application on that same site to expand that stormwater filtration area but he does not know the status of that. They probably will not hear anything until June or July when they do the State biennial budget.

Mr. Varga thanked Mr. Ziemnik for coming tonight and said he thought that what the Tree Commission was really looking at was what the Metro Parks' intent or plan was for an area at Riegelsberger and Jaycox as far as incorporating trees to enhance our tree canopy. That is what we are looking at; we have to look at the future and make sure we enhance our tree canopy in the City of Avon. In Cuyahoga County, the canopy is down 13% over the last 10 years so we want to make sure in Lorain County that we try to enhance the tree canopy to the best of our ability. If we can help the Metro Parks in any way to make recommendations or work with them, we will be more than happy to do that.

Mr. Ziemnik stated that the Metro Parks has a wonderful relationship throughout Lorain County but very specifically with the City of Avon. The City of Avon was an amazing partner on the Metro Parks acquiring

the big corner parcel at Jaycox and Riegelsberger. French Creek kind of bisects the site; the west side is historically geologically wetland. Over the decades as things got settled out, trees were cleared, drain tile was installed and that is what drained a lot of Lorain County and very specifically Avon as well. So the west side of that site is really a wetland area and is not anything that is going to retain water in any sense of a depression basis but it is like a big sponge. The Metro Parks worked with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Ohio EPA in getting that part of the site as a wetland restoration. We are working with a wetland consultant and have most of the site restored in terms of a wildflower meadow. The only thing left to that is a peripheral trail that will go around the site and eventually a bridge will be put in to bridge French Creek onto the northeast side but it has the potential to become a forested wetland area. Mr. Ziemnik said that he just had correspondence today from a Davey Resource Group that is interested in making part of that site a forested area. So if that is the case, there are 11 acres on that side, split up by where the tributary comes in along Riegelsberger. To get to your point, Mr. Varga, Mr. Ziemnik said that he thought that over time a substantial amount of that site will be forested. As you know it already has a pretty healthy stand of cottonwoods and we will probably not be overly aggressive on taking them out but we are very interested in seeing that returned to a forested area.

Mr. Ziemnik said that on the northeast side, coming in off from Jaycox Road, because of French Creek's flooding we have excavated out about 30,000 cubic yards of soil to create a stormwater filtration basin that has substantially controlled the flooding. That site back in 2014 was literally 6 ft. under water so he thinks that they have made a significant dent in relieving that flooding there along French Creek. So at this point, he does not see a lot of potential for trees for that side of the site because of the way things are situated in those basins. We have the 30,000 cubic yard basin plus there is potential for us to expand additional stormwater filtration and if that is the case he does not see that side of French Creek as a good candidate for reforestation. Because of the way that French Creek is right up against Jaycox Road there, there is not a lot of potential there for tree canopy. He added that specifically to the question about planting native trees, that is all they are doing right now and that is all they care to do.

Mr. Moore asked if there was any type of plan as far as the number of trees that the Metro Parks would like to put in there and Mr. Ziemnik said, at this point, no. As most of them know, the best time to be doing tree planting is in the late fall or early winter. At that point, he thought that they would have a pretty good handle on how many trees they are putting in. And they are not putting in 3 or 4 caliper trees over there. They will probably be a notch above a whip-type of thing but they will stake them in and get them established. Because of the high volume of trees, it is a greater chance of survivability. We will lose a few over the years, but overall we will have a really magnificent forest growing up there. Mr. Moore said that we want to work together to try to get as many trees as possible for drainage and so many of the other benefits that we all know about. A reason they wanted to have Mr. Ziemnik there tonight was to maybe come up with a plan for planting trees and perhaps a plan for applying for grants.

Mr. Ziemnik said that what the wetland consultants and Davey Resources, etc., have to restore is going to dictate how many trees initially we are going to put in. That does not mean that we cannot later supplement that but we are going to conform to the standards that they need to meet with the Ohio EPA in getting that forested. He said that he knows we are here talking specifically about Avon but the Lorain County Metroparks has been on a relatively aggressive plan for the last 5 to 7 years to obtain trees from the nurseries when they do the fall clearings of their fields. Whatever they do not sell, they plow under, so we take advantage of that and throughout the Metroparks we have been pretty successful in getting truckloads of trees to bring in so we will certainly be targeting these areas.

Mr. Ziemnik said that he wanted to add that they are in discussions with a family whose property fronts on Jaycox Road and goes all the way back to French Creek. They have farmed probably a good 10 to 12 acres of that back land near French Creek. If we are successful in obtaining that property, we will certainly look for opportunities to get that reforested because right now it is just a big rural farm field. The Metro Parks is a political subdivision of the State of Ohio, created under Chapter 1545, and in broad terms, it is the preservation and conservation of the State's natural resources. That is the mission of all metropolitan park districts in the State of Ohio, so we would certainly look to get that area reforested. There is a lot of flood plain there along French Creek as well.

