

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission  
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building  
On Wednesday, November 9, 2022  
At 7:30 P.M.**

The Chairman, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Councilman Anthony Moore, called the meeting to order.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Shannon Laurenzi; Matt Smith; John Traxler; Liesa Wetzig; Anthony Moore, Chairman; Certified Arborist Richard Varga (Non-Voting Member)

ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

Ms. Berges asked that four additions be made to the agenda:

1. Avon's Tree Lighting Festival
2. A plaque for the newly planted Christmas Tree
3. Discussion of a newspaper article regarding the debate by Bay Village to impose a fine for cutting down healthy trees
4. The Tree City USA Awards Ceremony

The Chairman stated that the first and second additions could be combined.

A motion was made by Ms. Berges and seconded by Ms. Laurenzi to amend the agenda by adding discussions of the following: Avon's Tree Lighting Festival/ Plaque for Newly Planted Christmas Tree; Newspaper Article Regarding Fines in Bay Village for Cutting Down Healthy Trees; Tree City USA Ceremony. The vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Laurenzi, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Mr. Moore, "yes".

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

TREE LIGHTING FESTIVAL ON DECEMBER 3, 2022/PLAQUE FOR NEWLY PLANTED CHRISTMAS TREE

Ms. Berges said that she brought a poster for the Avon Tree Lighting which is organized by the French Creek Foundation. Ms. Laurenzi had mentioned that we would possibly donate our leftover water from Arbor Day to their Tree Lighting Festival and they were very happy to have us do that. They just had a meeting earlier this week to discuss this event and a plaque was mentioned. At one of our last meetings, Mr. Varga had talked about putting up a plaque with information about the Tree Commission, a list of the Tree Commission members, the fact that we planted the tree on such and such a date, and tie that in to the Tree Lighting Ceremony. Ms. Berges said that she thought that Clint Gault, President of the French Creek Foundation, was thinking about a large plaque like the kind that they have at the History Walk which would also tie into the History Walk behind the tree. So the Tree Commission would have to look at the wording of the plaque and she did not know how soon we could get that done. Ms. Laurenzi said that she had made some suggestions a few weeks ago and had some verbiage she could email out.

Mr. Varga said that from what he understood, Clint Gault wanted to be involved in the plaque also so if we put something together maybe then we could copy him on that. Ms. Berges said, yes, she thought they wanted the French Creek Foundation's name somewhere on the plaque because they do the tree lighting every year and so she thought that they want to be partners in this. Ms. Laurenzi asked if they

are using the tree that we planted for the Christmas Tree Lighting and Ms. Berges said, no, the City is cutting down a larger tree for the tree lighting. Mr. Varga added that the tree that we did plant grows very quickly so it will not be long before it is used for the tree lighting ceremony, and he noted that the City does not want to keep cutting down trees.

Ms. Laurenzi asked if the French Creek Foundation was expecting any participation from the Tree Commission for the Tree Lighting event and Ms. Berges said she thought that if we want to participate, we just need to talk to them and to make sure that there is a table available for us. She is sure that they would be happy to have us there; they just need to plan for it. She thought that participants are expected to be there at 3:00 P.M. to set up so if we want to participate, we would need to agree as a body, that is what we want to do so that we have people there manning the table. Ms. Wetzig asked if we wanted to have a table or if we just wanted to let them know that a few of us are available to volunteer to be there to assist them. Ms. Berges said that she was sure it would be whatever this body wants to do. She thought that they would be appreciative of extra volunteers. So we can let them know what we decide.

Mr. Varga said if we have a table, he would be more than happy to be there with information about the Tree Commission to make everybody aware of it. So many of the people he talked to on Arbor Day really were not aware of our Tree Commission and what we are doing. So he thought we just have to keep promoting the Tree Commission and this would be a perfect opportunity.

Mr. Moore suggested that if we are going to do things where we are trying to promote the Tree Commission, we should see if we could get a banner that we could put on a table, just to keep raising awareness. He said that he would look into this.

#### BAY VILLAGE NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Mr. Varga stated that, with this article, he just wanted to show everybody how Bay Village was trying to recommend that residents could not take down a healthy tree in the City of Bay Village or they would be fined. He just wanted to make everybody aware of what is going on in other cities and he will keep looking for all those articles so in the future we might want to discuss these things further. And healthy trees mean like for developers coming in and just taking down every tree when they do the development and not trying to save some trees if they are savable.

Mr. Moore said that, in his vision, the Tree Commission was not to be an enforcement body but more for education, communication, promotion of trees, and working with our residents. He said that he wants the Commission to work with City Council on ordinances maybe involving the developers and saving our tree canopy as much as we can as they come to develop. Mr. Varga said, yes, that is the whole principle and he agrees with Mr. Moore. He just wanted everybody to be aware of other cities and what path they are taking. We want to look at other cities and formulate our own ideas within our Commission. Since we have a great Commission, he thinks we can formulate something that is really functional.

#### TREE CITY USA AWARDS CEREMONY

Ms. Berges stated that an email from the Urban Forester that talked about the different programs, said that they were still looking for a host for 2023 for the Tree City USA Awards. The email said it does not have to be an expensive event. Rocky River is going to be hosting it for 2024 and then there is nobody for 2025. Ms. Berges said she thought that Mr. Varga had expressed interest in possibly hosting it but is 2023 too soon for our group since we are so new and just getting started?

Mr. Varga said that he, Mr. Moore, and Mr. Smith went to the Awards Ceremony this year and it was pretty elaborate. They had a huge tent and another tent for food and they were serving buffet style lunches and they had another tent with vendors. Also, there were several speakers. Mr. Varga said what he wanted us to try to do was host the Tree Academy in Avon and that was what he was talking to Urban Forester Stephanie Miller about. That is our first step, to try and host a Tree Academy but he thought we should wait until at least 2025 before we do an Awards Ceremony because that is a pretty big event. All the cities from Ohio come to that and it is well attended.

Mr. Moore agreed that we should wait a few years to host an Awards Ceremony. The Arbor Day was the smashing success and we can build upon that.

#### MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2022

A motion was made by Mr. Boccabella and seconded by Ms. Berges to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, October 12, 2022, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Mr. Boccabella, “yes”; Ms. Laurenzi, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”; Mr. Moore, “yes”.

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

#### DISCUSSION OF THE APPLICATION FOR TREE CITY USA DESIGNATION – Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga stated that last Wednesday he and Mr. Smith spent 2-1/2 hours with Michelle Morahan at the Service Dept. finishing up the application. She had all of the items on a spreadsheet and Mr. Varga gave her the tree plan for the City of Avon, and our Arbor Day celebration and the proclamation. He talked to Ms. Morahan again on Monday and she only had to get the signature of the Mayor for the proclamation for the Arbor Day and one more item from the Finance Dept. Once Ms. Morahan has those, she is going to send the application to Urban Forester Stephanie Miller. Mr. Varga said that he will follow up to make sure that Ms. Miller received the application and see if we have anything else to do. So hopefully, this is all going to happen this week.

Mr. Traxler asked what the actual deadline was on the application and Mr. Varga said, December 4<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Traxler then asked, and once it is submitted, what is the normal turnaround time for approval? Mr. Varga said that as long as Ms. Miller gets it and approves it, that is it; it only takes a few days. He is not absolutely positive of how long the turnaround is, but he has all the contact information and will be following up on all of it.

#### WRAP-UP DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST ANNUAL ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION – Ms. Laurenzi

Ms. Laurenzi thanked everyone and said she thought that Arbor Day was a success. She just wanted to go over a couple things and get everyone’s opinion on how things went. We can make some notes on what we learned from this year and what we want to continue to do or to change next year.

Ms. Laurenzi then led discussion on the following items:

1. **The Christmas Tree Dedication** – Ms. Laurenzi said that she just wanted to make sure that we

are going to do a plaque or something like that. That was brought up earlier tonight and she was glad that the French Creek Foundation is interested in doing the same thing so we will get that done.

2. **Tree Saplings** – Ms. Laurenzi said she thought this was a huge success; everybody was very excited about being able to take a tree home and the planting directions were nice and easy to understand. She said that Mr. Traxler did all the work on that. Mr. Traxler agreed that it went really well; people were very receptive. He said that we had more trees than we needed. There were 110 trees and we may have about 40 trees left. Mr. Varga said that he was going to talk to the Mayor to designate areas where we can plant any leftover trees each year so that we can record them and keep track of their growth.

Mr. Moore said that he had a suggestion on an area for planting. When the Metroparks did their new wetlands park at Riegelsberger and Jaycox, some residents who live on Kensington lost a good piece of area and now they have dogs running in their yards from people walking the path. He said he was sure they would be happy to have trees planted on that line in the Metroparks. Ms. Laurenzi added that, yes, along the path there is an area that takes a jog to cross over the creek and it gets really close to the backyards of several of the houses on Kensington; to add some buffer there would be a great idea. Mr. Varga said that he will talk to the Mayor.

Ms. Laurenzi stated that regarding the delivery of the trees to the residents, she felt the containers were good and the distribution went really well. They were a good size and she thought that made a big difference.

3. **Giveaway Bags** - Ms. Laurenzi stated that the giveaway bags that we had at the beginning were a big hit. Next year she would like to do our own Arbor Day bag and maybe the tree could go right in it. Ms. Wetzig said that it is always nice to have a bag to put all the materials in because there were a lot of things that the vendors had also.

4. **The Tree Scavenger Hunt** - Ms. Laurenzi said that she heard great reviews on the scavenger hunt. She thought that it was a huge success and it worked out really well. Ms. Berges said that she thought it went really well, too, and the prizes were great. She just wondered about adding to it next year so the kids who did it this year have something a little extra or different for them. Ms. Wetzig said it is a good idea to change it around but she did not think the kids are going to remember from year to year right away. She said that next year she would like to put displays of leaves, acorns, etc. at the bottom of trees so they can be identified easier.

5. **Arbor Day Agenda** - Ms. Laurenzi asked about the length of time for Arbor Day; how did they think that all flowed? She felt like it was a good amount of time although she felt that it could have ended a little earlier than we had planned. Next year or going forward, we might do the raffle as we did this year – 2 hours in and make it that you have to be present to win. Mr. Moore said it seems like we lost a lot of people after that first hour or hour and a half. Plus, if we do the raffle, it kind of breaks it up a little bit and removes that dead time we had at the end.

Ms. Wetzig stated that she felt as if we should have had a sign because there were a lot of people on the playground that did not even know what we were doing there. Ms. Laurenzi said a banner or something would have helped and everyone agreed.

Mr. Traxler said that, for the scavenger hunt, maybe we could do something a little more complicated to get more kids involved and have the raffles throughout and make it flexible, too. But for the first year, we learned.

Ms. Laurenzi noted that we gave away 30 raffle gifts. She called 15 people today so half of them were not present at Arbor Day to receive their gifts. She just wishes that more people had been there at the time of the raffle.

6. **Food and Drinks** - Ms. Laurenzi said that selling the pizza turned out better than she expected since there were so many changes beforehand. People were buying them and the pricing seemed ok to her. They were only selling whole pizzas so if you wanted just a slice, that was a problem. But the pizza was delicious and she understood why they sold the whole pizzas as it was much easier. So we will have to see next year if they are still interested in doing it. She thought that two food vendors would have been ok or we could have had a stand with hot dogs or something like that.

Ms. Berges asked if we knew how much of the pizza they donated and Mr. Varga said he was going to talk to them about that. They did donate gift certificates. Ms. Laurenzi asked if we had a final total on how much money we raised from the beer and Ms. Wetzig said, \$300. Ms. Laurenzi said that was great because that was donated. She asked if that included the cost of the cups and Ms. Wetzig said, no, and noted that the keg and the tap were donated.

Ms. Laurenzi said that something she thought of for next year was to have a donation table and a sign about what the donation was for; to make a bigger deal about that so that people might throw in a few dollars for our cause.

7. **Music** – Ms. Laurenzi stated that the choir did a great job and the National Anthem was a great way to start off our event. If they are willing to do it again next year, she was going to see if they wanted to sing another song after the National Anthem. They did such a nice job and it was a big deal that they all came out to sing just once. Also, Ms. Laurenzi heard great reviews on Curt Vigg; everybody enjoyed the music so that was a nice addition. She thanked Mr. Smith for arranging for Mr. Vigg to be included in the Arbor Day celebration.

8. **Sponsor Tables** - Ms. Laurenzi said that she thought that the sponsor tables were good. Maybe next year we could have a little bit more space for them. It was definitely good that they were under the tent with the wind situation. She said she thought that next year we need more tent space, maybe three or four tents. If it had been bad weather, there was not a lot of space for people to be. This year we could have used three tents with all that was going on. It seemed all spread out when we were setting it up but then when everybody got there it seemed a little congested. She thought that if we have a space for people to be then they will stay and enjoy the event. She added that she thought that the location and the layout were great.

9. **Suggestions or Comments** - Mr. Moore suggested that for next year, we might look at holding the event earlier. When we get into the end of October or early November, we are just tempting fate. We were so lucky that we had a beautiful day this year but planning it for November next year, he was wondering if we will be so lucky. Maybe having it at the beginning of October is a good idea since we typically have a little better weather then. Mr. Varga said that he was thinking the same thing. He was really nervous about the day possibly being inclement weather this year. We will have to look at the dates but he thought that holding the event earlier is something we should consider just to be on the safe side.

Ms. Berges asked how we would reconcile that with our Arbor Day being declared the first Saturday in November? Mr. Varga said that all we have to do is change the proclamation; we just have to change the date. It was a proclamation originally just to establish Arbor Day for the Tree City USA application, but once now we have it established, to change the date should not be that big of a deal.

Ms. Laurenzi thanked everyone once again; they were a great team and she really appreciates everyone's help and it came together wonderfully.

Ms. Berges stated that she had some comments about communication. She said that she was very happy with the newspaper coverage. The Chronicle gave it a lot of space which she was not expecting and then she just saw today a picture in Westlife of the planting of the Avon tree. So again, she thought the newspapers did a nice job reporting it or at least announcing it. Also, the Fire Dept has a big sign that they use for different things and she would just suggest that she contact them next year and ask that they post Arbor Day on their sign so that everybody going up and down Detroit Road will see it.

Mr. Varga wanted to give recognition to Stephanie Spahr at 3550 Pondview, who donated some saplings. Ms. Berges added that she also wanted to recognize Don Myers; she did not want to leave him out either.

#### MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Moore said that if anyone had any receipts to please give those to Rose Seighman, the Mayor's Assistant. Also, he is going to have the Finance Director come in and talk to us about the formality of allocating funds, receipts, etc. This year the Administration realized that we were just learning the procedures for all of that but for next year there are certain steps that they want us to take.

Mr. Moore thanked everyone and said that Arbor Day was an amazing celebration. He said that he also wanted to apologize again to Ms. Berges for missing her name at the beginning of the event. He still feels bad about that and again, he was sorry. He thanked some of our residents for volunteering; the Engleman family volunteered a tremendous amount of time and he just wanted that to go on the record and thank them. And he thanked the other residents that were helping and apologized for not having their names. And he thanked Ms. Laurenzi again for the tee shirts she ordered for all the Tree Commission members; that was such a good idea. Mr. Traxler stated that the Leos Club did a great job; without them it would not have been as much fun.

Mr. Moore said it was just amazing. So many people came up to him and just said how wonderful it was and what a great time they had and they were kind of surprised at how well it went since our Commission is so new. It was really impressive and everyone should get a pat on the back.

#### AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Rick Schneider, 32370 Schwartz Road, Avon, congratulated everyone on the formation of the Tree Commission. He stated that he was the Zoning Enforcement Officer for the City of Avon for 9-1/2 years and one of the concerns that people would often call him about as the ZEO, was a neighbor planting a shrub, a bush, or a tree too close to the property line. And as the tree or bush matures, it encroaches on the other peoples' property and they would always ask him what they could do. He would tell them that he thought by law they were allowed to trim off anything that encroaches onto their property as long as they did not kill that tree or bush. He thought as people find out that the Tree Commission is in existence,

they will be coming to them with their problems but as Mr. Moore said earlier, this is not an enforcement Commission; it is for education and assistance. But he thought that if the Commission recommends ordinances to the Council or the Mayor, it would have more weight than if an individual did that. He is suggesting that people do the research, find out how big that bush or tree or shrub is going to grow and if it is going to mature at 8 ft. in diameter, then it needs to be planted 8 ft. off the property line so that people do not have this bickering between them. Also, maybe the Commission could look over plans when people apply for a building permit; sometimes they have a landscape drawing and somebody could scan over that and keep people aware of what they are planting and where they can plant.

Mr. Moore stated that the Tree Commission does have some links on the website which would be the scope of education that could speak to that concern, and he has had conversations with Mr. Varga about how the Commission might work with Council. Mr. Moore said he has also had some calls recently about trees that are overhanging and branches that are dropping into the neighbor's yard. He thought that it is a really gray area between what the City can do and what they cannot so that is something for the Commission to work on as we go on. Mr. Schneider noted that the City has only a small tree ordinance which lists invasive trees that are not allowed to be planted in the City of Avon but that is about it. Mr. Varga said that they put together a new ordinance when they established the Tree Commission and they tried to deal with some of those issues. The law was just changed two years ago concerning overhanging trees and if it is proved that the tree was compromised by a neighbor pruning it, then that neighbor is liable, so there is a gray area now as far as the law is concerned with trimming the trees or shrubs.

Mr. Varga said that he worked with the City of Cleveland Heights and they called him in occasionally to look at plans from builders and developers and how they were going to landscape. So if the Mayor wants him to get involved in that now that we have a Tree Commission, Mr. Varga can always bring a plan to the Commission also for their thoughts. And the Law Director could have input also as far as the species and how it grows and whether it is too close to the property line, etc.

#### ADJOURN

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

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

Respectfully submitted by Gail Hayden, Assistant Clerk of Council