

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, July 9, 2025
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Richard Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Mary Johnson; Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member); Matt Smith; John Traxler; Liesa Wetzig; Chair, Richard Varga (non-voting Member).

Others in Attendance: Barbara Brooks, Clerk of Council; Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - Alex Boccabella; Megan Englemann; John Gasior, Law Director

MOTION TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO ADD ITEM #6A – TO DISCUSS THE ADDITION OF A STUDENT MEMBER

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to amend the agenda to add item #6A – To Discuss the Addition of a second Student Member and the vote was Ms. Berges, “yes”; Ms. Johnson, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”.

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

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2025

A motion was made by Ms. Wetzig and seconded by Ms. Johnson to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, June 11, 2025, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Johnson, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”.

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

DISCUSSION OF THE 2025 ARBOR DAY EVENT, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga presented details about the upcoming Arbor Day event. He mentioned that handouts were distributed to the members regarding the event. He encouraged everyone to review the handout and sign up for specific events.

Mr. Varga went through the event schedule, which included:

1. Opening ceremony with Mayor Jensen and the National Anthem
2. Tree Planting: Mr. Varga and Mr. Traxler will handle the tree planting activities during the event. They plan to coordinate the involvement of other members and ensure all necessary arrangements for planting are in place. Coordination will involve planning the site selection for planting, ensuring the availability of necessary tools, and organizing volunteers to assist in the planting process.
3. Possible additional speakers, including State Representative Gail Manning: Mr. Varga mentioned that usually, Representative Manning attends the event, but they are not certain if she will be able to participate this year. The planning team is considering having additional speakers as part of the

opening ceremony alongside the tree planting event, Mayor Jensen's address, and the national anthem.

He discussed the need for lead members for various aspects of the event, including:

1. **Welcome Table:** Mr. Varga discussed the need for a lead member to oversee the welcome table at the Arbor Day event. This role would involve greeting attendees and providing them with event information as they arrive. The individual responsible for the welcome table would be responsible for organizing any necessary materials and ensuring that the process runs smoothly during the event. Mr. Varga emphasized the importance of having a dedicated lead for this role to ensure attendees receive a warm welcome and have a positive experience from the start of the event. The welcome table serves as the first point of contact for guests, making it a crucial part of setting the tone for the day.
2. **Giveaways:** Mr. Varga highlighted the need for a lead member to oversee the giveaways at the Arbor Day event. He discussed how this role involves organizing the distribution of giveaways to attendees, coordinating the preparation and setup, and ensuring that the process runs smoothly. The giveaways are an integral part of ensuring attendees leave with a positive experience and something memorable from the event. Mr. Varga stressed the importance of this role in contributing to the overall success of the day.
3. **Advertising:** Mr. Varga mentioned the idea of using yard signs to promote the event. He emphasized the importance of making the signs easily readable from a distance, suggesting larger letters for key information like the date and time of the Arbor Day event, October 4, 2025. Mr. Varga noted seeing yard signs for other events that were difficult to read, even when stopped at a traffic light while driving, and stressed the need for clear, readable information, potentially with a smaller tree graphic for aesthetic purposes. Ms. Berges suggested using "First Saturday in October" on the yard signs instead of a specific date. This change would allow for yearly reuse of the signs, making them more cost-effective and sustainable. She also recommended keeping the information simple and directing people to the city website for additional details. This approach would make it easier for those passing by to quickly capture essential event information while providing a resource for further exploration.

Mr. Varga discussed the need for volunteers to handle donations and sponsors. Mr. Smith volunteered to be the lead member for this aspect, mentioning that he would compile a list of those who are donating gift cards and prizes.

Mr. Varga noted that Mr. Boccabella usually handles the site setup, though he was not present at the meeting.

Other event elements discussed included:

1. **Scavenger Hunt:** Mr. Varga mentioned that the scavenger hunt is part of the Arbor Day event, a fun and interactive activity designed to engage participants of all ages. It's an opportunity for attendees to explore the event area, appreciate nature, and learn about trees through a series of clues or challenges. Additionally, the scavenger hunt aims to educate participants by incorporating botanical facts and encouraging exploration of the natural surroundings. Mr. Traxler and Ms. Wetzig are responsible for organizing and overseeing the scavenger hunt. Their tasks include planning the route, crafting the clues, and ensuring all materials are ready for participants. They will coordinate the setup and any assistance needed to facilitate a smooth and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.
2. **Tree Planting:** Mr. Varga, along with Mr. Traxler, will lead the tree planting activities during the Arbor Day event. They plan to coordinate the involvement of other members and ensure all

necessary arrangements for planting are in place. Coordination will involve planning the site selection for planting, ensuring the availability of necessary tools, and organizing volunteers to assist in the planting process.

