

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Monday, December 16, 2024

The Chairman Rick Varga, called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M.

PRESENT:

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

ABSENT: Megan Engelmann, Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member)

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Presley, Finance Director; Beth Raicevich, Assistant Finance Director; Clare Harasimchuk, Recreation Coordinator; Susan Beres, Parks and Recreation Clerk II; Matt Leiden, Northeast Ohio Regional Urban Forester; Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council

DISCUSSION OF AVON HOSTING THE TREE CITY USA AWARDS EVENT IN MAY 2025 WITH URBAN FORESTER
MATT LEIDEN Mr. Varga

Matt Leiden, Northeastern Ohio Regional Urban Forester, Kirtland, Ohio, noted that the Avon Tree Commission is hosting the 2025 Tree City USA Awards, which includes all of the communities in his region and encompasses Erie County to the border of Pennsylvania. He added any cities that have the designation of Tree City USA get awarded yearly and they host a large event for all of those cities. He asked since the Avon Tree Commission is hosting this event next year if most of the planning committee was present today and Mr. Varga confirmed.

Mr. Leiden advised the Commission has a binder that they would follow, and it lays out all the important tasks they need to be doing. He inquired where they are at in the process in accordance to the binder and Ms. Wetzig responded six months. Mr. Leiden advised they should be at the point where they are making arrangements for speakers. He inquired what else was listed in the binder at this point of the process and Ms. Wetzig advised proposing to City Council a city budget for expenditures for the program.

Mr. Leiden believes the Tree Commission has already completed that step and sought confirmation. Ms. Berges advised not specifically for this event. Mr. Leiden advised that would be the next step for the Tree Commission.

Mr. Presley asked what kind of expenses is the City going to incur. He stated the individuals that attend are going to pay the City directly, but then the City will have one bill from Tom's Country Place, what else is expected to be paid or what are the obligations of the City other than that?

Mr. Leiden stated typically communities will have the facility booked, the lunch provided and a giveaway but noted that none of these are required but he was going by what has been done in the past. He added the Commission could simply do the rental place if they choose.

Ms. Wetzig stated they also have to consider the event program.

Mr. Leiden noted that is true and advised that typically a booklet is made but it could be simple in design as well. Mr. Leiden stated he always tells the Commissions during these meetings that Northeast Ohio does things a little bit differently whereas in other parts of the state, they do not have a binder like that or at least not as nice as they do here. He advised the Tree Commission has a lot of choices available to them. Ms. Wetzig stated she has Rocky River's budget from last year and they spent \$3,326 yet they had an income of \$11,875. She added this included the registration, vendors, and the silver, gold, and platinum sponsors.

Mr. Leiden stated sponsors will be important and it is usually local businesses and people that want to sponsor an event like this one. He added he has a vendor list and advised he will make a note and send it over to the Commission.

- Event Registration

Mr. Leiden suggested they review how registrations are going to be handled for the Tree City USA event. He advised that Rocky River was able to set up their own registration, but if needed the Tree Commission could also do registrations through the Ohio Independent Arborist Association. Mr. Leiden asked if the Tree Commission has done anything previously regarding event registrations.

Mr. Presley advised what they briefly discussed on another occasion was to include online registration through the City's Recreation Department program. He added they could set up a code for that registration and provide a link directly to the registration page. He added it would be through an advertisement so that when people go online, they can immediately click that link which would then take them to the sign-up page to register for the event.

Mr. Leiden stated that is perfect.

Mr. Presley inquired what did Rocky River charge or what is the general going rate involved with registration?

Ms. Wetzig stated \$35, and Mr. Leiden agreed, but noted that the Commission could adjust that up to \$40 but also recommended not bringing it down too low.

Mr. Presley suggested some Commission Members go to Tom's Country Place to see what can be arranged for a nice luncheon and include the facility. He stated hopefully if it comes in under that \$35 rate per person they can use some of the \$5 per person cost to help offset some of these other expenses. Mr. Presley added he does not think Mayor Jensen or Council would have a problem in helping to subsidize this event for a couple dollars in difference as Mr. Leiden discussed it would potentially cost \$1,500 at most to get this event taken care of. He added he believes Mayor Jensen would prefer something just as nice as the Rocky River event. Mr. Presley suggested looking at some of the landscape companies and reach out to them to see if they would nicely sponsor the back pages of the booklet. Mr. Presley stated he thinks that is very doable and they should continue to work towards that.

Mr. Varga advised that the Commission has been communicating with Willoway Nurseries and stated he has spoken to Tom Demaline several times and their business has expressed excitement and has interest in being part of this event. He added Willoway Nurseries would be one of their biggest sponsors and Willoway Nurseries plans to have a speaker at the event as well. Mr. Varga asked Mr. Leiden how many cities are part of Tree City USA?

Mr. Leiden stated presently there are 55 cities but believes he will be adding four cities this year so 59 would be the final number. He added with each of these cities there is at least one person present to represent their City but there are also cities that send their entire Tree Commission, and advised that can be up to 10 people. Mr. Leiden noted the number they suggest for this event is about 250 attendees, but sometimes they are limited by space and other times it is more open to whoever wants to attend.

Ms. Berges asked if there is a way with how registration is setup that the attendees or those who sign up can get a confirmation back that their registration has been accepted?

Ms. Harasimchuk advised they can get a receipt, and the receipt will say their name and it will list how they have it coded such as "Tree Commission Award Ceremony."

