

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, November 12, 2025
At 7:30 p.m.**

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

PRESENT:

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

Others in Attendance: Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2025**

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, October 8, 2025, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, “abstain”; Mr. Boccabella, “yes”; Ms. Englemann, “yes”; Ms. Johnson, “abstain”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”.

The vote was 5 for, 0 against, and 2 abstain and the Chair declared the motion passed.

**REVIEW AND INTERVIEW OF THE STUDENT APPLICANTS FOR CONSIDERATION OF
APPOINTMENT TO THE TREE COMMISSION AS A STUDENT MEMBER**

Mr. Varga

WILLIAM BLAYNEY

William Blayney introduced himself to the Tree Commission by stating his name and address: residing at 35123 Saddle Creek. During his introduction, Mr. Blayney clearly articulated his future aspirations and current endeavors, expressing a profound interest in majoring in evolutionary biology during his college studies. This ambition is driven by his strong beliefs and insights about the challenges facing our world today, particularly the urgency of addressing global issues such as climate change and global warming. Mr. Blayney emphasized the imperative for younger generations to step up and actively pursue solutions to these pressing concerns, recognizing the inadequacy of existing processes and institutions to effectively address environmental challenges.

Mr. Blayney ardently articulated his vision for advocating policy changes and implementing sustainability practices, with a particular focus on Communities like Avon. He stressed the vital role of youth participation in shaping environmental policies and initiatives that will define a sustainable future. His dedication to environmental advocacy was further highlighted by his extensive involvement in leadership roles within his School Community. Mr. Blayney holds positions in four different clubs, illustrating his proactive nature and organizational aptitude. He serves as an officer in a volunteering-based club where students assist with district's fine arts events, as the Vice President of the Math Club, as the founder and leader of the Advanced Placement (AP) Club that supports peers in specialized self-study courses including AP Environmental Science, and as the Treasurer of the Drama Club. These roles underscore his unwavering commitment to serving others and nurturing a sense of Community involvement.

Additionally, Mr. Blayney elaborated on his participation with the Cleveland Zoo Teen Advisory Council, where he collaborates with the zoo's education department to strategize ways to connect meaningfully with teenagers across the area. Despite the restriction from using social media for outreach due to the zoo's guidelines, Mr. Blayney has honed his ability to engage audiences through creative and innovative methods. He reflected on this experience as invaluable in enhancing his skills in advocacy and outreach, not just for the current projects but also for future initiatives.

Addressing concerns regarding scheduling conflicts, particularly between Arbor Day engagements and Homecoming events, Mr. Blayney assured Commission Members of his commitment to prioritize Tree Commission duties, reaffirming that his dedication to environmental responsibilities supersedes other social activities. He described himself as a "go-getter," dedicated to putting full effort into all his commitments, demonstrating unyielding resolve in all his endeavors.

Moreover, Mr. Blayney displayed evident enthusiasm for building Community relationships through environmental advocacy, recognizing the significant role that social media platforms can play in effectively engaging both younger and older demographics. He envisioned utilizing these platforms as potent tools to disseminate sustainability information, promote Community participation, and raise awareness about events like Arbor Day.

Ultimately, Mr. Blayney conveyed his eager desire to gain valuable insights through his involvement with the Tree Commission. His passion lies especially in understanding the intricate link between daily local interactions and broader environmental patterns. He is committed to learning how Community-centered development practices can affect the environment, thereby integrating sustainability measures into the societal structure at large. Mr. Blayney's forward-thinking approach and readiness to contribute meaningfully align harmoniously with the Tree Commission's mission to advance sustainable urban forestry practices and conservation education. His aspirations establish him as a promising candidate for promoting and fostering sustainable change within Avon, driven by his ambition to make a tangible impact on his Community's environmental future.

KEIRA KNUTH

Keira Knuth, 2298 Conrad Street, introduced herself to the Tree Commission, immediately drawing attention to her profound interest in pursuing pre-law studies. She expressed that serving on the Commission would provide invaluable decision-making experience vital for her future career. Ms. Knuth's journey into environmental consciousness began at a very young age. She recounted her early experience of watching a documentary on animal cruelty at age six, a moment that profoundly impacted her views on animal rights and the environment. This pivotal experience led her to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, a choice deeply rooted in her commitment to her values concerning animal welfare and environmental protection.

Throughout her dialogue with the Commission, Ms. Knuth highlighted several key environmental concerns arising from Avon's ongoing development. She passionately spoke about the detrimental impacts such as heightened carbon dioxide emissions and significant tree canopy loss, which are critical to maintaining the environmental fabric of the region. Ms. Knuth's expression of these concerns demonstrated her understanding of the intricate link between urban development and ecological degradation and her aspiration to drive positive changes through active engagement with the Commission.

Exploration into Ms. Knuth's extracurricular interests revealed her active participation in both the Leo Club and the Animal Club. She described how the Animal Club aims to disseminate awareness about animal welfare among students by organizing meetings with guest speakers, including veterinarians and shelter workers, to provide expert insights into the field of animal care and ethics. These activities allowed Ms. Knuth to not only further her knowledge but also advocate passionately for animal rights, reflecting her proactive approach towards fostering a better-informed Community within her School.

Ms. Knuth illuminated her academic pursuits, particularly through her Advanced Placement (AP) Seminar class, as avenues that have broadened her analytical skills and understanding of societal and environmental issues. In this challenging academic setting, she engages in extensive research on diverse and meaningful topics. Currently, she is delving into a project on biohacking, examining its potential relationship with animal manipulation, analyzing the broader ecosystem repercussions. Her active engagement in such thought-provoking subjects underscores her analytical prowess and motivation to understand and address the complex dynamics between human endeavors and environmental health.

Anticipating potential scheduling conflicts between her Tree Commission responsibilities and social gatherings, such as Arbor Day and the Homecoming event, Ms. Knuth assured the Commission of her unwavering dedication to prioritize her duties with the Tree Commission. Her discernment of fundamental priorities reflects maturity and a genuine dedication to both her personal and the Commission's objectives.

In her dialogue with Commission Members, Ms. Knuth raised an insightful inquiry regarding the decision-making criteria used for determining tree planting locations and species selection. She received comprehensive insights from Mr. Varga, who explained the City's Land Disturbance Ordinance. This Ordinance plays a crucial role by levying fees for land disturbances that subsequently fund strategic tree planting endeavors across the City. The Commission's recent achievements include the successful plantation of 24 trees in various City Parks, reflecting a concerted effort to enhance the local tree canopy.

Mr. Varga further expounded on their adherence to a strategic tree diversity formula—20-30-20—to prevent monoculture pitfalls and safeguard the region from specific threats, like the invasive Bradford Pears or vulnerabilities associated with the Emerald Ash Borer. This meticulous planning underscores the Commission's commitment to promoting a sustainable and biologically diverse urban landscape.

Ms. Knuth's interactions throughout the meeting highlighted her earnest interest in understanding and influencing the pivotal decision-making paradigms essential for sustainable environmental change. Her academic pursuits, combined with her proactive Community engagement, underscore her capability and potential to meaningfully contribute to the Commission's objectives. Her visionary approach aligns seamlessly with the Tree Commission's mission to foster sustainable urban forestry practices and conservation education in Avon. Her contribution could significantly aid the Commission in advancing its goals, making her an exemplary candidate with the potential to champion meaningful environmental initiatives.

COLLIN O'DONNELL

Collin O'Donnell, 36550 Mills Road, introduced himself to the Tree Commission by sharing a captivating story about his early fascination with nature. As a child of five, a visit to Multnomah Falls in Oregon left an indelible mark on him. He described this experience as a pivotal moment that ignited his deep appreciation for the natural world, an interest which only grew as he started noticing and cherishing the subtle, often hidden, natural landscapes within Ohio upon his return. This early exposure to nature's grandeur sparked a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship that he now channels through various activities at Avon High School.

During the interview, Commission Members curious about his involvement with the SAVE Club, an environmental advocacy group at his School, learned of Mr. O'Donnell's active participation in initiatives such as recycling, litter cleanups, and the education of fellow students about pressing environmental issues. Mr. O'Donnell emphasized his dedication to these efforts and expressed a broader aspiration: to attend Cornell University where he hopes to immerse himself in the study of environmental and earth sciences. His ultimate goal is to forge a career with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources,

specifically within their Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. There, Mr. O'Donnell intends to engage deeply in conservation projects aimed at protecting the State's valuable natural assets.

Mr. O'Donnell's environmental passion also manifests through his commitment to addressing practical sustainability challenges within his School Community. He voiced an ambitious plan to initiate a food composting program at Avon High School, underlining the potential of this initiative to significantly reduce food waste generated during lunch periods. His proposal demonstrates not just an innovative approach but a proactive stance in tackling sustainability issues that directly impact his peer environment.

Adding another dimension to his deep connection with nature, Mr. O'Donnell spoke of his love for photography. This personal hobby, he explained, provides another avenue through which he engages with the environment. He is particularly drawn to photographing waterfalls, which he sees as the most dynamic and vibrant aspects of nature. This pastime has led him to explore and capture stunning landscapes at local hiking sites such as French Creek and the Henry Church Rock area in Chagrin, allowing him to marry artistic pursuit with his appreciation for the outdoors.

In discussing his personal attributes, Mr. O'Donnell described himself as a determined and motivated individual. He noted his willingness to make sacrifices to meet his goals and shared that despite not being involved in numerous clubs, his ample free time is devoted to the environmental causes he ardently supports. This strong determination, coupled with his availability, underlines his readiness and capability to contribute significantly to the Tree Commission's endeavors.

In his dialogue with the Commission, Mr. O'Donnell didn't shy away from asking insightful questions about ongoing projects, reflecting not only his keen interest but also his proactive mindset in figuring out how he can assist effectively if selected. The Commission Members welcomed his inquiries and assured him, along with other applicants, of their openness to engaging interested students, encouraging their attendance at future meetings and involvement in Tree Commission activities, regardless of the selection outcomes. This receptiveness signifies the Commission's broader commitment to fostering an inclusive environment that nurtures environmental advocacy among youth, a goal Mr. O'Donnell is particularly aligned with and eager to support. His eagerness to be involved in these initiatives highlights his readiness to be an active participant in promoting sustainable practices and advocating for the environment within Avon.

DISCUSSION OF THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga distributed bullet points and ideas for the Traxler Arboretum. He reported that the next steps include a joint meeting with Mayor Jensen and Mr. Cummins, the City Engineer, to assess the optimal site for introducing an activity center in the Arboretum area. They will consider the engineering requirements, including the availability and integration of utilities like water and heat essential for the facility.

Additionally, Mr. Varga highlighted that Gayle Manning, a State Representative from Ohio, is actively engaged in securing a grant for the Traxler Arboretum. This grant could potentially accelerate the project's development by providing necessary funds. Once they obtain information about the grant and consider the engineering aspects, it will pave the way for them to delve into other items on their predetermined list, which encapsulates a variety of potential improvements and initiatives surrounding the Arboretum project.

Mr. Varga further inspired the Commission Members to focus on specific areas they are passionate about, encouraging involvement in spheres like social media, donation drives, or scholarship programs aimed at enhancing Community engagement and involvement. In this context, he mentioned Paula Pitasky, the City's Marketing and Communications Consultant, potential role in assisting with sponsorships targeting the development of the visitor center or the establishment of diverse garden areas within the Arboretum.

Mr. Smith contributed additional ideas, suggesting a strategic placement of directional signs at pivotal locations throughout Avon. The proposed locations include the corner of Hayes Street and Detroit Road, at the intersection of Hayes Street and Centennial Avenue, and on Centennial Avenue directing towards the Arboretum's parking lot. This measure aims to significantly boost public awareness and facilitate access. Furthermore, he proposed the creation of a pathway that would link the east side of Avon High School directly to the Arboretum, making it convenient for students to access the site and participate in environmental activities.

Further discussions within the Commission encompassed plans to pave some walkways to enhance accessibility and user-friendliness within the Arboretum. The Commission Members also noted the Mayor's commitment to mobilize the Streets Department over the winter to undertake cleanup operations in the Arboretum area, aiming to prepare the space for future developments and public use enhancements.

The proposed initiatives underscore a comprehensive approach towards developing the Traxler Arboretum as a hub of educational and recreational activities, facilitating a central place for Community engagement while prioritizing environmental sustainability and awareness.

DISCUSSION OF A TREE COMMISSION NEWSLETTER FOR 2026

Ms. Berges

Ms. Berges reviewed the history of the Tree Commission newsletter, noting that editions were published in Spring 2023 and Summer 2024, but none in 2025. The Commission had been approached by the City to consider producing a newsletter for Spring 2026, providing an opportunity to engage the Community with recent developments and future plans.

Commission Members expressed strong support for the initiative, highlighting the importance of keeping residents informed about ongoing projects, particularly the Traxler Arboretum and increased student involvement. They envisioned the newsletter as a crucial tool to disseminate updates on pathways, access points, and other features of the Arboretum, especially since residents had raised numerous questions at a recent gathering as mentioned by Ms. Johnson. The newsletter could serve not just as a medium to provide information but as a platform to incite Community interest and participation in the Commission's endeavors.

Ms. Johnson commented that the Commission had accomplished enough in the past year, marking significant progress, and also set ambitious goals for the coming year, providing ample content for a robust newsletter. As the Commission reiterated their commitment to maintaining transparency and openness, they believed that sharing these updates with the Community would enhance public trust and engagement.

Ms. Englemann, however, raised a point for consideration, suggesting that the Commission explore more environmentally friendly communication channels, such as social media, either alongside or as an alternative to a printed newsletter. She highlighted the growing need to align their outreach efforts with the Commission's overarching commitment to environmental sustainability.

In response, Mr. Varga acknowledged the importance of incorporating digital strategies, noting that social media was already embedded in the plans for promoting the Traxler Arboretum. The Commission recognized the potential of social media platforms to reach a wider audience, especially younger residents who might prefer digital communication methods. This dual approach, combining traditional newsletters with innovative digital outreach, could maximize their impact in fostering an informed and engaged Community.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges distributed information regarding an upcoming Community forum presented by the Bay Village Tree Conservancy, focusing on the integral ecology and human health benefits provided by trees.

This enlightening event is scheduled for the following Wednesday at 6:30 PM. The forum aims to attract Community members who are keen to deepen their understanding of how trees contribute to both ecological balance and public health.

Ms. Berges took a moment to acknowledge Linda Heiden for her invaluable contributions in providing fascinating and informative articles concerning trees and their significance throughout the Cleveland area. These articles have served as an educational resource, enhancing Community awareness about the pivotal role trees play in urban ecosystems.

In addition to sharing this information, Ms. Berges extended heartfelt congratulations to Ms. Pajak on her outstanding achievements with the Cross-Country team. Ms. Pajak's accomplishments have not only brought pride to the Community but also highlight the importance of supporting our youth in their athletic and personal development endeavors.

Furthermore, Ms. Berges issued a crucial reminder to all Commission Members about the necessary protocol regarding purchase orders. She emphasized that purchase orders must be secured prior to making any purchases to ensure financial procedures are efficiently managed and streamlined. This process can be coordinated either through her or Mr. Varga, helping maintain the Commission's operational integrity and facilitating smoother transactions within the Finance Department.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann had no comments.

Ms. Johnson reported on two significant projects currently underway. First, she updated the Commission on the application for the Growth Award as part of Tree City USA, which is due in December. Ms. Johnson is nearing completion and intends to submit the application within the next few days. This award is crucial as it aligns with the Commission's continued efforts to enhance Avon's status as a Tree City USA by promoting urban forestry initiatives.

Secondly, she detailed a follow-up report that is required by Lorain County Public Health concerning a grant they had been awarded in January. This grant enabled the City to purchase several bike racks and a bike repair stand, which have been successfully installed by the Streets Department. Ms. Johnson highlighted that the utilization of these funds has encouraged outdoor activity and facilitated Community engagement in bike-friendly initiatives.

Moreover, Ms. Johnson informed the Commission that there were remaining funds from the grant. After consulting with Lorain County Public Health, it was agreed that these funds would be directed towards installing a charging station for electric scooters at the pool. This addition aligns with the overarching initiative to improve sustainable transportation options within the City, thus fostering an environmentally friendly Community. The approval from Lorain County Public Health underscores the merit of investing in infrastructure that supports eco-friendly commuting options, thereby contributing positively to Avon's urban ecosystem.

Ms. Pajak. provided an update on the Tree Campus initiative at Avon High School. She reported meeting with Mr. Simon, a club teacher adviser, with plans to work with the club on refurbishing the courtyards at the School to include trees and create spaces for students to enjoy during free periods and lunch. The vision is to enhance these courtyards to be areas where students can connect with nature, which aligns with the Commission's commitment to fostering environmental awareness and engagement within the School Community.

Additionally, Ms. Pajak and Mrs. Buller, Avon High School Principal, are reaching out to Bill Fishleigh, Director of Operations, to discuss bringing more trees to the campus, which ties into the broader initiative to earn the Tree Campus School designation from the Arbor Day Foundation. This designation would not only recognize the School's efforts in integrating urban forestry but also facilitate active student participation in environmental stewardship activities. The aim is to have a functional Arboretum at the School that teachers, like Mr. Porter from the Environmental Science Department, could use as an outdoor classroom, thereby enriching the learning experiences of students through practical engagement with nature.

This meeting with Mr. Fishleigh is scheduled for December, where they intend to finalize plans for funding and executing these developments. The initiative is also exploring ways to involve students in Community tree-planting efforts beyond the School grounds, extending their impact into the wider Avon Community, and creating a lasting legacy of sustainable practices for future generations of students.

Mr. Smith expressed gratitude to Ms. Johnson for her substantial contributions toward the establishment of bike racks and a repair station in the Community. He detailed the ongoing effort of working toward the Tree Campus School designation for Avon High School, emphasizing the collaborative meeting he and Ms. Pajak had with Mrs. Buller in August. Their discussion focused on presenting the concept of developing the School grounds to accommodate more trees, creating an inviting and educational space for students.

Beyond just planting trees at the School, Mr. Smith highlighted a visionary initiative that extends into the broader Avon Community. The long-term goal is to foster an environment where students are actively involved in aiding the public with tree planting and conservation efforts, laying the groundwork for lasting environmental stewardship. He emphasized the importance of instilling a sense of Community responsibility in students, encouraging them to become proactive participants in urban forestry projects. This initiative aims to cultivate both ecological sensitivity and a hands-on understanding of sustainable practices among students, thereby enriching their educational experience and reinforcing the Community's commitment to environmental conservation.

Mr. Traxler had no comments.

Ms. Wetzig had no comments.

Mr. Varga had no comments.

AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to enter into executive session for the purpose of discussing the appointment of a public official, and the vote was: Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Englemann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes".

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

RECONVENE

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

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

NOMINATION AND RECOMMENDATION TO MAYOR JENSEN OF A STUDENT MEMBER TO THE TREE COMMISSION

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Wetzig to recommend Collin O'Donnell to Mayor Jensen for appointment as a student non-voting, non-paid member of the Tree Commission for a term of two years, and the vote was: Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Englemann, "yes".

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

ADJOURN: 8:38 p.m.

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

The vote was 7 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, December 10, 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