Mr. Traxler asked Mr. Ziemnik how it was going with the other projects that he has and he was also curious how the State of Ohio Clean Ohio Green Space program is progressing. Mr. Ziemnik responded that they have two projects that are currently in Columbus waiting for final approval and closure. They have acquired 9 holes of the Bobolink Golf Course along Jaycox Road, so that is going to get reclaimed ultimately because a lot of that is actually wetland. That will take a couple years but that will be reclaimed to wetland and he thinks it is a great opportunity for reforestation right along Jaycox Road there. And then the Lustr property at French Creek and Detroit Road has been submitted but that deal may not go through. If we do make it happen, that site it is already pretty heavily forested so he does not see any really great potential for additional canopy cover there and it is a very wet site too. Also, they are working with the City on what they call the TLCI NOACA Trail Project so as soon as they finish acquisition, the City Engineer is going to get in and do a delineation and hopefully we can work together and find the best way to get a trail through there.

Ms. Berges noted that in Miller Nature Preserve, on the north side as you are walking through the woods, it seems like there are a lot of trees that are down now. She asked Mr. Ziemnik if there were plans to replant trees in that area; it is pretty wet back there. Mr. Ziemnik responded that if they did replant trees, it would just be a spotty replacement type of thing and Ms. Berges is right, that is a very wet area. He said that they are kind of on the cusp in building a trail through there as it can get pretty soggy. You have to understand, too, especially in those situations, if a tree comes down they will leave it down because it makes great habitat. But he thought that periodically they will come back in and start to replace and restore but it would just be spotty; there are no big open areas there that they would be reforesting.

Mr. Moore thanked Mr. Ziemnik for coming in and talking with them and said that the Tree Commission is looking forward to working with him.

ARBOR DAY

Ms. Laurenzi stated that she went to Tennessee and went to the Franklin, TN Arbor Day festivities. Franklin is one of the premier communities near Nashville. They did a great job. They had a tree scavenger hunt, they had recycled bags and other small items to give away, there was a food truck, and a rock wall. It was from 10:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. although it was almost over when Ms. Laurenzi got there about 11:00 A.M. so she does not know how we want to plan our Arbor Day. But they had a great turnout; lots of kids and families and it really encouraged them to walk through the park and look at the trees and learn about trees and she thought that was a really great idea.

Mr. Varga reported that he, Mr. Traxler, and Mr. Smith went to Oberlin's Arbor Day and they basically were just planting a tree, and there were about 15 or 20 people there. They had a great discussion with everybody there so it was really nice just to talk to everybody and get a feel for what they were doing in the future and what we could possibly do. The nice thing about our Arbor Day is that it is

going to be at the Aquatic Center where we have already identified the trees through the History Walk there. So we were talking about having different groups going through the Walk at different times and identifying trees. Also we are going to have educational tree pruning and tree planting areas. We talked to the Mayor and he said it was fine to have some food trucks available and we also are talking to Avon Brewing Co. to do a beer tent. So that is what we were thinking about and this is all just brain storming right now.

Mr. Varga said that he was going ahead a little bit now but we were also thinking about doing YouTube videos because Recreation Coordinator Clare Harasimchuk has a person that is affiliated with the City that does that. We were thinking about doing that maybe before Arbor Day to promote it and then have the videos on the City website as far as information on tree planting, pruning, and mulching. We would do just a couple videos to start and then progress from there. He asked the Commission members if they thought this was something to go forward with and everyone agreed. Mr. Varga said that he would go further then and talk to Ms. Harasimchuk and see what is actually involved in making these YouTube videos. We will be the first city that he knows of that will be posting YouTubes for tree care.

UPDATE ON THE MEMORIAL TREE PROGRAM

Mr. Varga referred to a handout that he had given everyone and said that he, Ms. Harasimchuk, Mr. Smith, and Rose Seighman, the Mayor's Assistant, worked on it together. He thought that they had put together a more comprehensive memorial tree selection and if there is anything that anyone wants to add or correct, to let him know. It has been posted but we can always add to it or correct it.

DISCUSSION OF CREATING YOUTUBE VIDEOS ABOUT TREES FOR AVON

Mr. Varga stated, as he indicated earlier, we have already started this process. He just wanted to run it by everybody for their input. As he said, initially, we were just thinking about 2 or 3 videos and we did not want to make them too long, maybe 5 or 6 minutes so people would not be turned off by the video being too long. Once he narrows it down, he will make an outline of the topics and how to proceed and they can all discuss it from there as he wants input from everybody.

MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Berges said that she read in the paper that Avon Lake's Garden Club gave out free native plants to Avon Lake residents during their plant sale. She knows that our Garden Club is having their plant sale on May 21st so it is probably not enough time to talk to them about this but she was thinking we could look into this for next year and coordinate with our Garden Club to see if they would be interested in it. She thought that she would call the Avon Lake Garden Club to see where they get these native plants because they were not charging the residents for them so she was not sure who donated them or how they went about to do that. She knows that we are interested in promoting native plants as part of the Avon Tree Commission.

Ms. Berges said, and just to add on to that, do we want to list Ohio native plants on our web page or a link to native plants? Mr. Varga said that he has had long discussions with Bill Hendrix out in Lake County Nursery about the terminology "native" plants. It can be native to Ohio, to northern Ohio but not to southern Ohio, to Appalachia in Ohio, etc. so there is a distinction as far as native plants is concerned. So

then Mr. Hendrix came up with a list that he thought was appropriate for native trees and Mr. Varga has that like a cross section of everything. So you have to be careful with the terminology “native”.

Ms. Berges said, also, the Lorain Soil and Water Conservation District is having a “Big Tree” contest. Apparently they do this every year and this year they are featuring beech trees so again, do we want to promote something like this? Does Mr. Varga know where there are beech trees in Avon? Is that common in Avon?

Mr. Varga answered, yes, they are a native tree and there are some huge beech trees right here by the Aquatic Center in our History Walk area. When Miller Nature Preserve held their Arbor Day in 2018, they also had a contest to see who had the oldest, most mature tree in Avon and it was just for a general tree. He likes the idea of being more specific; he thinks that way you diversify it a little bit and you get more people involved. He thinks that is a great idea. Ms. Berges said that she could follow up and get the application form and we can enter it and see if our beech trees are the biggest ones in Lorain County.

Ms. Berges said, lastly, she was thinking that, as we are trying to get information out to residents, it would be nice to have articles in the newspaper on a bi-monthly basis or every quarter in addition to the information we have on the web page. Just to put this information out in front of residents of the different things that we are talking about that would be of value to them. Mr. Varga said that he was going to communicate with the Chronicle Telegram and also with Westlife, which has had articles about trees in the last couple issues. So we definitely want to start promoting Avon in that realm and he will look into that.

Mr. Varga noted that there is a scholarship program through the ISA, International Society of Arboriculture, and he will make sure everybody gets a copy of that information. He said that he would like us to apply for students in the City of Avon.

Mr. Traxler stated that they had talked about handing out seedlings at the November 5th Arbor Day event but it is difficult to get trees at that time because usually trees are dug in the spring. He suggested that they discuss ordering maybe 50 small seedlings relatively soon so that they do have those. He asked if anybody had any comments about that; if they agreed that would be a good idea.

Mr. Varga said that he was at the ISA Conference and talked with a woman from the U. of Kentucky about the shortage of white oaks because that is what they make the bourbon barrels out of and as a consequence, they have been harvesting all these oaks but nobody replanted any oaks so there is this shortage. So the U. of Kentucky had a program to collect white oak acorns and have planted over 600,000 of them on a donated 25 acres. Now they have all these seedlings that are about 12 to 15 inches tall and are trying to get people to plant them. This woman told him to contact her if he wanted seedlings and he will do that.

Ms. Berges asked Mr. Traxler how soon he would need to order seedlings and Mr. Traxler said he thought we should probably do it before the next meeting so that we do not miss an opportunity. If we do not, he was not sure what we would do. We could buy containerized trees but that might be expensive .

Mr. Varga said that he will get his information and he and Mr. Traxler will have a discussion about it. Mr. Traxler added that they would share that with everybody before doing anything. Mr. Traxler said that he guessed that we would not necessarily have to have the seedlings but it would be nice and he does not

think they would be very expensive. Obviously we want native trees but he was not sure we can get deciduous trees; it may have to be evergreens because evergreens are easier to dig in the fall.

Mr. Varga stated that the trees that they were giving away at the Library were junipers, so they were evergreens. And Mr. Moore planted a beautiful one in his backyard. Mr. Traxler said that another option we could do, too, is purchase seedlings now, put them in a holding area, and then dig them up but you might lose those trees and it is extra work.

