

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD

January 8, 2025



The Michigan City Tree Board met in a regular meeting at Alco TV, 301 E 8th St #101, Michigan City, IN 46360, on Wednesday 01/08/25, at 5:30 p.m. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Members Present:

James Mellowitz, Mary Nell Murphy, Laura Henderson, Jen Birchfield, Betsy Elsaesser, Dennis Brittain. Quorum of four satisfied.

Members Absent:

Dominique Edwards, Dr. Vidya Kora

Public Present:

Michael Wolff, City Forester; Phil Graf of Great Lakes Urban Forestry Management; Ian Osborne of Walker St.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Jen moved and Laura seconded approval of the agenda, motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Laura moved and Jen seconded approval of the 12/04/24 meeting with the amendments listed below; motion passed.

- Old Business 8B: After discussion the Board accepted the suggestion that Jim had emailed to the Board prior to the meeting: Paragraph 8B should be amended to add that *the proposed changes to ordinance section 102-34 regarding Tree Board responsibilities and funding, passed unanimously by a vote of the Board for the purpose of submitting them to the City Attorney for comment. The City Forester was invited to email the Board with his thoughts on the proposal.*
 - (Michael noted in discussion with the Mayor that no changes were planned at this time. Jim will follow up with the Mayor.)
- New Business 9B: second to last sentence truncated to: *It was determined to have the discussion later, off-line.*
- New Business 9C: Jim clarified that it was not the Board's intention to give "the Tree Board authority over every aspect of his job." The board agreed to delete this paragraph from the minutes, and encouraged Michael to submit adjustments to the proposed ordinance.
- Treasurer's Report: there was discussion on the \$710.19 amount noted in the #2308 Donation Fund. No adjustments to the minutes requested.

SECRETARY/TREASURE'S REPORT

Laura and Mary Nell have requested a meeting with the Comptroller to clarify both budgets. It was confirmed the \$193 DNR Nursery bill was paid 11/21/24.

ELECTION OF 2025 OFFICERS

The Nominating Committee's slate of Jen Birchfield for President, Jim Mellowitz for Vice-president, Mary Nell Murphy for secretary was seconded by Dennis. Unanimously accepted. The Board presented a proclamation to Laura Henderson as she steps aside after 6+ years of service as Tree Board secretary and also recognized her other environmental work in the community. Jim acknowledged her civic activism as a standard for others to aspire to. A well-deserved round of applause was given to Laura, along with some tokens on the Board's appreciation.

COMMUNICATIONS

Rachel Stenger, DNR Urban Forestry Outreach Coordinator requested info on our annual Earth Day event. Mary Nell provided her details for the 4/26 event at 11 am at the Senior Center.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Public Relations: Mary Nell has posted on the Friends of MC Tree Board Facebook page about the 4/26 Earth Day event, the Arborist Apprentice program and the Arbor Day "Healthy Trees, Healthy Me!" poster contest. Currently have 160 Facebook followers.

Education & Outreach: DNR outreach contact Madeleine Gullion will be able to help us making community contact. Jen noted a new DNR program that will provide a native tree replacement for an invasive tree removed.

CITY FORESTER REPORT

In addition to Michael's written report, he noted that the Arborist Apprentice, Bella Munoz, will start on Monday 1/13/25. This is a 3-year full-time position.

OLD BUSINESS

Proposals to amend city ordinances: Following the discussion during review of the minutes, Jim asked Michael to send the Board the revised ordinance that is now in place.

Update on IRA grant progress and inventory: Michael requested that Phil Graf provide a summary of the tree inventory progress. Phil noted that:

- 12/15 Street tree inventory was completed
- 12/23 City-owned properties tree inventory was completed
- 01/02 Parks inventory has begun; will take a couple more weeks
- Remaining: two cemeteries, two golf courses
- 02/01 Estimated completion date, depending on weather
- Next will be urban mitigation activities
- April procure trees for planting
- Apr-May-Jun plant trees with SCA assistance
- Jul-Aug water and maintenance of trees
- Sep-Oct begin more planting

Communitree: Betsy agreed to complete the Communitree application, due 2/07. Mary Nell moved that the Board support Betsy in the submission of the Communitree application, Jim

seconded this motion.; motion passed. Jen will reach out to her contacts at two of the local elementary schools.

Invoices: Betsy submitted her office supply invoice to the City Comptroller.

NEW BUSINESS

DNR Urban Forestry Outreach Coordinator, Madeleine Gullion. DNR's Rachel Stenger recommended the board contact her on our community engagement strategy.

Outreach presentations: Michael noted he reached out to Nancy Moldenhauer regarding a Zoom presentation to the Green Drinks organization.

COMMENTS

Board: Members of the Board expressed concerns about the Volunteer Contact form, Jen agreed to discuss with Michael at their standing monthly meeting with SCA. They will note suggested adjustments, including marking certain fields that are not required depending on the type of activity (planting on owner's property).

Laura agreed to take minutes at the next meeting since Mary Nell is away in February.

Public: Ian Osborne of Walker St in Michigan City met Phil Graf during the tree inventory and is concerned about heritage trees and other large logs being wood-chipped. He would like to work with the City Forester to obtain some of the wood designated for refuse, and re-use and recycle the wood on projects such as materials for IRA Project signage, benches by city trees, art classes. Michael agreed to continue their conversation.

Michael requested the Board track every person who receives a tree to plant. It was noted that we can request this info, but it will be difficult to record for every recipient of the tree seedlings giveaways. We will continue to have sign-up sheets requesting this info.

Michael noted that there is now a mail slot at the Clerk's office in City Hall for the Tree Board. Jen and Mary Nell will check at least monthly, and asked others who visit City Hall to do the same.

Next Meeting Date

The next regular meeting is scheduled for 2/5/25 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St.

Adjournment

Laura moved and Jen seconded a motion to adjourn, approved.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy