

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, January 12, 2022
At 7:30 P.M.**

The Chairman, Ward 3 Councilman Anthony Moore, called the meeting to order.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Shannon Laurenzi; Greg Mateyka; John Schwartz; Matt Smith; John Traxler; Anthony Moore, Chairman; Certified Arborist Richard Varga (Non-Voting Member)

Law Director – John Gasior; Clerk of Council - Barbara Brooks

CORRESPONDENCE

The Clerk said that she had no correspondence.

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2021

A motion was made by Ms. Berges and seconded by Mr. Smith to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, December 8, 2021, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, “yes”; Ms. Laurenzi, “yes”; Mr. Mateyka, “yes”; Mr. Schwartz, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Mr. Moore, “yes”.

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

GUIDANCE REGARDING AVON BECOMING DESIGNATED AS A TREE CITY USA

Mr. Moore welcomed special guest, Stephanie Miller, Regional Urban Forester, and stated that the Commission was excited to hear what she had to say.

Stephanie Miller, Regional Urban Forester with the Ohio Division of Forestry, stated that in their discussion tonight she would like to help them start to figure out the future of the Tree Commission program and some of the things that they might consider doing to build and strengthen it, and make sure that they have a sustainable program.

Ms. Miller said that she would start first with Tree City USA, and it sounds like they are well on their way to obtaining that designation. Since the Avon Tree Commission was formed right at the end of 2021, their first year of the Tree City USA will be 2022. The urban forester for this region has retired, so she is covering the region until a new person is named. She noted that Ohio is one of the few states in the country that has professional urban foresters that work directly with a community so if they need anything having to do with their legislation, standards, etc. to make sure that they have a strong program, the Division of Forestry has those services to offer to Ohio communities and it does not cost anything. So she encourages them to take advantage of the new urban forester when he or she is hired, and she is available for help in the meantime.

Ms. Miller stated that the Division also has educational opportunities that she hopes they will take advantage of this spring. Every year Tree City USA communities host an awards program and that is a great opportunity to see what everybody else is doing, rub shoulders with other politicians, elected officials, and tree commissioners, and most importantly to celebrate you and your work and to get your award in person. So even though Avon is not a Tree City for 2021, you will probably receive an invitation for that so go if you can. It is probably going to be in May this year. Then also, there is the Tree Commission Academy, and the North Coast Urban Forestry Conference, which is a great conference on more timely topics. Our Tree Commission Academy is the core class for tree commissioners and elected officials to help you get all your things together and get everybody on the same page so that you can figure out what program is going to be best for Avon. That Academy is going to be delayed a little bit because we are waiting on the new urban forester and the position needs to be posted. Once that is up and going make sure that you are on the urban forester's email list and you get notices and go to those events. And again, most importantly, the most valuable thing that we offer is direct assistance to you. We come to you and we help you on your turf. So if you need a second opinion on a tree, or help with a tree risk assessment program, or a sidewalk issue, that is why the urban foresters are there and she hopes that they take advantage of their services.

Ms. Berges asked if the urban forester also helps with grant applications and letting us know what funding sources are out there and Ms. Miller said, yes, and the Division of Forestry has grants every once in awhile and will let you know about them. What is different about their grants is that they are not based on need; they are based on a community's capacity to show that they have a comprehensive urban forestry program. We know that trees are going to live when you have everything in place to make sure that they are cared for properly. And so grants are weighted to communities that have a Tree Commission, a tree ordinance, and a budget, but also are able to show us in that application that they know what they are talking about and it is pretty easy to tell who does not. Another thing that we have found the last couple of grant rounds is that every awarded community has had a Tree Commission Academy graduate. So as soon as the Academy is available, all of you get in there; it will be well worth your time. There is no program like it in the world. It is unique to Ohio; we developed it here. It won an international award its first year out because it was so different. So that would be what she would suggest because when you have that education base and you work with that urban forester, then you will be ready and it shows in the grant application.