Mr. Moore stated, as Mr. Varga mentioned, the Library did their Neighborhood Forestry program and he wanted to thank Mr. Varga for stopping at his house to give him suggestions on planting the eastern red cedar tree they received from the Library. His daughter was quite excited about it and all of his family is going to be excited to see how it comes along. He also wanted to thank Mr. Varga again for going over some tree pruning which was really helpful. He thinks that the YouTube videos will be really helpful for residents and he is super excited to hear all the plans for Avon Arbor Day. It sounds like we are going to be setting a benchmark for everyone around us.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Nancy Haas, 4272 Reserve Way, stated that she was a retired nursing director at University Hospitals and has lived in Avon for almost 5 years and is very happy in Avon. She is involved in the Avon Garden Club and is the 1st Vice President, so she was there representing not only herself but also the Avon Garden Club. She thought that the things that the Avon Garden Club would like to know are how they can help and how they can get involved. They are a non-profit and do not have a lot of money. They do have some fund raisers and as was mentioned, their plant sale is coming up in just a couple of weeks. She thinks that the Garden Club would be very interested in learning more about the Tree Commission, its goals and also how they can help and in ways they could partner through helping with Arbor Day or at their plant sale which is their main fund raiser for the year.

Ms. Haas said that the Garden Club is booking speakers for 2023 and she would like for somebody from the Tree Commission to come and speak about the plans and the goals of the Tree Commission and also if they could recommend someone to come and speak specifically about the care of trees, what trees to plant, etc. And if they can just let the Garden Club know then how they can help she would appreciate it. Ms. Haas added, as far as passing out trees at their Garden Club sale in 2023, they would be glad to do that. They do have a limited budget but they might be able to make a donation toward purchasing the seedlings. Their plant sale is always in May. She thinks it is a good idea about the YouTube videos and she agrees that they should not be lengthy. The shorter the better and probably breaking up the topics such as pruning, planting, etc.

Ms. Laurenzi asked when and where the Garden Club plant sale was held and Ms. Haas said it is Saturday, May 21st, 8:00 AM to 12:00 P.M. at the lot adjacent to the Senior Center. The first hour is very busy; they do have things left but these are plants from the Garden Club members' yards so sometimes there are only 2 or 3 of something.

Mr. Ziemnik asked everyone if they were aware that the Girl Scouts have this big initiative of planting 5 million trees throughout the United States? Very recently the Metro Parks acquired donated seedlings and they worked with three Girl Scout troops and did a very extensive planting of those seedlings. He does not know if any local Girl Scout troops are involved with this program, but they have a goal to plant as many trees as they can. He will try to get some sources on this.

Mr. Varga said that John Schwartz, who is absent tonight, works for the Lorain County Soil and he was talking about that. Mr. Traxler said that he was talking about the trees that are available now. The problem we had was what was available in the fall. Mr. Zeimnik said that he would try to find out. The other thing he wanted to mention, and he was sure Mr. Varga was aware of it, is that there is a disease going through the beeches right now that is pretty fatal. Mr. Varga said there is a blight. Nobody really has an answer right now about what is going on so they are still researching all that.

Mr. Ziemnik stated that there are huge federal pots of money out there right now. The Lake Erie Commission, the Ohio EPA, US EPA, are all going for anything for water quality and anything that is in the watershed. In our case we have French Creek, which goes into the Black River, which goes into Lake Erie. These agencies are very interested in making that impact for the harmful algae blooms and are begging for people to submit applications because they need to get this money spent as it is a 5 year window. Mr. Ziemnik said he hopes that the Tree Commission can explore that and find some opportunity. That may be a great funding source to get some of those dollars by saying, we can reforest some areas and filter the water. They will love that and Mr. Ziemnik thinks it is a good opportunity.

Mr. Varga thanked Mr. Ziemnik for that information. He said that he and Mr. Smith know those grants are out there and have started to look at them. Mr. Ziemnik said that he does not know if legislation has been passed quite yet but they are talking about big dollars and when they are begging for you to take their money and spend it in 5 years, you have to take advantage of it.

Mr. Ziemnik then asked if they were familiar with the H2 Ohio program which comes out of Columbus, generated by Gov. DeWine and now ODNR. They are really big into attacking the harmful algae blooms. It is vegetation, wetlands, storm water filtration, and he thinks it is another opportunity that if you can make those connections, you might get some funding assistance. They are going after these big federal dollars as well for what they call the GLRI, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, so he would encourage them to check into that as well.

Mr. Moore said that his wife is a Girl Scout troop leader so he was going to talk to her about the initiative for planting trees and he thanked Mr. Ziemnik for letting them know about that. Mr. Ziemnik said they would love the opportunity to work together and noted that some of his staff were former Girl Scout leaders.

ADJOURN

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

The vote was 5 for and 0 against and the Chairman declared the motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 8:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council