Ms. Wetzig stated it will be held on May 15, 2025, and asked if the date would be listed when registering online.

Ms. Harasimchuk stated to keep in mind it is the Parks Department registration site for all their programs so people will have to find it as it will not be the only item listed on that website, but they can try to make it as clear as possible.

Ms. Johnson asked if it is possible to put a link on the Tree Commission website page that would take them directly to the registration page.

Ms. Harasimchuk advised it would send people to the general registration page, and they would be required to make a login as well if they do not already have one.

Mr. Leiden stated that particular online registration process may be challenging for some populations of people and would be a hurdle that will come up. He inquired if the Tree Commission will only do online registration or would they also be able to do it by check?

Ms. Harasimchuk advised they could handle registration/payments over the phone if needed; however, the login requirement is not something that she can override.

Mr. Presley advised they will work further on the online registration aspect to see what they can do. Mr. Presley suggested if needed they can put a paper registration out there that could be faxed in and followed up with a check or if someone wants to pay by credit card then it would have the phone number they could call to assist. He added Mr. Leiden is correct as to expecting each individual to create a user profile would be a bit cumbersome. Mr. Presley added they can work with Aaron Jenkins, IT- City of Avon, to look at the best method. Mr. Presley advised they will come up with something that could be utilized.

Mr. Leiden stated the worst-case scenario is that he does have an online option that can be used, but there is a 10% fee with each registration; however, it but may be something for the Commission to consider.

Ms. Harasimchuk stated if the Commission has both online and paper registrations payments, to be sure that they can keep track of how many people they can allow for this event.

Mr. Leiden stated they would need to know the capacity at Tom's Country Place.

There was some group discussion regarding the number ranging from 300 to 400 people for accommodations at Tom's Country Place as well as possibly use of the front hall.

Mr. Varga stated when they went over the seating with Tom's Country Place, they were advised there is plenty of room.

Ms. Johnson asked when do people usually start to register? She added she knows that is probably driven by their event communications.

Mr. Leiden advised that information is in the binder and believes it is approximately 2-3 months before the event. He noted this is one of those things he suggests to keep sending out to promote people to register for the event.

Ms. Wetzig asked about starting registration around March 15th and Mr. Leiden confirmed.

- Processing of Payments

Mr. Leiden noted in regard to the online payment part, it has been done in the past where it has only been checks and that makes things a bit more difficult, but noted it is doable.

Ms. Wetzig stated she believes they should do a paper registration through email. She believes they printed a paper registration for Rocky River's Tree City USA's event and have a link on there that says who you would contact to make a credit card payment.

Mr. Leiden stated you would see that a lot of cities end up having to do it in paper form and they go through their Finance Department.

Ms. Wetzig stated she could help keep track of payment registrations too.

Mr. Presley stated he would estimate that right after the first of the year the Commission would send out the first save the date or the first reminder of the Tree City USA event. He added the process is a little cumbersome in getting a purchase order and following up with a check, but if they are, he would think a lot of cities would want to do a check as far as the payment method and it is easier than trying to go through with a credit card and keep the receipts. Mr. Presley inquired as to who would be responsible for the billing and other associated tasks. He added as soon as the first of the year comes, budgets are approved, there is money available, and he asked rhetorically why not go after available funds as quickly as possible from all the other cities, and in the middle of January send out a "Save the Date" reminder, and possibly add information as to where they can get the form online. He added that may encourage them to register immediately, but he does not think they should wait until March 15th. Mr. Presley advised the sooner they get it out there the better it will be as far as their numbers coming in.

Ms. Wetzig stated they sent out "Save the Dates", but noted they could also send out an email.

Mr. Leiden advised he can send an email whenever the Commission wants as well. Mr. Leiden stated if the Commission did not want to get the registration form set up for January, he would be able to assist in getting information out so that the task is done.

Mr. Varga asked if Willoway Nurseries wants to be a sponsor and they want to donate \$500, how does that work? Would they write the City a check?

Mr. Presley advised Willoway Nurseries would write a check to the City noting Tree City USA. He added and they will put the check in the same account as the rest of the receipts for the event so they can match them up with their income statement between registrations and donations. He advised to keep track of all of the receipts. He suggested for the brochure, ensure they mention everyone or include their advertisement whether quarter page, half page, or whole page. He noted advertisements come up with a different cost for each so when the Commission goes out promoting this event they could send it out to

the advertisers to let them decide what size advertisement they want and there is a consistent rate. Mr. Presley noted as far as the artwork is concerned the Commission would need to have some camera-ready artwork to make a brochure for this event.

Mr. Leiden asked if the Commission thought about sponsorships, levels, or how they would handle those? He noted not all the people who are vendors will be sponsors and vice versa. He referenced that Rocky River had gold, silver, and platinum levels in the past. He added however the Tree Commission wants to handle that will work.

Ms. Berges asked if Mr. Presley will set up a separate fund for this event and Mr. Presley advised yes.

Ms. Berges added that a separate fund would help to keep that money separate from everything else.

The discussion revolved around tracking the funds and the City covering any shortfalls in the allotted budget to cover events costs.

Ms. Johnson asked what happens if there is money leftover.

Mr. Presley stated they hope to break even. He added if anyone has any questions for the Finance Department or Ms. Harasmichuk they can reach out by phone or email. Mr. Presley wished the Tree Commission good luck for their event, and stated they will help in any way they can.

ADJOURN: 1:22 p.m.

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Rachel Markovitz, Assistant Clerk of Council