12/2/25

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD
September 3, 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 09/03/25, at 5:30 pm. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Call to Order:
The meeting was called to order by President Jen Birchfield at 5:33 pm.

Roll Call:
Present: Jen Birchfield, Denise Blau, Dennis Brittain, Betsy Elsaesser, Laura Henderson, Harshini Radnayaka. Nancy Moldenhauer (council liaison) and Phil Graf (contract city forester) also present. Quorum of four satisfied.
Absent: Mary Nell Murphy, Dr. Vidya Kora (both are traveling and are excused)
Public present: none

Approval of Agenda:
Betsy requested that items c, d, and e under Old Business be dropped from this agenda due to no new information. Jen agreed and asked if members we be agreeable to time limits on agenda items in the future. There was general agreement in favor of time limits. Laura moved and Betsy seconded that the agenda be adopted with the removal of the 3 items as requested by Betsy. All voted in favor, none opposed.

Approval of Minutes:
Laura moved and Dennis seconded approval of the minutes of the 08/06/25 meeting; motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment
None

Secretary/Treasurer's Report:
Budget performance reports for funds 1101 General Fund and 4500 Grant Fund, and status report for Tree Board donation fund 2304 as provided by Comptroller's office and forwarded to Tree Board members were reviewed. Jen will submit for reimbursement for her purchase of tree watering equipment. Laura moved and Betsy seconded for Jen to receive reimbursement for the $10 she spent on stickers for tabling. The motion was unanimously approved.

Communications:
Laura noted receipt of Jen's reappointment. She also shared 2 emails from Rachel Stenger of DNR announcing opportunities this fall: one announced the Northwest Indiana Big Tree Tour, 3 different tree steward workshops around the state, and the 2025 Community and Urban Forestry Symposium, with details for signing up as well as dates and locations; the other

announced 3 SCA tree plantings, open to volunteers. Members of the board who are interested were invited to ask Laura to forward the emails to them. Betsy requested the forwarded emails. Also from Rachel Stenger of DNR was a request for events for a statewide list of urban forestry related events, By September 5. After brief discussion it was generally decided we had nothing to add to the list as Oktoberfest was over.
Betsy noted she has notified all schools that received plantings of trees this year, that volunteers had watered the trees through the summer and it is now their turn to water the trees weekly until frost.
Laura mentioned a facebook message that encouraged no further planting of silver maple due to roots growing into sewer lines. Betsy suggested we promote use of the new Michigan City website where one can put a request into the website and it will bet to Phil. A flier on the new website will be good to have for October Farmer's Market. Jen is working with the city to design a flier about the grant, and also brought up the questionnaire regarding trees that she and the city have designed, which includes a QR code that leads to the city web site, our Facebook page, and the forester's email. Denise asked for copies for the October Farmer's Market, and Jen will facilitate that.

Committee Reports:

Outreach and Engagement:

Grant Application to NIRPC Communitree: Jen reports that Betsy's application has been approved and the email will go out from NIRPC soon.
Farmer's Market: Denise Blau, Dennis Brittain, and Laura Henderson will be at the season's final farmer's market in Michigan City on October 4.
Arbor Day: no updates

City Forester Report:

Forester reports for the last 2 months were emailed by the forester to tree board members prior to this meeting. Laura commented that she was disturbed to learn that a number of the species for the fall planting are not native trees. She was especially concerned about Lilac Tree which has shown some evidence of being invasive. Phil mentioned that many of the trees we will plant are native, particularly in the spring when many oaks and redbuds will be planted. His primary concern is to plant trees that can withstand the rigors of urban life which has little in common with native life, and to use those trees that can survive and thrive. He reports he has seen no evidence of invasive tendencies with Lilac Trees. Jen asked if it were stipulated in the grant that we plant native trees. Phil said we are planting native trees, but not 100% native trees. Jen emphasized need for compliance with the grant, and Phil will check with Drew Hart. Phil invited further discussion of this issue for future planting lists. This discussion will continue at future meetings.

Update on IRA grant progress and inventory: Jen reported that the community engagement part of the grant is underway, with meetings, events, distribution of surveys and fliers, and maps being printed. Betsy suggested a small item to the Beacher when fall planting dates and areas are known. Dennis suggested also using the power of Facebook to spread the word. Nancy added we should use the Herald-Argus also. Jen mentioned coordinating with the city on publicity. Jen and Phil will work together to produce maps for community engagement.

Old Business:
Mayor's Community Activation Grant: Jen is roughing out our application for this grant, using Phil's idea of tree signage mapping. It will use QR codes to link to information on selected trees in certain locations. Phil and Jen will work out details such as which locations and coordinating with Parks Department. Denise asked for some copies when they are ready for the Visitor Center as she reports many visitors looking for nature related activities.
Order Seedlings from DNR: Betsy volunteered to order on the first day that orders are open, using her credit card and getting reimbursed. There was a lively discussion about which trees to order. Eventually we came up with 100 redbuds, 100 northern white cedar, 100 black gum, and one wildlife packet (10 each of 14 species including 3 oak species and several flowering shrubs or small trees. Betsy will also check if they have any serviceberries (which are not on their list of available trees).
Oktoberfest: We participated and collected about 20 completed surveys. Stickers were very popular. City is preparing a list of upcoming events suitable for our participation.

New Business:
DNR Big Tree tour and Tree Stewards workshop: addressed earlier in Communications
Per City Hall IT's Steve Tyler > *You'll need to send the agendas and minutes to boardagendas@emichigancity.com and boardminutes@emichigancity.com.* Jen will help Laura with this.

Comments--Council Liaisons: Nancy announced Northwest Indiana Green Drinks tomorrow evening on Zoom or Save the Dunes Facebook live, tomorrow evening at 6:30 pm, on recycling, featuring Sacha Gee Burns. These events are saved and posted on Save the Dunes YouTube subscription site.

Comments—Board Members: Jen announced the Trail Creek Watershed Week, where as part of her day job at NIRPC she will staff one of the educational tables. Denise said she could make buttons for us this winter. We will need to know the cost of materials so we can consider this next month.

Next Meeting: October 1, 2025 at 5:30 pm, IBEW building, ALCO

Adjournment: Dennis moved and Denise seconded for adjournment. All voted in favor. Jen adjourned the meeting at 6:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Henderson, acting secretary