

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, December 10, 2025
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Mr. Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Megan Englemann; Mary Johnson; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); 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, NOVEMBER 12, 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, November 12, 2025, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Englemann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

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

UPDATE ON THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga reported on his recent meeting with the Mayor, which took place the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, to discuss the Traxler Arboretum. During this meeting, they reviewed the site to determine the potential location for a visitor center. The discussion highlighted the feasibility of various options, including parking lots and the construction of a bridge over French Creek, which are crucial elements in making the Arboretum more accessible and visitor-friendly. The potential location for the visitor center is strategically chosen where a house once stood, offering a panoramic view across the French Creek. From this spot, a walkway is planned to extend from the parking lot off Stoney Ridge Road, enhancing the visitor experience by providing a clear view of the surrounding landscape.

In detail, Mr. Varga shared that they are eagerly awaiting State funding, which is expected to be appropriated through State Representative Gail Manning specifically for the bridge construction. While the funds are primarily designated for the bridge, any leftover sums are hoped to be used for the next stages of development, such as creating asphalt walkways. Ongoing discussions are in place to clarify the total funds available and ensure informed planning. Mr. Varga emphasized a proactive approach, noting the Streets Department has initiated measuring the walkways to determine pricing and feasibility within the available budget. This demonstrates a commitment to maintaining progress. The Department plans to clear underbrush and dead trees during the winter, given favorable weather conditions, showcasing a commitment to maintaining a clean and safe environment in preparation for enhanced visitor accessibility.

Mr. Varga highlighted the importance of constructing asphalt walkways, necessary for accessibility, particularly benefiting strollers and wheelchairs. Approximately \$20,000 is expected to be collaboratively allocated by the Mayor and Mr. Traxler toward the walkway initiative. In response to queries regarding the suitability of asphalt in an arboretum setting, Mr. Varga assured the committee that many high-end arboreturns adopt asphalt paths for improved accessibility. He cited Schoepfle Arboretum in Birmingham

as an example, noting it is known for its asphalt pathways. Unlike Schoepfle Arboretum, the Traxler Arboretum aims to remain dog-friendly, a significant consideration for local residents and potential visitors who are pet owners.

Further plausible plans include discussions about erecting signage at strategic points, particularly along Detroit Road, Hayes Street, and Centennial Road, to enhance visibility and engagement with the Arboretum. While this measure awaits contingent funding guidance, the Mayor supports the idea, recognizing its potential to increase public awareness.

Mr. Varga's involvement extends beyond planning; he emphasized the project's collaborative nature at Commission meetings. He advocated for increased member participation in Traxler Family Arboretum Advisory Commission sessions, recognizing that diverse perspectives are crucial to the project's success. Involving a broader cross-section of the community is essential to fostering ownership and support, bridging across Avon's different demographic groups. This involvement seeks not only to enhance the infrastructure and aesthetic of the Arboretum but also to interconnect community facets such as school curriculums, park resources, and recreational pathways.

The Commission also discussed incorporating feedback and ideas from Members about the ongoing development and future initiatives. Mr. Varga mentioned that they are considering linking the Arboretum more closely with Avon's educational institutions, specifically the High School. The vision involves constructing a walkway connection directly to the School, facilitating a seamless transition between educational and natural spaces. This plan underscores the intention to incorporate educational opportunities into the Arboretum's design, offering a hands-on learning environment directly linked to Avon's educational curriculum.

The initiative aims to promote environmental awareness and stewardship among students, instilling these values from a young age and fostering long-term community engagement with the space. By partnering with educational institutions, the Arboretum hopes to cultivate a culture of environmental responsibility and awareness within the community. Additionally, the possibility of involving School clubs and local organizations in the maintenance and activities at the Arboretum was suggested, aiming to build a sense of community and shared responsibility for the Arboretum's success.

UPDATE ON AVON HIGH SCHOOL BEING A TREE CAMPUS AND THE SAVE CLUB

Mr. Smith and Ms. Pajak

Ms. Pajak provided a detailed update on the progress toward achieving Tree Campus designation for Avon High School. She mentioned that her last interaction with the SAVE Club was in early November due to conflicting commitments, but she maintained communication with the Club's President and Advisor to organize the next meeting. This meeting is scheduled for December 18th, which she will attend to discuss plans for involving students in planting trees and plants within the School courtyards. This initiative is part of a broader effort to engage the student body in hands-on learning experiences related to environmental stewardship.

Ms. Pajak elaborated that she has been working closely with Club Advisors to formulate a structured plan for the SAVE Club's involvement. They are organizing the details of the students' roles so that she can present a clear plan to the club on December 18th. These activities are scheduled to roll out in early spring when the planting conditions are more favorable, and the students' involvement is expected to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of environmental sustainability practices. Ms. Pajak confirmed that the necessary funding for this project would be sourced directly from the School, ensuring all required materials are obtained in a timely manner.

In an effort to establish stronger community ties and reinforce the connection between the Tree Commission and the student body, Ms. Pajak extended an invitation to the Tree Commission Members to

attend the December 18th meeting at 3:00 PM. This meeting aims to foster collaboration and encourage participation from the Commission in the student-driven initiative, thereby solidifying the relationship between the Tree Commission and the students. Ms. Pajak's outreach illustrates the importance of community involvement and the role of the Commission in supporting student activities aligned with environmental goals.

Regarding the educational requirements integral to the attainment of Tree Campus designation, Ms. Pajak indicated that she planned a meeting with key School Administration figures, including Principal Mrs. Buller and Environmental Science Teacher Mr. Porter. The goal of this meeting is to meticulously review the existing curriculum to ensure it aligns with the stipulated educational criteria for Tree Campus designation. She also intends to update them on the developments concerning the Arboretum, with the intention of integrating these enhancements into their teaching resources, thereby enriching the students' academic experience with practical elements of ecological education.

