

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, April 8, 2026
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Mr. Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:48 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Mary Johnson; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member); Matt Smith; John Traxler; Chair, Richard Varga (non-voting Member).

Others in Attendance: Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - Megan Engelmann; Liesa Wetzig; John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2026**

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Traxler to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, March 11, 2026, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes".

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

UPDATE ON ARBOR DAY 2026

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga presented a comprehensive agenda for the upcoming Arbor Day event and reviewed planning progress with Commission Members. He confirmed he would lead the opening ceremony with the Mayor and students, ensuring a strong kickoff to the event. Mr. Smith shared his usual timeline for organizing the music, noting that he typically handles these arrangements in August. He pointed out that the High School student who sang the national anthem at last year's event had expressed her willingness to perform again, though he planned to confirm this commitment through the choir director to ensure all arrangements were formally in place. Mr. Smith also highlighted that the Middle School Jazz band, which had delivered an outstanding performance last year, was anticipated to participate again. However, he mentioned he needed to coordinate with the Jazz Band Director to solidify their involvement and prepare for their set, maintaining the event's vibrant musical tradition and engaging community participation.

For the welcome table, the Commission reviewed inventory that included 43 rain gauges and 61 Avon bags remaining from previous years. Ms. Johnson expressed concern that 61 bags seemed low, noting that people have many bags and sometimes choose not to take them, but given their utility at events, they are still a valuable item to order. The group discussed the importance of ordering additional bags as they are popular giveaway items and serve a dual purpose by also being used for Tree City USA Awards. Ms. Berges provided some background on previous orders, mentioning that 100 bags were initially purchased with 25 left over from the prior Arbor Day, indicating that while there were leftovers, the bags are instrumental to the event's success. Consequently, Mr. Varga and the others considered the need to ensure ample supply, as they realized that 61 might not suffice for the upcoming event activities, which further underscores the need for strategic planning around inventory and community needs.

Regarding promotional activities, Mr. Varga noted uncertainty about Ms. Engelmann's availability to handle advertising, so he proposed assigning the responsibility to other Members of the Commission.

Specifically, he highlighted the need for assistance with disseminating event information at various key locations, including libraries, schools, post offices, and local businesses. Mr. Varga suggested that Mr. O'Donnell could take the lead on distributing promotional materials to these locations, affirming that additional support would be provided if necessary to ensure that the event is adequately advertised across the community. The discussion also included the importance of utilizing both traditional and digital platforms to maximize outreach, touching upon newspapers and social media as viable channels for reaching a broader audience. To further bolster visibility, the Commission decided to strategically deploy yard signs roughly three weeks ahead of the event, ensuring ample public awareness and anticipation leading up to Arbor Day. Mr. Varga emphasized the collaborative nature of this effort, urging everyone to contribute to the advertising push to enhance attendance and community engagement.

For sponsored donations, the group reviewed their standard list of local businesses that have traditionally supported their Arbor Day events. Mr. Varga committed to personally approaching Pickering Hill Farms and X-Golf to request contributions, while Mr. Smith confidently mentioned he would take charge of securing donations from Big Top Brewhouse, a local favorite known for typically providing generous gift cards. Recognizing the importance of broadening their support base, Mr. Varga also planned to reach out to the Wine Room to gauge their interest in participating in this year's event.

Additionally, the Commission opened the floor to suggestions for new potential contributors, encouraging Members to take flyers to local establishments and inquire if they might be interested in joining their community outreach efforts. Members discussed the strategy of personally visiting businesses with these printed materials to provide more visibility and create an engaging pitch that highlights the community impact of their sponsorship. This approach aimed to reinforce community ties and attract new partnerships that would enhance the breadth of support for the event.

Mr. Boccabella volunteered to lead setup activities, showcasing his reliable coordination skills during previous Arbor Day events. His responsibilities will include the organization and arrangement of tents, tables, and chairs, ensuring a smooth setup process for the day's activities. With the support of the City, logistics such as trash receptacle positioning, road blockages, and restroom access will be expertly managed, minimizing disruptions and enhancing event organization. Mr. Boccabella's proactive approach was appreciated, as he often assists with setup even when not explicitly assigned, making him a natural leader for this role.

Mr. Traxler agreed to coordinate the scavenger hunt, and Mr. Varga provided him with materials from a tree seminar that took place in Tennessee. This seminar involved tree identification activities, which could inspire new engagements during the event. Mr. Varga highlighted the necessity for collaboration and expressed enthusiasm about introducing novel elements to the hunting activity. He encouraged Mr. O'Donnell to work alongside Mr. Traxler on developing fresh ideas for the scavenger hunt, suggesting that they could explore unique concepts that promote learning and engagement among participants. Mr. O'Donnell was also prompted to share any innovative thoughts he might have regarding the scavenger hunt activities, potentially drawing from the materials they received. Mr. Varga emphasized the importance of engaging the participants with activities that are both educational and enjoyable, aligning with the broader goal of fostering awareness and appreciation for the environment through interactive experiences.

The Commission discussed food options extensively, with Mr. Varga emphasizing that pizza would be the most practical choice due to Health Department regulations that complicate on-site cooking of hot dogs and hamburgers. Mr. Varga explained that once food preparation and cooking are involved, the Health Department requires compliance with various safety standards, such as maintaining specific temperatures and having immediate access to water, which prove cumbersome to manage. Given these regulatory constraints, the group agreed that pizza was the optimal solution, as it bypasses these complexities and had been well-received in the past. They also noted that last year there was an excess amount of pizza,

which led to donations of the leftover pizza to the Fire Department. This demonstrated the practicality of ordering a manageable amount. Mr. Smith added that the pizza slices were easy to sell by the Rotary Club Members, complementing the event's logistical ease. Thus, the Commission felt confident that this approach resolved past regulatory challenges encountered during previous events and simplified the overall food service management for the upcoming Arbor Day celebration.

For beverages, Mr. Smith reported ongoing negotiations with Heinen's for beer service. The Commission planned to provide juice boxes or pouches for children, which could be purchased at Costco, along with bottled water. They considered the practicality and ease of distributing these items, as juice boxes and small bottled water can be easily handled by children. The group also discussed past experiences, noting that small bottles of water had been effectively used in previous years, stored in large coolers to keep them chilled. They recalled that in the past, water had been sourced from surplus stock at the City Hall, but since that supply wasn't available last year, they had to purchase the water separately.

Additionally, the importance of securing proper purchase orders through the City was emphasized to facilitate these acquisitions smoothly. Mr. Smith mentioned the necessity of acquiring ice, noting a past instance where there was a last-minute run for ice. This highlighted the need for better advance planning to keep beverages cold during the event. The Commission collectively aimed to ensure that these logistical elements would be well-organized to accommodate all attendees comfortably.

Entertainment arrangements for the upcoming Arbor Day event were thoroughly discussed among the Commission Members. Kurt Vigg was confirmed to return with his performance, ensuring continuity of his much-appreciated entertainment from previous years. Additionally, the Middle School Jazz Band, which had garnered positive feedback for their excellent performance last year, was expected to participate once again. Mr. Varga and the Commission greatly valued their involvement, recognizing the Middle School Band's contribution to the event's vibrant atmosphere. The petting zoo, a favorite among attendees, was confirmed as booked, adding an interactive and engaging element to the festivities. Maintaining these entertainment dimensions was seen as pivotal in making the event enjoyable for all ages, encouraging community participation and fostering an educational yet fun environment.

UPDATE ON TREE CANOPY PROJECT

Mr. O'Donnell

Mr. O'Donnell provided a comprehensive update on the tree canopy analysis project, which he completed with Mr. Wible's assistance. The project was an extensive effort aimed at understanding changes in tree coverage over a significant period. Data was meticulously collected for every year from 1995 to 2025, and a detailed analysis was conducted on various land classifications, including roads, bare ground, buildings, open water, grassland, farmland, and most importantly, forests. Mr. O'Donnell explained that their presentation incorporates pie charts depicting forest coverage percentages for key years: 37.5% in 1995, dropping to 25% in 2005, rising slightly to 26.4% in 2015, and reaching 28.9% in 2025.

However, Mr. O'Donnell noted some inconsistencies between the pie chart data, which suggested a gradual recovery, and a trend line graph that depicted a general decline throughout the period. He attributed these discrepancies to limitations within the analysis software they utilized, which struggled with differentiating between dark-colored buildings and dark ground, thereby creating uncertainties in the percentages. To account for these fluctuations, Mr. O'Donnell suggested modifying the presentation to display averages rather than data for specific years, thereby providing a clearer overall trend.

In addition to visual data, the presentation included an economic impact analysis, which quantified the financial losses from reduced tree canopy since 1995. Specifically, the data indicated a loss of \$135,000 worth of stormwater mitigation, \$175,000 worth of air pollution removal, and \$428,000 worth of CO₂ sequestration. Mr. O'Donnell emphasized that this analysis clearly demonstrated the financial and environmental importance of protecting existing trees and preventing their removal.

Mr. Varga lauded the students' meticulous work and mentioned plans for leveraging these findings in a presentation to City Council. The intention was to encourage Council's greater involvement in tree canopy preservation efforts. Council engagement was seen as crucial to the environmental future of the City, given their influential role in policy-making. Mr. Varga's intent was not only to showcase the work done by the students but also to urge City Council action towards sustainable tree preservation initiatives, thereby ensuring a healthier urban ecosystem for the future.

UPDATE ON EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Mr. Varga

In Ms. Engelmann's absence, Mr. Varga reported on the progress of educational outreach planning. As part of their initiative, a meeting was held at the library with Ms. Berges and Ms. Engelmann, where they discussed the development of a self-guided tree walk around the Aquatic Center area. This project is designed to integrate the existing historical walk, Aquatic Center facilities, and Storybook Trail. By identifying and marking trees with the expertise of John Traxler, they aim to create a resourceful and educational experience for the community.

Mr. Varga also elaborated on his discussions with the Avon Garden Club, extending an invitation for collaboration on this project. He intends to present them with materials and inspiration drawn from a similar tree walk he visited while in Beaufort, South Carolina, which effectively used educational plaques and guided maps to engage the public. This tree walk project aims to become a long-standing educational asset within the community, capable of remaining relevant and valuable, even in the absence of the current Tree Commission Members.

Additionally, the Commission discussed the potential for the tree walk to expand its offerings in the future. They see opportunities to host thematic evening wine walks and educational Saturday walks for children during the summer months, fostering a broader community engagement. Mr. Varga emphasized the importance of laying a strong foundation with this tree walk so it can endure as a self-sustaining project, providing long-term educational value. Collaboration with local organizations like the Garden Club is seen as pivotal to enriching the project's resources and ensuring its continuity. The focus is on creating a lasting legacy that educates residents about local trees and the environment, reinforcing community ties to the natural landscape.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges reported that the Tree Commission Newsletter was at the printer after receiving Mayoral approval and should be distributed sometime in May.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann was absent.

Ms. Johnson had no comments.

Mr. O'Donnell had no comments.

Ms. Pajak provided a detailed update on the tree campus project, highlighting some of the challenges she faced while coordinating the courtyard renovation plans with the current branch manager. Initially, the project had proposed the use of planters; however, plans began to pivot towards in-ground installations. This modification, though beneficial for the long-term sustainability of the project, posed an increased challenge due to its invasive nature. Ms. Pajak mentioned that such construction processes would likely not be feasible during the school year because of restrictions related to the safety and presence of students, which prohibit significant construction activity on campus.

To overcome some of these challenges, Ms. Pajak emphasized her next steps, which included reaching out to the previous branch manager, who had been involved in earlier courtyard projects. Her goal was to gain insight and secure an estimate for the costs associated with this new approach. Moreover, Ms. Pajak intended to ensure that the current manager was fully apprised of the proposed changes and approved the modified plan before the project could proceed. This careful strategy was aimed at aligning all stakeholders and effectively managing the project constraints, ensuring a collaborative effort in achieving the project's goals.

Mr. Smith announced the Tree City USA Awards event scheduled for May 14th, emphasizing the importance of immediate registration through Donna Zalesky, the Mayor's Administrative Assistant, to ensure participation. The City has generously offered to cover the registration fees, which includes access to a day filled with enriching activities: breakfast, lunch, and a series of educational speakers focused on tree conservation and urban forestry.

Mr. Smith highlighted the educational value of the event, encouraging all Commission Members to take part, and specifically addressed the Student Members, Mr. O'Donnell and Ms. Pajak. He informed them that attending the awards could offer a valuable learning opportunity, suggesting they consider how they might arrange time away from school to participate. Mr. Smith explained that the event would provide exposure to insightful discussions and networking opportunities with other tree enthusiasts and professionals, potentially inspiring further involvement in their work with the Commission.

Mr. Traxler commented positively on the tree giveaway program, noting that distributing trees beyond the initial 30 at Arbor Day helps increase tree density throughout the City. He suggested the program is an effective way to enhance the urban environment. Mr. Varga agreed and emphasized the importance of this initiative. He connected the giveaway program to their shade tree planting program funded through land disturbance fees, which had earned them recognition awards. Mr. Varga noted that these efforts align with the City's broader environmental goals and contribute to a sustainable urban ecosystem. The shade tree program, which is financed by fees collected for land disturbances, has been instrumental in planting additional trees throughout the City. This initiative is part of the City's commitment to maintaining and expanding their green spaces, demonstrating Avon Tree Commission's dedication to enhancing ecological well-being and providing residents with more green areas. The program's success is evidenced by the awards received, underscoring the community's recognition of their environmental contributions.

Ms. Wetzig was absent.

Mr. Varga reported ongoing communication with the Chagrin Falls Tree Commission, which has engaged students in undertaking comprehensive tree inventories. This initiative exemplifies a practical, hands-on educational approach, allowing students to contribute meaningfully to local environmental efforts while simultaneously gaining valuable experience in ecological studies and data management. Mr. Varga expressed interest in observing their program during the summer. He hopes to bring back insights that could help Avon potentially adopt similar methods or incorporate successful strategies into their tree management plans.

In additional news, Mr. Varga proudly announced that the Commission had received recognition and congratulations of the Gold Leaf Award from Senator Nathan Manning, a testament to the Avon Tree Commission's dedication to community forestry and environmental stewardship. This prestigious award was conferred through Senator Nathan Manning's office as recognition of the Commission's significant contributions to the City's arboricultural practices and commitment to expanding and preserving tree canopies. As a mark of distinction and City pride, Mr. Varga planned to have the award framed and prominently displayed in Avon's new City Hall, serving as an inspiration and reminder of the Commission's achievements and ongoing mission.

AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

ADJOURN: 8:29 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. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "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, May 13, 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