3. Tree Sapling Giveaway: Mr. Varga opened the floor for volunteers to take charge of the tree sapling giveaway at the Arbor Day event and Ms. Wetzig volunteered. This activity involves organizing the distribution of saplings to attendees, ensuring that the process runs smoothly and efficiently. The sapling giveaway aims to promote tree planting and provide the community an opportunity to participate directly in conservation efforts.

A key task associated with the giveaway is coordinating with local nurseries or suppliers to procure the saplings. This includes determining the types of saplings to be distributed, ensuring they align with the event's educational goals and ecological preferences. The giveaway lead will also be responsible for managing a team of volunteers who will assist in distributing the saplings during the event. The goal is to engage more community members and foster an interest in environmental stewardship.

Additionally, Mr. Varga encouraged members to consider the logistical aspects of the giveaway, such as setup and signage, to ensure that participants know where to go for their saplings. This part of the event is essential in encouraging attendees to plant trees in their communities, thus extending the impact of the Arbor Day celebration beyond the day of the event.

4. Demonstrations (including a possible rain barrel and bike repair station): Mr. Varga discussed the inclusion of demonstrations in the Arbor Day event, specifically mentioning a possible rain barrel demonstration as part of the activities. He indicated that they were uncertain if the rain barrel demonstration would be available this year, as those who typically coordinate it had not been contacted yet. However, he highlighted that the bike repair station, provided through a grant, is expected to be part of the demonstrations. Ms. Johnson expressed her willingness to take on the task of coordinating the demonstrations if she could obtain contact information for those involved in the past. This would involve reaching out to previous demonstrators and confirming their participation, allowing them to showcase their skills or products to educate attendees about the environmental benefits associated with these tools. The demonstrations aim to engage attendees by providing practical insights and are an opportunity to promote sustainability practices through hands-on learning experiences.
5. Food and Beverages (to be supplied by Big Top Brew House): Big Top Brew House (800 Center Rd., Avon) has graciously agreed to supply the food and beverages for the Arbor Day event. This arrangement provides an excellent opportunity to ensure that attendees can enjoy refreshments as part of the celebration. The brewery's involvement in supplying both the food and beer highlights their commitment to supporting local community events.
6. Entertainment including possible performances by the Avon High School Jazz Band and Choir: Entertainment for the Arbor Day event is set to include engaging performances that enhance the celebratory atmosphere. Mr. Smith expressed the need for additional help with the entertainment segment, particularly from Ms. Englemann, who had previously assisted with face painting activities. He plans to reach out on August 1st to Eric Bowman, the Avon High School Jazz Band Director, and Michael Bridgewater, the Choir Director, to discuss their potential involvement in this year's event. Mr. Smith hopes to secure performances from both the Jazz Band and Choir, noting that in previous years they have successfully participated despite scheduling overlaps with Homecoming Day.

Recognizing the possibility of overlapping events, such as the school's Homecoming and cross-country meets, Olivia Pajak, a student member, pointed out potential scheduling conflicts, but remained hopeful that morning performances could be accommodated. Mr. Smith was optimistic

and recalled that in past years, students were able to perform in the morning and still participate in other school commitments. By engaging these talented youth musicians, the Commission aims to foster a deeper connection with the local community, showcasing the talents of Avon's students and maximizing participation in this important community event.

Ms. Berges suggested foregoing face painting in favor of temporary tattoos or spray-on decals, which are quicker and more efficient. She noted that during the previous year's event, there was trouble finding someone to do face painting, leading them to opt for temporary tattoos instead. These tattoos, she remarked, were applied more quickly and helped avoid long lines, thus enhancing the flow of the event. Olivia Pajak shared that at this year's Eagle Run event in May, larger spray-on decals were used, which were particularly popular with attendees. She suggested exploring this option for the upcoming Arbor Day event as well, highlighting the positive feedback and efficiency provided by the spray-on decals.

Ms. Berges volunteered to coordinate vendors for the Arbor Day event, highlighting potential participants such as the Lorain County Conservation District and Lorain County Metro Parks. She noted that establishing contact with the Lorain County Conservation District could facilitate their involvement in the event, possibly having a table with information for attendees. Ms. Berges expressed the importance of reaching out to these organizations early to ensure their participation, as previous attempts to involve the Lorain County Metro Parks were unsuccessful due to delayed outreach. Her role would involve setting up a separate category for vendors to ensure a more organized approach. By coordinating these efforts, Ms. Berges aims to enhance the educational and interactive aspects of the event, providing attendees with valuable resources and expanding community involvement.

FINAL WRAP-UP REPORT OF THE 2025 TREE CITY USA AWARDS EVENT Ms. Wetzig

Ms. Wetzig reported on the final wrap-up meeting for the Tree City USA Awards event. She mentioned that thank you notes were sent out and that the event was generally considered a success. There was one complaint about the beverages' temperature, as the cold water was not as cool as expected. However, this issue was addressed promptly. Some feedback indicated that the placement of the water containers may have been part of the problem. Additionally, Mr. Varga addressed a concern from attendees regarding Willoway Nursery's presentation. It was noted that some attendees felt that the nursery's representatives seemed to be trying to sell their products. Mr. Varga clarified that the presentation was intended to inform attendees about the availability of new hybrid trees, focusing on educating the audience about innovative cultivars rather than sales. He explained that the idea was to ensure attendees understood where these new hybrids, resistant to disease and insects, could be sourced, which enhances the educational aspect of the event.

Ms. Berges shared positive feedback from the Mayor, who was very happy with the Tree City USA event, noting that it made Avon proud. Additionally, a Council Member attended the event and stayed for the entire day. Initially, the Council Member expressed reservations when the first speaker began, wondering if leaving when Representative Manning left would have been the better choice. However, the Council Member quickly became engaged, finding the speaker fascinating and insightful. At a subsequent Council meeting, this Council Member praised the event's content and shared his experiences, encouraging other Council Members to attend future Tree City USA events.

UPDATE ON THE ADDITION OF A SECOND STUDENT MEMBER TO THE TREE COMMISSION Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga confirmed that the addition of a second student member to the Tree Commission had been officially approved through a City Ordinance. This change marks a progressive step for the Commission, allowing it to incorporate fresh perspectives from the student community. He explained that this would enable continuity within the Commission, as one student member would be replaced each year while another continues, maintaining a steady flow of student input and involvement in tree-related initiatives. Mr. Varga also noted that the City of Avon takes pride in being one of the few cities to include student members in its Tree Commission, a point that was well received when both he and Ms. Berges spoke

about the initiative at an urban forestry conference. This approach is meant to foster ongoing participation from the younger generation, ensuring their engagement and contribution to local environmental efforts

CREATION OF AND APPOINTMENT TO THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM ADVISORY GROUP

Mr. Varga

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to create the Traxler Arboretum Advisory Group, and the vote was: Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”; Ms. Johnson, “yes”.

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

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Traxler to appoint the following 9 members to the Traxler Arboretum Advisory Group: Mary Berges, Matt Smith, Tom Smith, John Traxler, Richard Varga, Michael Teichman, Liesa Wetzig, David Woolsey, and Jim Ziemnik, and the vote was: Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”; Ms. Johnson, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”.

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

Mr. Varga initiated the discussion on developing a master plan for the Traxler Arboretum, underscoring its initial stage as the first step toward realizing the project's full potential. He emphasized the necessity of ongoing collaboration among various stakeholders as a key to ensuring the Arboretum's long-term success. The aim is to create a comprehensive blueprint that not only structures the Arboretum project effectively but also secures both financial and community support vital for its realization.

During the meeting, Jim Ziemnik, renowned as a Director of the Lorain County Metro Parks and an experienced landscape architect, was mentioned as already taking active steps with his team to formulate an initial master plan. Mr. Varga elucidated Jim's significant role in the planning phase, leveraging his expertise to set a solid foundation that aligns both community needs and environmental objectives.

Furthermore, Mr. Varga articulated the plan's scope, which includes consulting with various departments and organizations, such as the Garden Club, Recreation Department, and Parks Department. By extending invitations to many individuals and groups, the team aims to nurture a broad-based collaboration that enriches the overall development process through diverse perspectives and expertise. This collective effort seeks to ensure the Arboretum becomes a centerpiece of community pride and engagement.

Mr. Varga further stressed the importance of fostering enthusiasm among potential supporters, including members of the City Council. He highlighted how a well-defined master plan would serve as a compelling communication tool to convey the group's vision, thus helping to secure crucial funding and support from both private and public sectors. Such steps are essential for building a sustainable and engaging public space that addresses the evolving needs and aspirations of the Avon community.

Lastly, Mr. Varga elaborated on the educational potential of the Arboretum, envisioning it as a vibrant hub for initiatives that engage students and local community members. By fostering an inclusive environment, the advisory group seeks to promote learning, creativity, and appreciation for nature. He shared that the location's proximity to educational institutions, particularly the high school, would allow for integrating curricular activities and projects, such as botany classes and environmental science research, directly within the Arboretum setting. This educational integration could feature projects like wood structures created by students, art installations, and other learning activities coordinated with local schools.

Through these efforts, the Arboretum is poised to become not only a dynamic asset for Avon but also a beacon of environmental education and community involvement. Mr. Varga shared that his experience visiting botanical gardens worldwide has inspired several ideas for the Arboretum's development. One key objective is to incorporate educational themes, considering their proximity to the high school, to

engage students in various projects. This initiative could include collaborations with the art department to develop creative designs and structures for plant displays.

Moreover, the project envisions a multitude of interactive and educational components, such as workshops and exhibits, that highlight the importance of native plant species and sustainability. These efforts aim to cultivate an environment where the local community can participate in learning experiences and environmental stewardship. Mr. Varga hopes that by connecting students and educators with the Arboretum, Avon can foster a culture of exploration and discovery, enriching the community's educational landscape and promoting conservation awareness.

The creation of the Arboretum Advisory Group is seen as instrumental in achieving these goals. Mr. Varga emphasized the significance of involving influential figures and entities that can contribute their expertise and resources, ensuring the Arboretum's growth aligns with the community's aspirations. This committee will explore opportunities for grant funding, donations, and partnerships to support the Arboretum's development and maintenance. By advocating for this shared vision, Mr. Varga aspires to cultivate a lasting legacy that serves as a vital educational and ecological resource for generations to come.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges reported on her discussions with the Mayor regarding the need for shade trees in some of the City parks to provide relief for visitors from the sun. She highlighted specific locations where shade trees are required, including Eagle Point Park and Schwartz Road Park, where there are playgrounds and bleachers without protection from the hot sun. She also mentioned the future City Hall, which is currently the Board of Education building, as an area that could benefit from more trees. The Mayor has expressed a willingness to use funds from the Land Disturbance Fee collected from developers to plant larger, more mature shade trees rather than waiting for smaller ones to grow, ensuring shade is provided sooner rather than later. This proactive approach shows the City's commitment to improving green spaces within Avon.

Ms. Johnson updated the Commission on the status of bike racks that were made possible thanks to the Lorain County Public Health Grant. The bike racks have been ordered and received, and she is coordinating with the Streets Department for their installation. This initiative demonstrates the City's dedication to promoting sustainable transportation and bike-friendly infrastructure.

Ms. Pajak expressed her support for the idea of adding shade trees, noting personal experiences with sun exposure at Veterans Park, Eagle Point Park, and the hot conditions they endure during visits there. Her endorsement highlights the importance of addressing these areas to enhance visitor comfort.

Mr. Smith mentioned that he had no additional comments for the meeting.

Mr. Traxler echoed the sentiment about the need for shade trees and brought up the Avon's Dog Park specifically as a location that lacks sufficient tree coverage. He took the opportunity to welcome new Advisory Group members, underscoring the importance of their roles and inviting questions or comments they might have. His input reinforces the collective effort being made to improve Avon's park system.

Ms. Wetzig thanked Ms. Berges for advocating for shade trees in parks, emphasizing that it's an issue she has also considered for some time. She also welcomed the new Advisory Group members and Anne Kish (Assistant Clerk of Council) and she extended her thanks to Barbara Brooks, Clerk of Council, for her contributions, particularly during the Tree City USA event.

Mr. Varga welcomed Anne Kish as the new Assistant Clerk of Council and proceeded to welcome the new members to the Traxler Arboretum Advisory Group.

AUDIENCE:

Lori Thomas, 5414 Deer Path, Sheffield Village, from the Parks Department offered to help with event promotion and vendor information for the Arbor Day event. She suggested utilizing several resources available through the department, including electronic boards located in strategic positions such as in front of the Fire Station, the Post Office, and the Aquatic Center, to reach a broad audience. Additionally, she mentioned the use of a TV at the Aquatic Center and the department's Constant Contact system, which can send out information to thousands of Avon residents. These tools provide multiple avenues through which the Arbor Day event can be publicized, helping to ensure strong community attendance and engagement.

Tess Wearsch, 2808 Creekview Lane, Avon, expressed excitement about the Arboretum Project, noting its potential to foster educational opportunities. She emphasized the importance of integrating geological development information into the educational components of the Arboretum, highlighting how it can provide valuable insights to the community about the natural history of the area. Ms. Wearsch also mentioned her interest in sharing information about the origin of Schwartz Road Park, pointing out that there is a wealth of interesting details she had learned while working with the Natural History Museum. This knowledge was presented in her biology classes and is something she believes residents of Avon would greatly benefit from understanding. Her enthusiasm underscores her commitment to using the Arboretum as a platform for education and community enrichment.

Dave Woolsey, 2238 Garden Drive, Avon, Pastor, Avon Methodist Church, shared his enthusiasm for the City's conservation efforts and applauded the initiative to create natural spaces for people to enjoy. In his remarks, he expressed his personal connection to the community by mentioning his experience as a resident for 18 years and highlighted his practice of walking extensively throughout Avon. Pastor Woolsey emphasized that spaces like the Traxler Arboretum have a significant impact, providing residents with an escape from everyday urban life, and he commended Avon for preserving and nurturing such areas. He articulated the importance of having places where people can connect with nature, noting that these environments offer a sense of tranquility and are crucial for the well-being of the community. Pastor Woolsey's comments reflected his excitement about Avon's direction in conservation and his optimism about future developments in the City's park system.

Mike Teichman, 1920 Pembroke Lane, Avon, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be part of the project and inquired about funding sources for the Arboretum. Mr. Teichman noted the enthusiasm within the City for maintaining green spaces and emphasized the importance of pushing back on development to preserve nature. He wanted to know whether funding for the Arboretum would come from an annual budget or if it would be self-supporting. In response, Ms. Berges explained that there isn't currently anything set aside for the Arboretum and that it's too early to determine overall costs without a master plan. Mr. Varga added that having a master plan would help in approaching potential funders, including those interested in horticulture, to support the project.

Tom Smith, 38457 Detroit Road, Avon, suggested developing a curriculum centered around the Traxler Arboretum, similar to programs he had been involved with at Cascade Park in Elyria. He outlined potential educational opportunities in various subjects using the Arboretum as a focal point. Mr. Tom Smith shared that during his career as a teacher at Northwood Junior High in Elyria, they focused on Cascade Park, which allowed students to engage with local landmarks through tailored curriculum activities. This initiative involved various subjects, where history classes taught about the Native Americans and the Bear Cave, while science classes conducted water quality testing in the river. He emphasized that the Traxler Arboretum could offer Avon students similar immersive learning opportunities by being familiar with their local environment. Given its proximity to the high school, the Arboretum could serve as a multifaceted educational tool, potentially incorporating aspects such as the history of the Traxler property, tree and plant knowledge, and featuring opportunities for environmental science projects like testing water quality in nearby French Creek. Mr. Tom Smith highlighted that such initiatives would not only enrich educational experiences but also foster a deeper community connection.

with the Arboretum, creating a sense of ownership and appreciation for local natural resources among students.

Mr. Traxler expressed gratitude for the City's efforts in purchasing and preserving properties for public use. He emphasized the importance of working together to develop not only the Arboretum but the entire park system in Avon. Mr. Traxler highlighted the responsiveness of the Mayor and City Council in acquiring properties that would benefit the community, underscoring how fortunate Avon is compared to other cities that may not have had the opportunity or resources to secure similar assets. Describing the Arboretum as a chance to engage the wider community, he envisioned it as a catalyst for broader discussions and initiatives focused on green spaces. Mr. Traxler conveyed his optimism about collaborative efforts, noting the importance of generating enthusiasm and support from City Officials, residents, and other stakeholders. He looked forward to seeing a transformation in Avon's Park system, fueled by collective commitment and shared ideals for a greener and more accessible environment.

ADJOURN: 8:15 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. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes".

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

The Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission is
Wednesday, August 13, 2025, at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

PASSED: _____

SIGNED BY: _____
Rick Varga, Chair

ATTEST:

Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council