

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Tuesday, October 29, 2024

The Chairman Rick Varga, called the meeting to order at 3:33 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

Absent: Mary Berges; Megan Engelmann

Others in Attendance: Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council

DISCUSSION OF TREE CITY USA GROWTH AWARDS

Mr. Varga advised he provided a handout (attached) for the growth awards that they are looking to apply for this year. He highlighted a few of the categories he thought would be applicable as well as categories that they may have already accomplished, or they could hopefully accomplish in the future. He and Ms. Berges are spending all day at the Tree Academy on October 30, 2024, with Urban Foresters, Matt Leiden and Stephanie Miller to go over the growth awards. Mr. Varga noted the Urban Foresters are the ones that qualify the growth awards after they are submitted. Mr. Varga stated he does not have experience in this area. He noted that he gave Mary Johnson the login for the application process because they had to first apply for the renewal for the Tree City USA then subsequently, they could proceed to apply for the growth awards. He advised they could not apply for the growth awards without applying for the renewal. They are awaiting login access and Ms. Johnson kindly offered to see what she could do as far as getting access.

Mr. Varga is aware it is going to be a learning process and recommended everyone look over the growth awards handout and consider how it is applicable. He asked how do they qualify for this? Mr. Varga advised he is going to find out what he can from the Urban Foresters. Ms. Johnson asked for the due date and Mr. Varga responded December 1, 2024. Mr. Varga stated they do not have a lot of time to apply for the renewal and then apply for the growth awards. Mr. Varga suggested in the future they are going to have to start evaluating possible growth awards sooner as they move forward throughout the year.

Mr. Boccabella confirmed that a few members reviewed these potential growth awards back in May.

Mr. Boccabella recalled discussing which ones they do not think they could qualify for, the ones they think they could qualify for if they did some work on them, and then there are ones that they felt they could qualify for immediately based on things they are already doing or were going to do in the future. He added a reminder that each of the items has a point value and to qualify for one growth award you need 10 points. Mr. Boccabella stated there was a list of items that they could qualify for with no or limited effort; all they have to do is find additional documentation and determine what they would need to submit for the awards. Ms. Johnson inquired if essentially their goal was to apply for as many growth awards as they could, which is really what you want to do, and further asked if these awards are awarded at the Tree Commission event in May. She further inquired if that was a part of them maintaining their Tree City USA

status? Mr. Varga responded no and advised this is in addition to Tree Commission. The Commission's main focus is to work on the Tree Commission designation with Michelle Morahan of the Service Department to look at all of the qualifications first, then once that is completed, they would apply for it to get the renewal.

Mr. Varga opened the discussion of the growth awards handout, the first category to discuss is A10 -Green Jobs, which states "one or more individuals without formal experience in urban forestry particularly youth, women, minorities or other underserved segments of society are provided internships," etc. Mr. Varga commented this could apply to Ms. Pajak as well. Mr. Varga stated he is not aware if the schools have any programs similar to this and inquired of Ms. Pajak if she is aware of any, for example green jobs that could be similar to urban forestry, such as picking up debris. He stated he is unsure but is trying to find out if its applicable. Mr. Varga mentioned that the green jobs category sounded somewhat vague. Ms. Pajak advised they have the JVS School, but she is not sure, and commented possibly youth education such as something similar to the Save Club including potentially working with the Save Club to do a lesson. She advised the environmental science teacher would be very open to working on something like that such as possibly teaching a lesson about this type of topic with the kids, but overall, she does not know very much about the green jobs part of that category. Ms. Wetzig inquired of Ms. Pajak if they have any outdoor classrooms that she is aware of. Ms. Pajak stated she thinks they may have something at Heritage East but not at the high school as she described it as more of a courtyard.

Mr. Varga noted in his meeting with the Urban Foresters tomorrow, he can indicate that Avon Schools have a Save Club and ask if that relates to the growth awards. He referred to the last page of the handout regarding Education and also noted the Tree Festival category. He added he believes that would certainly be Arbor Day. Mr. Varga advised although he would have to find out to be sure, he felt they had an outdoor classroom when they did the tree planting and care demonstration. Thus, he wondered if that would be applicable to the category of outdoor classrooms. Mr. Traxler inquired what exactly is the definition of an outdoor classroom. He felt that it is great and makes sense for future consideration. Mr. Traxler inquired about an area next to the high school as a potential location. Ms. Wetzig stated they just put an outdoor classroom in at Avon Lake and they had the kids help with spreading the mulch and they also had picnic tables donated by the PTA.

Ms. Pajak stated at the high school there is a courtyard that is attached to the cafeteria and further back there is another courtyard that is not used; however, it has a bunch of broken benches. She advised that the physics class goes out to the courtyard at times. She suggested they could possibly make some improvements and look at replacing the benches so they are not falling apart. She advised that is an area that is occasionally used by the classrooms and that may be something to consider for the Commission.

Mr. Varga stated E20- Arbor Day Events, states that "during the year, the city or non-profit partner conducted an additional Arbor Day event beyond the official city observance at local or secondary schools." Mr. Smith stated he would think the tree planting demonstration the week after Arbor Day would fall under that category since it is an official activity.

Mr. Varga agreed and contemplated how that would overlap with the outdoor classroom. Mr. Smith agreed and stated it could go to either category. Mr. Varga speculated if they could use that for more than one category or how would the Tree City USA organization want to see that presented. Mr. Smith stated it may be a good question to pose to Mr. Leiden and Ms. Miller.

Mr. Varga noted A2- Donation Account Created, notes “a new special account is established throughout during the year for public donations for tree planting and care,” and asked if their Memorial tree planting program falls into that category? Mr. Smith added those are not donations per se, they are paying for the tree and service to have it planted. Mr. Varga stated he thought that could be applicable regarding the Memorial tree or Dedication tree, but asked which one would enhance the urban forestry/canopy in the City.

Mr. Boccabella asked regarding A3, if they completed two grant applications this year? Mr. Varga responded it was last year. Mr. Boccabella noted then they would not qualify. Mr. Varga stated he could inquire and mentioned that they applied last year. Ms. Johnson asked if they could go back to discuss A2- Donation Account Created notes a new special account is established during the year to accept public donations, the question she would ask is when was that established? Does it have to have been established in 2024? Mr. Varga stated the Tree Commission started three years ago, they went back and Mr. Traxler and Mr. Smith picked different species of trees and they made a more extensive list instead of just saying memorial trees they also added a category of dedication trees and celebration trees, so they broadened it for people. Ms. Johnson inquired 2024 or prior? Mr. Varga noted it was prior to 2024. Mr. Varga advised he would have to look further into this tomorrow with the Urban Foresters.

Ms. Wetzig also noted to review and inquire on the wording of the start date and what they are able to do for A6- City Forester. Mr. Varga stated that would be one of the questions, define one-time only. Mr. Varga stated for the one-time categories, he thinks they could skip over those because he will be inquiring on those tomorrow such as defining the parameters.

Ms. Wetzig stated for A11- Tree Worker Safety Program, they would need to ask Mr. Streater regarding that category and asked if they do that as a City. Mr. Varga responded not that he is aware of, he is pretty certain it would not happen because he has worked with the City before and they had very little as far as care or information about personal protection and things of that nature.

Ms. Wetzig asked about A12- Continuing Education, she noted they were doing a class but when does that start? Mr. Varga stated that is part of their class and he has renewed his track qualification this year which is a tree risk assessment qualification and then he and Ms. Berges have been attending the Tree Academy so that category he thinks would be a go.

Mr. Varga advised he highlighted areas in anticipation of the upcoming meeting with the urban foresters and asked if there is anything else within the handout they can go through. An example would be Save Club since he is not sure, and he could inquire about how to utilize that particular aspect. Ms. Johnson asked if A14- Department Accreditation, is that accreditation one they already have or something that gets renewed? Ms. Wetzig asked when does Mr. Varga’s class graduate? Mr. Varga stated October 30, 2024, is the last senior class and then graduation is sometime in November around the 11th. Ms. Wetzig inquired if that would fall under A15- Leadership Training which would be 10 points per course per individual.

Mr. Varga stated one of the items they can skip over is Tree Inventory (B4, B5) because they have not tried to do any of the aspects of those categories. He added there is an app, iTree, which you can go through, download and take pictures and start categorizing the City’s canopy, but that is a lot of work. He added Bay Village hired an outside company to do their tree inventory even though they have an Arborist. He added there is a lot to do under category B which discusses Tree Inventory/Tree Canopy, so that is possibly something they are going to be looking at in the future. For example, should they have students go out to do inventory? Mr. Varga added if they could get someone in the Save Club/Environmental Studies and the

City to work with them and eventually be on the same level as other cities as far as conducting inventory. Ms. Pajak inquired if that is solely taking pictures? Mr. Varga confirmed it would involve taking pictures and identifying a tree to determine if it is healthy or not.

Mr. Varga stated if they skip to category C- Planning the Work – Policies, that is something that he has been working on over the years with the Tree Academy. He advised he will handle C1-Ordinance Clauses, C2- Species List, C3- Risk Management Policy, and C4- Private Tree Protection Ordinance, because that is all about our tree protection and all about our Ordinances that they are still trying to work on. They went through all the Ordinances but is hopeful he will be able to continue working on Ordinances soon. Under Plans, C & Annual Work Plan, Mr. Varga advised he came up with an annual work plan for the City and everything in “C” has to do with what he has been doing thus far.

Mr. Varga advised for Category D- Planting Trees, he inquired of the Commission what is applicable? Tree planting projects also includes the Memorial tree program but asked how do you define that? Mr. Smith inquired about a prior event at Crusher’s Stadium where trees were planted. Mr. Varga responded it was the AT&T tree planting program which was last year. He noted some of his inquiries of Mr. Leiden are going to be regarding how they define those kinds of events. He added with being a new Commission and since they have not applied for it previously, but it notes eligible each year. Mr. Varga stated that could possibly fall under the tree planting at the Crushers Stadium as they already completed it for the community tree nursery.

Ms. Wetzig asked if E2-Departmental Communication would be the Arbor Day planting demonstration because they did have a class the week after Arbor Day. Mr. Varga stated that is his question as they can see a lot of these categories overlap. Ms. Wetzig stated if they have individual’s names, they can do D3- Survival Monitoring for next year and Mr. Varga agreed. Mr. Boccabella stated with D11- Annual Risk Survey is an item Mr. Varga did not have highlighted, but it is one that he marked as something they completed when they reviewed the handout the last time. Mr. Varga confirmed and stated they completed that one as well. Mr. Varga stated he did a tree risk assessment at all the parks to evaluate tree risk education yet noted that that was last year, and he is unsure how to qualify. Mr. Varga inquired of the Commission, what does the Tree USA organization need in regard to risk survey for these growth awards? What would he need to show them as far as this risk survey? He added he has all of the information including pictures; however, this was about 2 years ago and closer to when they first started the Tree Commission.

Mr. Boccabella noted category D16- Public Installations as one category he also marked as something they had completed/eligible for based on their previous review. Mr. Varga advised for that category he is going to ask the Urban Foresters to further define it. He stated the City has a program for picking up debris and recycling which was included in their application for Tree City USA renewal yet in reference to D15 there is a recycling aspect of that, but the City does not have a processing facility.

Ms. Wetzig stated they may be able to do D22- Land Stewardship. Mr. Varga stated he did mark that category as well as D23. He also believed that they had E1- Citizen Tree Board. Mr. Boccabella stated he thinks they marked that as the Traxler property for D25- Openspace Acquisition. Ms. Johnson stated she was wondering about that one with the acquiring of property. Mr. Traxler commented it should be more than 5 points.

[There was some general discussion among the Commission Members regarding which awards were applied for the prior year mentioning the Traxler property and the walkway for the High School by the Stoney Ridge Road area.]

Mr. Varga referred to this process as a partnership and it is why he would have to inquire about official tree plantings, but the only thing presently as far as tree planting is Arbor Day, the Memorial Celebration and Dedication Tree program. Mr. Varga stated they were affiliated with AT&T at Crushers Stadium and AT&T approached the City regarding tree planting.

Mr. Varga referenced E6- New Tree Board Member as being applicable. He added eventually Ms. Pajak, student member, could potentially volunteer for tree care. He added she could look through this handout and see if something interested her as a student. Ms. Pajak suggested for the volunteer tree care, the high school has a Key Club and noted that students may be interested in participating in that area. She noted that she knows they already do some leaf raking in some communities.

Ms. Wetzig inquired if the 10 points is only from specific categories or does everything get added up? Mr. Boccabella advised from his understanding; it does not matter where it comes from. Mr. Varga agreed and stated that was also his understanding. Mr. Varga stated for E12- Community Forestry Report, he completed a report for City Council which included what they are doing as a Tree Commission.

Ms. Johnson stated for E11- Public Tree Care Guide, she referenced the newsletter/website and inquired if there was any new or additional information about the list of appropriated trees and recommended trees, as she wanted to know if its new or has been there. Mr. Varga stated they added tree planting. Ms. Johnson added maybe they could add to it even more since they have expanded this year. Mr. Varga noted he will be sure to take the items like the newsletter, the Memorial Tree pamphlet and other materials to show what they have accomplished thus far. Mr. Varga stated when they did the AT&T tree planting event at Crushers Stadium, they won an award for that through the ISA (International Society of Arboriculture). Ms. Johnson stated she is not familiar with that event. Mr. Varga advised it took place about one year ago in the fall-time. Mr. Smith commented it may have been two years ago.

Ms. Pajak asked if the items under E11 also count towards E13, as the E11 category is one-time only but E13 includes updating information. Mr. Varga stated that was a good point and he will make a note of it.

Ms. Wetzig stated she is trying to figure out what category the tree ring would fall under. Ms. Johnson suggested possibly Education. Ms. Wetzig stated they completed E16. Mr. Varga commented for E10- Citizen Science they could probably do something like that in the future. He noted it mentions urban forestry and that overlaps back to tree inventories. He added with that category, it would include getting citizens involved in tree inventory.

Mr. Varga inquired of the Commission if anyone knows what plant phenology is. Mr. Smith advised it is the recording of dates, times, temperatures, when things bud/bloom like wildflowers, sunflowers etc. He added it seems as though plants and flowers are blooming earlier in the season such as lilacs, which was not the case 20 years ago. He added he believes that would be a good activity for the high school student as well as the Save Club, Leo Club, and an Environmental Science Class. He remarked it is similar to a journal. Ms. Pajak stated for the Avon East Garden Club, this could be something they participate in by observing what happened on this day, etc. Mr. Varga added they also have found a direct correlation between phenology blooming and insect activity. He added at the Ohio State University there is a list that consists of the correlation between plants that bloom and when you should be applying certain pesticides or herbicides. He noted plant phenology is all encompassing as far as activities with plants flowering and leafing in addition to insect activity. Ms. Wetzig inquired if plant phenology falls into one of the categories on the handout or are they looking for where it could apply? Mr. Varga responded it would be under E10-

Citizen Science, such as if they have students do something as far as an activity related to that category. Ms. Johnson suggested this category could possibly be one to consider for next year and Mr. Varga agreed.

Mr. Varga pointed out the last page of the handout and stated he wanted to bring awareness to category E16- Tree Festival, and how that would relate to Arbor Day events. Ms. Wetzig referenced E18- Awards Programs, which states “during the year, community awards or other formal recognition were issued to individuals and supporting organization for tree planting and care projects.” She inquired if that would include the tree ring. Ms. Johnson advised she would look into getting the tree ring applicable to one of the award categories. Mr. Varga added he will also make a note to see where it could possibly be applied.

Mr. Smith inquired if Arbor Day, Arbor Day Celebration, and Arbor Fest are all considered to be the same? He added on the handout they refer to it as the Arbor Day Celebration. Mr. Boccabella commented isn't that a requirement of them maintaining the Tree USA certification? Mr. Smith answered yes. Mr. Boccabella inquired if this would be in addition to and Mr. Smith responded it notes eligible each year and they do their Arbor Day celebration every year and it couldn't hurt to ask. Ms. Johnson added they could complete the application and the worst they could say is no. Mr. Varga added this is why he wanted to focus on this more before he discusses this in the meeting with the Urban Foresters.

Mr. Varga stated they are very fortunate to now have Ms. Pajak a part of the Tree Commission as a lot of these categories may be more applicable as she could help from the student aspect such as volunteering and research certain aspects. Mr. Varga stated he does not know how applicable tree Ordinances would be, but it could be considered. He added hopefully at the next meeting of the Tree Commission on November 13, 2024, they will have an additional discussion about this handout, and he hopes to have additional information provided by the Urban Foresters that they could review.

Ms. Johnson said once they ask for more information, and once they understand how they are asking for the information, Arbor Day may apply for multiple awards and once it is written they can look at other opportunities.

Mr. Varga stated that it is great to have the Urban Foresters, Mr. Leiden and Ms. Miller, to assist them and hopefully tomorrow they can clarify further such as what they can apply for and which categories overlap, and if they can apply for more than one category.

Ms. Wetzig stated she has a note for E23- Youth Education, and referenced the Tree Commission meeting on March 13, 2024, in which Ms. Englemann helped to organize the Girl Scouts attending that meeting.

Mr. Varga believed they have enough information to get started and thinks this is a great start and he appreciated everyone as this helps to give everyone an idea of what they are planning for the future. He added his meeting tomorrow with the urban foresters in addition to hosting the awards ceremony in May of 2025, they want to try to obtain as many awards as they can. He mentioned they may have another meeting in November with Mr. Leiden to go over their plan.

Ms. Wetzig stated they are supposed to have the speaker confirmed and the budget submitted to City Council according to Mr. Leiden's timeline. She did not see another meeting but noted she has a February meeting with Mr. Leiden. Mr. Varga advised he will clarify with Mr. Leiden tomorrow.

ADJOURN: 4:22 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: Mr. Boccabella, "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.

The Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission is Wednesday, November 13, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council