In response to an inquiry from Ms. Berges regarding application deadlines for the K-12 Tree Campus designation, Ms. Pajak clarified that while there is no strict deadline, the applications are generally processed during the summer. This timeline offers some flexibility but underscores the necessity for timely preparation and submission. Ms. Pajak's role in this project underscores a collaborative approach, drawing on community resources and educational initiatives to foster a more environmentally conscious generation.

Moreover, the hands-on activities relating to the SAVE Club are beginning to take shape, ensuring that the students' practical involvement in sustainability initiatives remains a priority. By facilitating these engagements, she hopes to extend educational opportunities beyond the classroom, allowing students to partake in real-world applications of environmental science. Through these coordinated efforts, Ms. Pajak aims to deepen students' understanding of environmental issues and empower them to act as stewards of their School's ecological projects, thereby embedding these essential values within the School's culture.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges welcomed the newest Commission member, Mr. Collin O'Donnell, and expressed excitement about his involvement with the Tree Commission. During the meeting, Ms. Berges discussed an initiative spearheaded by Roy Larick from a Shade Tree Commission in Euclid, aimed at creating a Northeast Ohio networking group for Tree Commissions. This initiative is designed to gather ideas and foster collaboration among various regional Tree Commissions. She noted that Mr. Larick had organized a virtual meeting on November 20th, which she found to be well-attended by representatives from a broad range of Communities such as Euclid, South Euclid, Shaker, Fairview Park, Berea, Old Brooklyn, Lakewood, and Bay Village. The focus of the meeting was for different Tree Organizations to introduce their work and discuss the unique challenges they are facing in their communities. Ms. Berges highlighted the potential of this networking initiative as a valuable resource for information exchange and solution-sharing. She concluded by offering to share Mr. Larick's contact information with any Commission Members interested in participating in this collaborative effort, emphasizing the importance of staying connected with the larger Tree Commission Community.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann had no comments.

Ms. Johnson reported that she submitted the award application for Tree City USA on November 8th, marking a significant step in the Tree Commission's ongoing initiatives to secure recognition and resources for their projects. Following the submission, on December 4th, she also completed and submitted the evaluation and observation report to Lorain County Public Health, ensuring compliance and transparency in their reporting obligations.

She also attended the November 20th virtual meeting organized as part of an initiative spearheaded by Roy Larick from the Euclid Shade Tree Commission. This meeting, as noted by Ms. Berges, was well-attended by representatives from numerous communities, including Euclid, South Euclid, Shaker, Fairview Park, Berea, Old Brooklyn, Lakewood, Bay Village, and others. The diversity of attendees highlighted a regional interest in fostering collaboration and exchanging ideas for promoting tree stewardship across different communities.

The meeting was structured to allow attendees to introduce their respective organizations' work, share progress, and outline the unique challenges they are facing within their local areas. This engagement offered valuable insights into the vast array of operational environments and strategic approaches being utilized to enhance urban forestry and community involvement in tree-related projects. The structured yet collaborative nature of the meeting underscored the potential of this networking initiative to serve as an important platform for information exchange and solution-sharing, ultimately benefiting the collective efforts of these communities to address environmental challenges effectively.

Mr. O'Donnell shared information about the Lorain County Solid Waste Management District recycling contest, which offers a unique opportunity for schools to engage in sustainable practices by collecting recyclable materials. Specifically, the school in the County that collects the most plastic bags will be awarded an item made from recycled materials, such as a bench, thereby promoting tangible benefits from recycling efforts. To facilitate this, collection centers have been strategically set up at key locations in Avon, including City Hall, the Senior Center, Graffiti Wearhouse, the Library, and Avon High School. These centers are intended to make it convenient for Community Members to participate by depositing their plastic bags, thus fostering widespread involvement.

He underscored the significance of community engagement in these recycling initiatives, noting that every individual's contribution is crucial. By encouraging the population to actively participate in the contest, the initiative not only raises awareness about the importance of recycling in Avon but also serves as a catalyst for instilling long-lasting environmentally conscious habits among residents. The contest is designed not only as a competitive challenge but also as an educational vehicle, bringing to light the positive impacts of recycling on the environment and the community at large.

He also highlighted that the deadline for the contest is December 31, 2025, emphasizing the need for timely collection and participation. Winners will be announced shortly after the contest concludes, providing a concrete timeframe within which participants can expect results. This structured timeline aims to maintain momentum and encourage continued engagement from the community. By involving various segments of Avon, including educational institutions like Avon High School, the initiative seeks to integrate sustainability into the daily lives of residents, promoting a community-wide movement towards more sustainable practices. This contest represents an exciting opportunity for Avon to lead by example in environmental stewardship, encouraging a ripple effect of positive change throughout the region.

Ms. Pajak had no comments.

Mr. Smith had no comments.

Mr. Traxler had no comments.

Ms. Wetzig welcomed Mr. O'Donnell to the Commission and extended holiday wishes to everyone.

Mr. Varga expressed his hopes for a continued proactive engagement from all Members and encouraged them to stay informed and involved in the ongoing projects. He highlighted the importance of collaboration

for the success of initiatives like the Traxler Arboretum and others and wished everyone a joyful holiday season.

Several Members noted they would be absent for the January meeting, raising concerns about whether a quorum would be present.

AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

ADJOURN: 7:52 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission, 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.

The Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission is
Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 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