



MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD

April 2, 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 04/02/25, at 5:30 p.m.

local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Members Present:

Jen Birchfield, Dominique Edwards, Betsy Elsaesser, Laura Henderson, James Mellowitz, Mary Nell Murphy; Dennis Brittain (6:35). Quorum of four satisfied. City Forester Michael Wolff and Council Liaisons Dr. Vidya Kora and Nancy Moldenhauer also present.

Members Absent:

None

Public Present:

Wendy Vachet, Public Works Director at City Hall.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Betsy moved and Jim seconded approval of the agenda, motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Laura moved and Betsy seconded approval of the March minutes; motion passed.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The City Comptroller noted all bills paid when reports were provided. Betsy noted that we had about \$60 in donations after the Garden Show. Laura will take to City Hall.

COMMUNICATIONS

- The Mayor's office provided the annual proclamation for Arbor Day on 4/26/25
- Jen provided info on plans for DNR's "Big Tree" tour in late August/early September
- Jim will provide a Facebook-friendly article on proper tree planting
- The Friends of MC Tree Board Facebook page now has 170 followers
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COMMITTEE REPORTS

Public Relations:

- Betsy submitted a NIRPC grant for tree planting project at MC elementary schools. It has been accepted and we will receive ten trees. She is in contact with the four elementary schools in town on plantings. Michael asked to be informed of GIS locations, species after plantings in order to keep the tree inventory up to date.

- Betsy noted she has also completed the grant application to NIPSCO for tree planting and hopes to hear back from them soon.
- Green Drinks Zoom presentation by Jen is on 4/3; Tree Board members are encouraged to attend.

Education & Outreach:

- Betsy, Mary Nell and Dennis staffed a table at the 3/29 Garden Show. Lots of interest in tree care; several people expressed interest in volunteering; approximately 65 people interacted with our table.
- Farmers Market: Tree Board will continue our monthly outreach on first Saturdays at the Michigan City farmers market. Tree Board members are encouraged to staff our table.
 - 3-May Earth Day tree giveaway
 - 7-Jun
 - 5-Jul (Indep Day weekend)
 - 2-Aug
 - 6-Sep (Labor Day 9/1)
 - 4-Oct Last Tree Board event

Arbor Day, Tree Give-away: Tree giveaways will be 4/26 Earth Day Extravaganza at MC Senior Center from noon-3 and the first MC farmers market on 5/03 from 8-noon. Mary Nell has labeled the 500 tree tags with the five native species expected from the DNR Nursery. Tree Board members are encouraged to volunteer on 4/26, and to arrive early to place the labels on the trees. Jim, Betsy, Laura and Mary Nell have volunteered to work our table for the 4/26 tree giveaway.

Jen gave a reminder of NIRPC's invasive tree replacement program with Indiana DNR: residents may receive a native tree to replace a removed Callery Pear or Tree of Heaven (or other invasive) by providing before and after photos of the removed invasive. Details on the Friends of MC Tree Board Facebook page.

CITY FORESTER REPORT

- Michael emailed the board his written report, he added that he is working on the Urban Forestry Management Plan and then introduced Wendy Vachet, Public Works Director. She stated she will provide the clarity needed as a liaison for the Tree Board.
- Michael noted the grant is for planting trees mainly on city streets, rights-of-way, parks and cemeteries, but also possibly at the golf course. This will need to be clarified; there was a question about the Parks Department budgeting for tree planting for the parks and golf course.
- Michael re-iterated Phil Graff's stats from the last meeting on the Tree Inventory: the city has 14K trees, with an average score of 3.1 (of 1-5). He noted the arborists recommendations of removing/grinding the 700 stumps although there is not a budget for that this year; and noted we have 180 of the invasive Tree of Heaven.

- Jen asked if a draft for the public of the Tree Inventory could be available for the 4/36 tree giveaway. She could draft a public survey; this may be deferred since the tree giveaway events tend to be very busy with little time for extra interaction.
- Michael complemented the Arborist Apprentice, Bella Munoz, on her progress and helpfulness.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Update on IRA grant progress and inventory**

Wendy clarified that the Mayor had asked for the Spring planting to be postponed, not canceled, in light of uncertainty with federal grants at this time. She noted there is no reason not to move forward, and that she will verify the grant's receivables. The board approved a workshop with Wendy and city staff as needed just prior to next month's meeting: 4:30 pm on 5/07/25 for no longer than an hour.

In light of this, Jim's letter to the Mayor on the status of this year's planting per our federal grant was tabled until after the workshop.

It was noted that the SCA Spring planting window has passed, and that we need to communicate with the Mayor that the Fall planting could be planned.

Michael noted he is able to bill, and the Forest Service has approved the invoices he has submitted. Dr. Kora noted to Michael that it would be best to use the advance reimbursement process to pre-order our trees now. Jen offered assistance if needed. Michael noted we do not yet have an RFQ, so can't get pro forma invoices from nurseries.

- **Communitree**

Jen provided the news that MC Tree Board has been awarded ten trees, and The Walker Street Community Garden five trees.

- **Ordinance 102-34 Tree Board Duties and Responsibilities**

After some discussion, it was agreed to table this until after the one-hour workshop prior to next month's meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Walker Street Park Community Orchard**

Dominique gave an overview of the Walker Street Park Community Garden. It is in its 8th growing season, has 32 raised beds, receives funding through the city, and is now open to adding an orchard of native fruit trees. She is asking for best practices. Jen encouraged this, and noted virtual training available.

COMMENTS

Board: Mary Nell noted it is the time of year to remind city workers that oaks should not be pruned from now until first freeze due to the danger of spreading Oak Wilt (with exceptions

such as for storm removal). Michael said he would communicate with Vector Control.

Public: none.

Next Meeting Date

The next regular meeting is scheduled for 5/7/25 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. A special workshop will be held at 4:30 pm at the same date and location.

Adjournment

Betsy moved and Laura seconded adjournment, motion passed.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy