

Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, June 12, 2024

The Chairman Rick Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:34 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Others in Attendance: Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council
There is currently one vacancy on the Tree Commission

APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR PRO TEM FOR THE TREE COMMISSION

The Chairman opened the floor to accept nominations for a Chair Pro Tem of the Avon Tree Commission.

Ms. Berges nominated Mr. Smith to be Chair Pro Tem.

There being no other nominations, the Chair closed the nominations and declared Mr. Smith to be the Chair Pro Tem for the Avon Tree Commission.

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 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, May 8, 2024, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes", Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

The vote was 6 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

DISCUSSION OF TREE ORDINANCES

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated as a Tree Commission, they have been involved in re-writing some of the Tree Ordinances and they had assistance from Alex Bae, a law student at Case Western Reserve. He stated there has been several meetings and he has been working diligently with the Avon Law Director to put together new Ordinances to preserve and protect trees on private property jointly with construction crews in certain areas, as well as to create some sort of buffer zone to protect these trees.

Mr. Varga added currently the Commission is working on several tree Ordinances; however, one tree Ordinance they are striving for in particular is for a barrier protection zone to be instituted. He advised once they have everything ready regarding tree Ordinances ideally in the next few weeks, they are going to present it to the Tree Commission. He added once the tree Ordinances are approved by the Tree Commission, they will present the tree Ordinances to City Council for their approval. Mr. Varga advised this is the current status in reference to tree Ordinances and he will keep everyone aware of the progress as they move forward.

UPDATE ON THE TREE ACADEMY HOMEWORK INCLUDING CITY COUNCIL

Ms. Berges

Ms. Berges advised that last month she distributed the Tree City USA worksheet to City Council which the Tree Commission filled out on a previous occasion. She stated that four members of Council completed and returned their worksheets. She noted on June 3, 2024, she and Mr. Varga went over the results of Council's completed worksheets and they compared Council's responses to the responses that she and Mr. Varga established.

Ms. Berges stated she thinks overall there were more responses in the Optimal and Moderate range. She noted that Council certainly thought they were doing better than she and Mr. Varga had decided which is a good thing. She further advised it was determined there needed to be better communication about what the City does in terms of planting trees and tree maintenance. She added the Tree Commission will continue to work on that aspect. Ms. Berges stated that Mr. Varga also shared with Council some of the tree related awards that Avon has received over the last couple years to promote awareness. Ms. Berges commented that she believes the information relayed to Council was well-received and she felt Council had obtained a lot of information from reviewing the worksheet.

REPORT ON THE TREE CITY USA EVENT- ROCKY RIVER

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated they all attended the Tree City USA event that took place on May 16, 2024. He stated it was a great experience and he believes they all learned quite a bit from that event. Mr. Varga added that he brought a flag with a plaque and they are going to install in City Hall. Mr. Varga advised in moving forward for Avon hosting of the Tree City USA event for May 2025, they have procured Tom's Country Place and the City has taken care of the down payment so that part is finalized. He advised now they can start working on their upcoming Arbor Day event as it is the next major event for the Tree Commission. Mr. Varga further advised following Arbor Day in October of this year, they will begin working on the Tree City USA event.

UPDATE ON THE HISTORY TREE RING PROJECT

Mr. Varga

Mr. Smith stated that he and Mr. Varga visited Ron Buchanan in Avon, who had taken the two cross sections of the tree for the tree ring project. He stated that Mr. Buchanan had perfectly put the two cross sections together and polished them which was beautifully done. He added that Mr. Buchanan is building two carts for maneuverability so when it is transported it would be easier to wheel around to different places if necessary. Mr. Smith stated that he and Mr. Varga are going to find a trophy shop as they received some information from Holden Arboretum regarding their tree ring display. He stated they would need metal tags so they could imprint important dates of Avon into the tree ring. He further noted that they are going to look further into metal tags including how to attach them. Mr. Smith advised they are going to also work with Mr. White from the Avon Historical Society as they want to get important dates of Avon's history on the tree rings. Mr. Smith commented the project is coming along well and is looking good.

Mr. Varga stated what he observed about some of the tree rings in other communities is that they have all different historical dates marked, for example, the first man on the moon, when President Lincoln was born etc., and for this project they specifically want to stick with important dates of Avon on their tree ring. Mr. Smith agreed and added they want to focus on the tree rings being an educational tool for both kids and adults alike and they want to stick with Avon historical facts, as there are plenty of them.

UPDATE ON THE STUDENT TREE COMMISSION APPLICATIONS

Ms. Englemann

Ms. Englemann advised that she printed out the application forms that she created for the Student Tree Commission Member as well as the Tree Commission Board Member, which are very similar except that there are different areas to fill out for the student member. She passed them around to the Commission for review. Ms. Englemann stated she is under the impression that they are waiting on the student member of the Tree Commission Ordinance to be passed before they can have everything available on the website. She noted due to this, they pulled the advertisement for the student Tree Commission member from the newsletter this month.

Mr. Varga indicated after it is presented to Mr. Gasior and he reviews the Tree Commission Member and Student Member Ordinance and it is subsequently passed they can move forward with applications. Mr. Varga stated their plan is to open it up to the citizens of Avon so that if they apply or attend a meeting they can be informed of what the Tree Commission does. Berges inquired if they need a motion for a student member Tree Commission application.

A motion was made by Ms. Berges and seconded by Mr. Smith for a Student Non-Voting Member of the Tree Commission and that the application for that position also be approved and the vote was: Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Englemann, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes".

The vote was 6 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

DISCUSSION OF THE WILD HOOVES AND ARBOR DAY ACTIVITIES

Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith stated last year Avon hosted the "Not So Spooky Halloween" event and he stopped by at the event to check out the setup. He mentioned Ms. Berges attended that event as well. Mr. Smith mentioned he observed a petting zoo advertisement at this event which led him to think smaller animals such as hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, and animals of that nature, but he was surprised to learn that there were large animals there as well which included a llama, alpaca, sheep, two goats, a mini donkey, and a mini horse. He advised that it could also be arranged to have a pony reserved for pony rides. Mr. Smith stated he thought those animals were quite cool and noted they are very friendly. He added he thought that this feature would be great for all ages at the upcoming Arbor Day celebration.

Mr. Smith noted that he spoke with Betsy Thayer, who is the owner and operator of Wild Hooves Farms, and he inquired if she would be interested in coming to their upcoming Arbor Day Celebration and she indicated that she would be interested. Mr. Smith advised he obtained some additional information from Ms. Thayer, and although he is not very interested in the pony rides specifically, he did like the animals. He added he felt that a good place to have this petting zoo setup would be by the storybook trail as it would draw people including kids and families over to pet the animals. He also noted that they could then walk through the storybook trail where they would have vendors such as at the "Not So Spooky Halloween" event. Mr. Smith stated it would be good to get this going and that is his objective for Arbor Day.

Mr. Smith advised the cost of the petting zoo would be \$175 an hour and it would be for 2 ½ hours. He noted there is a travel fuel fee which would be an additional cost of \$30. Mr. Smith advised the total cost to have this feature at Arbor Day would be \$467.50. Mr. Smith stated he spoke with Ms. Seighman, the Mayor's Administrative Assistant, and Mayor Jensen about this opportunity for Arbor Day, and Mayor

Jensen indicated to him when the Tree Commission meets next that they would need to make a motion for this feature to be at Arbor Day. Mr. Smith advised from his understanding, once Council approves their recommendation, the City will cover the costs associated with having a petting zoo feature for Arbor Day. Mr. Smith advised it is his understanding that Ms. Thayer may already be in the City records with a W-9 form from a possible prior engagement. Ms. Wetzig inquired about additional information regarding the pony rides. Mr. Smith responded that one reason he does not want the pony rides at Arbor Day is due to the fact they are only hiring her for two and a half hours and they want the kids to be focused on the activities and exploring the area. He added that they do not want to overstimulate everyone by having pony rides there as well.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Wetzig to hire Betsy Thayer, Owner of Wild Hooves Farm LLC, to bring her petting zoo to the Arbor Day celebration and the vote was: Ms. Engelmann, "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 Chair declared the motion passed.

MEMBER COMMENTS –

Ms. Berges noted the Tree Commission Newsletter is going to be coming out sometime this summer. She stated she does not have an exact deadline yet as her work group has not had a meeting yet regarding the newsletter but the group will be meeting soon. Ms. Berges inquired if anyone had suggestions for anything they would like to see featured in the newsletter, they would be welcome. Ms. Berges stated this past Monday night on June 10, 2024, following the City Council meeting, Council went to visit the Traxler property. She added the Mayor invited them to walk through the property and Mr. Smith joined Council there to provide information regarding the Traxler property. She stated that the response from the Council Members was extremely positive, and they could not believe this place exists in Avon. She continued by saying as you walk through the property, it is just peaceful, and it feels like you are somewhere else with no worries of traffic disruptions. She added that Council is excited what the Traxler property could become and potential plans for it. She stated it was a very nice opportunity to walk through the property.

Ms. Berges advised on June 1, 2024, Bay Village had their Arbor Day event. She mentioned after last year's very cold and rainy Arbor Day in April, they decided to move that event to June, which worked out well as the event took place on a sunny day. She stated at the Bay Village Arbor Day event there was one large tent, two tree giveaways, a raffle of a large tree and a smaller tree, face painting, a food truck as well as the Bay Village Tree Conservancy. Ms. Berges advised the Bay Village Tree Conservancy is a newly formed group whose mission is to help residents to plant trees on private property vs. the City looking for public property to plant trees. Ms. Berges noted the group is brand new thus she offered information about what has been done in regards to grants and private property and cited Rocky River as an example. Ms. Berges advised that Bartlett Tree Experts were there and lastly, Western Reserve Conservancy and Holden Arboretum. She added these organizations provide some indication for who may visit their Arbor Day celebration in October.

Mr. Boccabella advised that he handed out a copy of the current draft that they have for the Avon Tree Commission banner and believes this is something Council Member Mr. Moore put together in late 2023. He advised that currently the Owner of Graffiti Warehouse has a draft and he would be able to make a banner for the Tree Commission. He added the only change to the existing banner that you would notice is that the tree has low-resolution. Mr. Boccabella noted they would have to either get a different picture

of a higher quality and of that style tree or possibly input a Hearts of Gold Redbud tree to the draft banner. He stated all the Tree Commission members can review this draft and at the next meeting in July if there are no other changes besides the tree, he can proceed with it and have it finalized. He noted they can figure out some of the details and colors. Mr. Boccabella stated that he is not tied to any particular aspect of the banner so they can add, delete, and modify. Mr. Boccabella stated if the Commission makes a decision next month, then they should have something made by August. He concluded by saying he will have this banner taken care of once they decide on the final design.

Ms. Englemann stated while she was working on the applications for the student Tree Commission member, she was using an image she believes was from Ms. Berges; however, the image quality was not ideal for this project, so she decided to try to draw a draft image instead to see if it could improve the overall design. She noted she did go with the Hearts of Gold Redbud tree since it features purple and gold colors to represent Avon. She stated it is a preliminary idea but they can change it up if needed. Ms. Englemann wanted to add some text that says, "Avon's Roots Run Deep," so this could potentially be something to replace another graphic. She advised she believed the Tree Commission could do a touch better and possibly inject some more life into it. She thinks with the purple hue of the Gold Redbud tree it looks good with the City of Avon logo and the Tree City USA logo. Ms. Englemann advised she will distribute this in case anyone has thoughts or feedback regarding the design. Mr. Traxler stated the other picture was not very graphic and believes this one created by Ms. Englemann reads so much better. Ms. Berges commented it looked perfect and everyone agreed that it came out beautifully. Mr. Boccabella commented that it looks awesome and Ms. Englemann believed it to be a good graphic and very colorful for Avon and that it will draw some attention.

Mr. Smith stated the Hearts of Gold Redbud trees, and he has three of them in his front yard, you can see the purple in the early spring and gold colors in the summer. He commented for the banner to have both Avon colors and the "Avon's Roots Run Deep" wording with the roots illustrated he believed Ms. Englemann covered all the bases. Ms. Englemann stated her thoughts for using this would not only be for their banner but also their website and other applications. She added she would like to have patches made for scouts when they visit and for when the Tree Commission does community outreach. Mr. Smith inquired if she could add the words Hearts of Gold on there and Ms. Englemann responded absolutely. Mr. Smith added it would have good clarity. Ms. Wetzig agreed and stated in the one spot with the part "Avon Roots Run Deep," it would be nice to have the roots a little more resituated. She added she loves the tree Ms. Englemann drafted and the colors look great.

Mr. Smith commented to touch back on the Arbor Day discussion, he knows they have the Tree Commission work group sheet in which they are all assigned different responsibilities. He noted that for Arbor Day they have Ms. Englemann and Mr. Boccabella listed but there are a lot more things to be completed. He inquired if Mr. Varga brought a checklist as they still have to divide up what members are handling which responsibilities. Mr. Smith stated they cannot expect to have just the two of them doing all of responsibilities for Arbor Day. Mr. Smith stated he can get the petting zoo, music and beer tent set up etc. He noted Mr. Boccabella could provide the tent; however, there are still the responsibilities of handling kids activities in addition to visiting businesses around the city to get donations for the prizes. He added they need to start thinking of who exactly is going to be doing which responsibility for Arbor Day. Ms. Wetzig recommended they go with what they did the last two years. Mr. Smith agreed and Ms. Wetzig added unless anyone wished to make adjustments. Mr. Varga stated he will compile what he has and distribute it to the group so for the next meeting they will be able to start working on the responsibilities for Arbor Day.

Mr. Varga added he has all the information in case there is anything the Tree Commission Members wish to modify, and they can review what they want to change, and they can be prepared for the next meeting to work on it. Mr. Smith agreed. He also stated he wanted to inform the Commission members when they are leaving tonight to notice the foyer area. He stated that their Tree City USA plaque is now up on the left side of the wall.

Mr. Traxler stated he wished to open a discussion about the seedlings that were handed out last Arbor Day in 2023. He mentioned he was a bit disappointed by the fact that while they were beautiful trees, the root system was overgrown. He advised that root system overgrowth tends to happen if your planting trees at a certain time of the year and noted it can be hard to prevent. Mr. Traxler noted what happens when you plant the seedlings they can be difficult to water. He and Mr. Varga discussed the possibility of changing the seedlings and to feature larger container trees. He added container trees may be a good option as people will not damage them through mowing or weed whacking, and second, they are able to get established quickly. He also noted how some of the other cities have programs where they have a short training session with mandatory attendance on how to properly water the tree. Mr. Traxler believes the tree container option is a great idea and he wanted to open a discussion on when the Tree Commission could possibly pursue that. He added if you want to pick trees growing in the City it is much more effective, but he noted it is also more expensive.

Ms. Wetzig suggested instead of freely handing out seedlings they would have people sign up for a demonstration of how to properly take care of the tree. She added after completing the demonstration then that person would receive a free seedling. Mr. Traxler confirmed and Mr. Varga noted people would have to attend and sign up for the tree they want, and samples can be available. Mr. Varga advised he checked with Willoway Nurseries and they have a 3-gallon tree that will grow to 4-5 feet in height and the cost is \$33; however, if they buy additional trees, it could be as low as \$25 per tree.

Mr. Smith stated he thinks that is exciting and Ms. Wetzig agreed and noted it would add more commitment. Mr. Smith agreed and stated people can be quite serious regarding these trees. He added while they are not going to walk away with a tree on Arbor Day, they can sign up for the workshop to get the tree. Mr. Varga and Mr. Traxler will have samples of about 4-5 different tree species at Arbor Day which Mr. Smith believes that to be sufficient. Mr. Traxler believes the Tree Commission will have to plan it further in advance. He added he does not think the trees are big, but they need to plan a bit more than before then he would proceed to order the seedlings. Mr. Traxler advised to plan for this the Commission has to set up the program, decide what they are going to do, when and where then maybe they can think on it as they have more time. Mr. Smith agreed and thought it is a great option and noted he would like to feature it this year instead of waiting. Ms. Berges stated she would support that 100% and thinks it is a great idea. Mr. Varga stated he got the idea at the Roundtable Conference from a discussion with a Council Member from Fairview Park. Ms. Wetzig inquired if they did any giveaways at the Bay Village Arbor Day. Ms. Berges responded Bay Village did not and noted they only gave away two trees which consisted of a large tree and a smaller tree.

Mr. Bocabella stated if you get a tree then the workshop would have to be fairly soon after the Arbor Day celebration for someone to attend the workshop then actually plant the tree. Mr. Varga stated the good thing is since Avon's Arbor Day is in early October they have some time as far as sign ups. He commented if this was the beginning of November, then they would really be under pressure. Mr. Smith inquired what if they had a simple session right there at the Arbor Day celebration such as earlier or later in the day. Mr. Varga stated the only concern is that they would have to know how many people are serious about the tree seedlings to sign up. He advised he would have to pick up the trees and handle the

giveaway of the trees at Arbor Day. Mr. Varga stated the Tree Commission can have the demonstration so those who are present and interested can learn more about the maintenance of the tree seedling and have the necessary information for its care. Ms. Wetzig stated for those who show up to the demonstration they could also request which seedling they prefer at Arbor Day. She added the Tree Commission could order them and deliver the trees after the event. Mr. Varga stated that could potentially work. Mr. Smith added they could also have a form that the City Arborist signs which states they attended the workshop, and they are entitled to choose a tree.

Ms. Wetzig stated the awards ceremony for Tree City USA was informative and interesting and she is looking forward to the planning aspect. She added for next year's Tree City USA event she has a lot of contacts and pictures. She advised that they already have the venue ready, so she believes they are doing well in getting ahead for the planning of that event. Mr. Varga confirmed and added it is going to be very exciting and Ms. Wetzig added she has a tree list to refer to from the other day. She added at the Tree City USA event they have a sheet where people provide input and feedback. She inquired if they have a new sheet for one of the awards. Mr. Smith stated Mr. Varga gave them out this year and he just updated his sheet yesterday. Mr. Varga advised he can send more of those if needed as he has plenty available.

AUDIENCE COMMENTS –

Marion Walters, 3124 Stone Wheel Street, stated it is nice to be here at the Tree Commission meeting and she appreciated the Commission listening to what she had to say. She stated they live on the west side of the City, which currently has building projects taking place. She felt they left very little if any consideration to the residents about the construction and the tree work that was involved. Ms. Walters stated the builders have taken down as many trees as possible right to the borderline and as far as they are concerned in doing that, the builders have taken down the trees to the point of where their tree is located. She noted they are only about 20 feet from the woods. Ms. Walters stated the trees they have been left with are completely upset. She stated when those trees were taken down it upset all the roots including the surrounding soil, and believes this has weakened the trees that are left..

Ms. Walters added her concern, as well as all her other neighbors concern, is that when they get strong winds from storms that come in from the west side to the east. She inquired what are these storms going to do to the trees? She added if they are weakened to that extent, they are going to come down. She noted the trees could potentially die or become weakened to such an extent, and the concern is that these trees are going to fall on their homes. Ms. Walters asked the Tree Commission what they were going to do about this. Whose responsibility does this belong to? Ms. Walters questioned if the builder had even considered this? Shouldn't the builder have looked into this possibility before taking any actions like this? Ms. Walters stated these are questions they do not know the answer to, and they would like to get some sort of idea of who to go to, and where do they go to from here. Ms. Walters advised this is why she has come here to the Tree Commission, to ask the Commission for their advice. She stated with having the expertise of a Certified Arborist, she is confident they can obtain some good advice from him. She inquired if the Tree Commission could give her some advice as to what she can do and what procedures she should take.

Mr. Varga stated what they are trying to do right now, as the Tree Commission, is to get an Ordinance passed. He advised the next thing they are going to do is advise the City and tell them exactly what Ms. Walters stated. He advised that Ms. Walters would need to go to City Council because even when the Tree Commission presents their ideas, if City Council does not approve them then it remains unresolved. Mr. Varga added the Tree Commission does the work in presenting their recommendations but it is important

for City Council to be aware of the concerns of its constituents. Mr. Varga stated that Ms. Walters coming here is great because it will be reflected in the meeting minutes and recorded by the City. He advised they as a Commission are doing everything in their power to preserve and protect trees in the City. He added he knows what the builders have done because the same thing happened on Detroit Road when they built Palmer Street. Mr. Varga stated they took all the trees down, every tree, just like Ms. Walters said and within a month there were 22 trees that came down that were strewn across Shakespeare Lane, right by Detroit Road. Ms. Walters stated she could believe it.

Mr. Varga stated this resulted in a civil suit between the builder and Shakespeare Lane. He advised what the Tree Commission is trying to do, and as other cities have done, is to put up some type of protection. He added that other cities have protection plans where they had put up fences to protect the critical root zone. Mr. Varga added they should not disturb the soil and run the trees over with the bulldozers because it can rip apart and compromise the roots. Mr. Varga stated a lot of this you are not going to even see now, but you are going to see 5 years from now the result of what the builders did. Mr. Varga stated that is a problem when they disturb the root system. Mr. Varga stated it does not show up right away, it could show up in 5 years, 6 years, 7 years etc., from now so that is why a protection plan is essential with construction. Mr. Varga stated the good thing here is Ms. Walters is making her voice known to the City now and it is going on record for what the builders are doing. He added in the instance she goes back to the builder, she has at least made this issue aware to the Tree Commission. Ms. Walters stated she presumes the best thing she could do is go back to her street and in her neighborhood on the west side to make her neighbors aware of a possible petition or something that will emphasize and relay back what she is seeing. Mr. Varga responded exactly.

Ms. Berges stated she recalled Ms. Walters at a recent Council meeting. Ms. Berges said she felt terrible she did not get a chance to speak because Ms. Walters had to leave when the meeting ran long. Ms. Walters stated that was okay as it was very educational to be present. Ms. Berges stated she wanted Ms. Walters to have the opportunity to speak to Council and she is absolutely welcome to come back to Council. Ms. Walters thanked Ms. Berges. Ms. Berges advised for Ms. Walters to share her experience with Council because the fact that her trees are being affected and damaged, she believes that is an important thing to communicate to Council. Ms. Walters agreed it is and stated they moved here 15 years ago knowing that although this is a young city, it is one that could be a tremendous example for other cities to follow. She added its her belief with how this issue has been handled that it makes her very glad she lives where she does. Ms. Walters thanked the Tree Commission for allowing her to speak on the matter. She is hopeful something else can be done to prevent a repeat of this with other builders.

There were no further comments.

ADJOURN: 7:58 p.m.

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. Berges “yes”; Mr. Boccabella “yes”, Ms. Engelmann, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”.

The vote was 6 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

The next meeting of the Tree Commission is Wednesday, July 10, 2024

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council