Mr. Varga thanked Ms. Miller for coming tonight and said they appreciated it. He asked her to talk about the Tree City USA growth award activity and what activities they should be looking at. Why should we look for those awards or how do those relate to us being more of a Tree City? Ms. Miller said that she wanted to preface that by saying that they do not push Tree City USA in Ohio although we have led the nation in the number of Tree Cities for almost the entirety of the program. We see it as a natural progression for every community that is doing what they should be doing anyway. There are four basic things to be a Tree City: a Tree Commission that is active and meets at least six times a year; a tree ordinance; a \$2.00 per capita investment in your trees somehow; and an Arbor Day celebration, with a proclamation for that. So those are four very basic things that really every community in the whole country should be doing anyway. The growth award is something over and above that and her philosophy always is to identify what you need in your community and do it, and you will have a growth award every single year because everybody needs to do something to improve their program all the time. Do not do something for the sake of getting the growth award but do something for the sake of improving Avon's urban forestry program. It might be updating your tree ordinance, or something as simple as filling a vacancy on the Tree Commission or expanding the Tree Commission. It can be how you use your wood waste – keeping it in town for mulch for example. So there are lots of different things and really if you

are doing your urban forestry program and trying to improve your program you will get a growth award every single year.

Mr. Varga stated that he signed up for a grant writing seminar at Holden Arboretum and that takes place on January 20th. Ms. Miller said that is a really great thing for him to go to. One of the things that they saw with their last round of grants were a lot of grants that were obviously written by grant writers, with no input from the Tree Commissions so they did not get grants because they did not know what they were talking about. So on your grant application, make sure that there is input from the Tree Commission and that they are well invested in it. So Mr. Varga going to that seminar will be really valuable. And we have talked primarily on the grants that we offer but occasionally there are other urban forestry things out there and each urban forester has an email list. So when the new urban forester gets on staff, make sure that you sign up for those emails because that is their primary means of getting grant notices out as well as news, and notices of conferences, etc.

Mr. Schwartz asked what type of grants the Division of Forestry has historically offered and Ms. Miller said that almost all of their grants have been tree planting grants because that is what the agencies that give them money find to be the easiest. However, they are always trying to get funding to do management grants because they all think in the Division of Forestry that that would go a lot further with a lot of communities because many times we have trees that need care before we should be planting new trees. When communities ask her what they can do to help get that going, she tells them to contact their Congress representatives and tell them they want management grants from the Division of Forestry, not all tree-planting grants.

Mr. Moore asked if there was a limit to the number of grants or are there certain grants that we should be going after first? Ms. Miller responded that she would strongly discourage them from their program relying on grants. What we have seen historically is that the strongest urban forestry programs are those that invest from home because then you have a stake in it and what happens. Many times, with the tree planting grants, trees are being planted that then cannot be taken care of and it takes away from grant money for maintenance that is needed on other trees. And so when there are grants, what you really should be doing is saying, do we even need this one? What is our need? And that is where you might begin as a Tree Commission, just to determine what your needs are here in Avon. For instance, you may see that you have a lot of aged trees that need a risk assessment, or see the problem ones that need to come down, or plan a pruning cycle. So you can ask yourselves if a planting grant is a good thing for you right now when you really should be investing your funds in this maintenance. So she encouraged the Commission to identify what their needs are, get those in writing and when they need that extra money to help fulfill and meet their goals, then that is when they go for a grant.

Ms. Miller said, and one of the things that they do a lot of is holding young tree training classes, which is critically important today. What that is, is training young trees so that they have proper architecture going into maturity. That is not something that historically has been done a lot in the United States and we have paid for it. We have a lot of communities in Northwest Ohio that have a lot of giant old silver maples with multiple stems in the crown that are vulnerable to storm damage and with increasing climate change risk and the fluctuation of storms that we know are already coming, we are having a lot more damage to those trees. With young tree training, that is preventable; poor architecture is preventable. So if you are going to plant trees you need to have a plan in place to get in them every couple of years for the first 15 years and do young tree training. So get to one of our free classes and learn how to do it, make sure you have people with good tools where there is time to do it. It does not take much time and it is a wise investment because FEMA does not want to pay for tree failures on trees that were not taken care of and insurance

companies do not want to be paying on that either. We are going to see less and less of insurance companies paying for predictable failures and a predictable failure is a tree that was not trained and has the architecture that is going to cause it to fall apart. So that is an important piece to look into. Learn how to train young trees and only plant what you can care for.

Mr. Gasior said that he wanted to ask Ms. Miller about the \$2.00 per capita requirement, which in the case of the City of Avon with a population of almost 25,000, would be \$50,000. How does that expenditure work over the course of the year? Do we have to exhaust that entire amount that we have appropriated or do we have to maintain that \$50,000 every year. Maybe we spend \$25,000 of it in 2022, then we replenish it to \$50,000 in 2023. How does that whole thing work? Ms. Miller said to be a Tree City USA, you need to have spent at least \$2.00 per capita. Mr. Gasior said so we have to spend it all and Ms. Miller said, yes, you need to show that. Your volunteer time and your staff time is calculated into that so if you have staff that are doing tree work, that goes towards your \$2.00. Mr. Gasior asked about those who serve without compensation, such as the Tree Commission here. Ms. Miller said, right, it still calculates out to about \$25.00 an hour for all their time. So when you are here meeting or going to training, or out inspecting a tree, having field time together, etc., keep track of that because that will go toward it too. So it is not unusual for a community to not have a full \$2.00 per capita budget that they spend every year, but they need to be able to show that they had a \$2.00 per capita investment into their tree program each year. And as far as how you spend that, going back to goals and priorities, focus on the priorities so that if you have a tree risk issue, put as much of that money toward that the first few years and then get those mature trees in shape. Your lowest priority is always tree planting. Mr. Gasior then asked what is the interplay with the grant money that you may receive that is obviously over and above. Ms. Miller said that would all count toward your budget. Mr. Gasior said, so if you got a \$10,000 grant, you have time and effort put into obtaining the grant but you are not actually spending your money anymore, you are spending the grant money. Ms. Miller noted that all of their grants are 50/50; if you have a \$10,000 grant, you are spending \$20,000. Mr. Gasior said, but that total amount of \$20,000 goes toward that \$50,000. Ms. Miller said, yes.

Mr. Smith asked about the City of Avon service of curbside chipping of branches. The City crew is getting paid but does that service count for the \$2.00 per capita? Ms. Miller answered that wood and leaf pickup, wood processing, etc. is maxed at 20% of your total budget. That service is a combination of urban forestry and street maintenance – getting the leaves and branches off the street, etc. so, yes, it would be 20%. Ms. Miller added that that \$2.00 per capita is always the easiest requirement for communities to meet because you are either investing it in preventive work or you are cleaning up the mess from not doing it. Mr. Smith asked if that money would send them to workshops, etc. and Ms. Miller said, yes, so if the City is paying for them to go to a workshop it can go toward that or if they are paying for it out of their own pockets, it can all go toward that because it is an investment in their program.

Mr. Varga said he had a list of expenses to consider and he would give copies of that to everybody. We have insect control, staking, mulching, dead tree removal, stump removal, pruning by City employees, equipment purchases, etc. There is a litany of things that we can use towards that \$50,000. Ms. Miller said, and she may be able to help prioritize that. She said, again, the number 1 priority is always planning, number 2 is risk mitigation, number 3 is young tree training, and number 4 is mature tree pruning on a routine basis. There is very little of Insect and disease spraying management; you should not be fertilizing trees or spraying them for bugs, etc. Always start from the top so you may spend the first couple of years just doing risk mitigation and that is fine; you do not have to plant a single tree to be a Tree City USA. You just need to be investing in what you need and that is where we as urban foresters can help you

identify some of that. You are very fortunate to have a tree risk assessment qualified arborist here in Mr. Varga so you will be able to stretch your dollars a lot more.

Mr. Mateyka asked where Ms. Miller saw Arbor Day as a priority. Arbor Day to him is educating children and even adults and he asked Ms. Miller how Arbor Day was celebrated in other communities. Mr. Miller responded that Arbor Day is whatever you want to make it. The only requirement is that you have a proclamation signed by the Mayor and that you have some kind of a public Arbor Day event. It can be everything from having school children together singing songs, to doing tree games, to planting a tree, to posting banners listing tree benefits, to social media blitzes, to special dedications for work that you are doing. There are some communities that tie Arbor Day into their local festival because they have a built-in audience. So you can make it whatever works for you.

Ms. Miller added that one thing that they have encouraged communities to do is to sponsor some teachers or have their schools sponsor Project Learning Tree so that teachers can incorporate that into their curriculum. She said that it is the finest environmental education program because the teacher can work it into any curriculum they are doing at all levels, so that could be something Avon can do and that could be your Arbor Day.

Ms. Laurenzi thanked Ms. Miller so much for coming out and talking to them. She had quite a drive from Findlay and they really appreciate her coming out here. Ms. Laurenzi then asked if Ms. Miller had any idea of when the new urban forester for our region would begin in that position. Ms. Miller said that the position will not be posted until probably the beginning of February and so she was guessing the soonest they will be starting is April or May but she is covering Lorain County in the meantime.

Mr. Moore also thanked Ms. Miller for coming and talking to them. This is obviously new for all of them except for Mr. Varga and he agrees with Ms. Miller that it is great to have Mr. Varga on the Tree Commission to help them. He said they are excited about Tree City USA and are looking forward to whoever is assigned to them as urban forester and having a good year. Ms. Miller said, yes, the Avon Tree Commission is on their way and she said to let her know if they needed anything.

DISCUSSION OF TREE GRANTS AND PROGRAMS

Mr. Varga stated that he thought that they had covered most of this item already so they do not have to delve into that. As he indicated, he signed up for a grant-writing program at Holden Arboretum so he will correspond with everybody on that and let them know how it went and what is involved.

DISCUSSION OF A "PLANT A TREE" CERTIFICATE

Mr. Varga stated that he had emailed everybody about this idea and just wanted to get some feedback. What are their thoughts about presenting to the community an opportunity to plant a tree as a memorial or to celebrate some event? The name of the person planting the tree would be on the tree and we could give them a certificate.

Ms. Berges noted that the Mayor was here and she said she thought that the Parks Department had something like that in place.

Mayor Jensen said that we do have a program in place at Northgate Park but it has not been promoted so he thought that this may be another thing to partner with the Tree Commission and really promote it.

The City has a newsletter that comes out every three months and an article could be written in there about this tree-planting program and also about Tree City USA and how the City is involved in that. If anybody wants to contact him to let him know, he will see about putting an article in the next newsletter. They are starting to work on it right now so the article could be either in this newsletter or one farther along. He thought that we need to make sure that we include all the activities of the Tree Commission in the newsletters so they go to every resident.

Mr. Moore said when he was thinking about Arbor Day, one thing they could do would be to invite all the folks that have planted trees as memorials, etc. and to recognize them in some way. He wondered if that would be workable for Arbor Day. Mr. Varga said, yes, and he added that it could also be a recognition of some group or a team that won a championship or whatever. That way they can remember that they won this championship and have the certificate and have a plaque on the tree. There are so many areas that we can look at to expand this. Mr. Smith said, and possibly the Tree Commission could use the per capita money to select a citizen or a team, whatever, and pay for a tree and photo, etc.

Ms. Berges said that she thought it was a great idea for the certificate and planting the tree, and she asked if we would charge the resident for the tree; would there be a certain fee? Mr. Varga said, yes, and we could distinguish it where if they want to plant a sapling or a larger tree, we can give some different prices. We will give them the option as long as they want to pay for it.

Ms. Laurenzi asked how they thought the best way was to determine what the needs are in the City. She said that Ms. Miller had said to make up some type of list, kind of following the Division of Forestry's first four most important things. How do we determine what is the best thing on that list, or one or two things to really focus on for 2022?

Mr. Varga stated that he has already gone around to certain parks and started to mark for removal, trees that are definitely dying or already dead so we have already started that particular aspect. We are working on trees right now that could cause a problem so that is first and foremost. These are trees that are in critical condition and might cause some damage to a house, to a walkway, or to somebody in the park, etc. So we have started that process already because as Ms. Miller indicated, that is the first step. We have to look at our larger trees first. Also, he has talked to the Streets Supt. about doing a pruning class with the City and having a couple individuals start learning how to prune properly. Ms. Laurenzi asked, so do we need to put something specific together? Is that something the Tree Commission would do or the City would do or would we get the report on all the parks first and see what trees need some attention and then move on to other public areas? Mr. Varga said, yes, that is what we are doing now; we are working on the park areas. Then for instance, somebody called Mr. Moore about a tree that was in the Metro Parks that was half rotted so we went out and looked at it and this tree was ready to fall over any minute. So that is the other thing we would do.

Mr. Moore said, in an instance like that where a tree is in Avon but it is on the Metro Parks property, we as a Commission are not going to do anything per se as far as that goes, correct? Mr. Varga said, no, and if there is an issue with a certain stand of trees because of disease or if there is an area in a park where we should consider planting trees, before taking any action, he will come back and present all that to the Tree Commission. He has only started this evaluating now so as he goes along, the Commission can give him feedback and they can go from there.

Ms. Laurenzi said so Mr. Varga was saying that he would assess the parks and the trees and then come back to the Commission and give a report and tell them what they might want to do which would help

with the grant planning. Mr. Varga said, no, he would email everybody so they are prepared before a meeting.

Ms. Laurenzi said, so after the parks are assessed and we come up with a plan that we can handle for 2022, or work with a plan that is going to take a couple of years, what are the next areas after parks? Mr. Varga stated that the City has been purchasing a lot of property for parkland so we need to focus on that. Ms. Laurenzi said, so he was saying the focus would be parks and other City property.

Ms. Berges said that Mr. Varga mentioned training some of the Service Dept. employees on pruning trees which she thought was great because as Ms. Miller was talking about the fact that it is not just planting the trees but it is maintaining them, pruning them, and training the young trees, Ms. Berges was wondering if our Service Dept. knew how to do all that. So it sounds like Mr. Varga is taking steps to make sure because the other part of it is if we do this memorial tree planting for example, and we have a lot of people who are enthusiastically buying trees for the City to plant, then they want their trees maintained so that also has an impact on the Service Dept and their employees. So she was glad to hear about the pruning class.

Mr. Smith noted that there is a never-ending problem of trees falling down in all the ditches and creeks, and brush growing up in the ditches, and this all needs to be cleared to combat stormwater runoff and flooding. So that could be another aspect of the Tree Commission.

Ms. Laurenzi asked if they thought all this work is something the City of Avon is going to be able to handle with the Service Dept. or are we going to need to bring in a company to do some or all of it? Mr. Varga said that he was not sure right now, until we get enough information and data. There are other cities that will call in sub-contractors but for right now, it would be easier for us to have a couple people on the City staff that can do some intermediate pruning just to keep things under control.

Mr. Traxler stated that, in regard to the tree lawns in Avon, most of the homes are relatively new and he asked if there was much of a problem with trees that are overgrown. Mr. Varga said, no, but there are situations where they need to be pruned properly. Mr. Traxler asked what Mr. Varga would propose? Would he go to a Homeowners Association about this? Mr. Varga said, yes, he would go to the Homeowners Association and right now he has scheduled meetings with two Associations to talk to them about trees and there again, when he talks to these HOAs, he would bring any questions that he has, back to the Tree Commission. He noted that he was just starting this so he does not know how it is going to go right now but hopefully in another couple months, he will be more acquainted with everything and be able to report to the Commission.

Mr. Moore asked if our Service Dept. is going to be able to handle doing the pruning, etc. with everything they have going on? Even if they get some training, is it something that they will be able to handle? Mayor Jensen said that the knowledge that our employees have right now is with power tools, so it would have to be a whole different type of work. He thought, with the proper training, there would be an ability to do some of it and we might have to have an outside source if it is necessary. Mr. Varga has been working with the Streets Supt. and pruning would go through the Parks Dept. and we do have staff to do some of that. They would have to work with an arborist. There might be that give and take where one year we have to get some outside help and other years we can do some of it ourselves.

MEMBER COMMENTS

There were no further comments from any of the Commission members.

The Chairman, Mr. Moore, stated that the only comment that he had was that he just wanted to make sure they keep in their scope the idea of having pictures of trees on the website, so when residents want to plant a tree, they have an idea of what that tree will look like. He wants to keep that in the forefront under the education.

ADJOURN: 8:26 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Schwartz to adjourn the meeting of the Avon Tree Commission, and the vote was: Ms. Laurenzi, "yes"; Mr. Mateyka, "yes"; Mr. Schwartz, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Moore, "yes"

The vote was 7 for and 0 against. The Chairman declared the motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Transcribed by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council