



MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD

July 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 07/02/25, at 5:30 p.m. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Members Present:

Jen Birchfield, Denise Blau, Dennis Brittain, Betsy Elsaesser, Laura Henderson, Mary Nell Murphy, Harshini Ratnayaka. Quorum of four satisfied. City Forester Phil Graf and Council Liaison Dr. Vidya Kora also present.

Members Excused:

Council Liaison Nancy Moldenhauer

Public Present:

Drew Hart, US Forest Service; Leslie Shad

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Board approved moving Public Comments after Approval of Agenda for convenience of visitors; Mary Nell noted the Term Start dates from City Hall appear to reflect the original term's starting date rather than the new members' Oath of Office date; then Dr. Kora moved and Mary Nell seconded approval of the updated agenda, motion passed.

COMMENTS - Public

Leslie Shad provided the intro below, her proposal will be included with the minutes to City Hall: *I wonder if it might be helpful or worthwhile to try to organize support for the work of the City and the Tree Board with a public-private partnership to preserve trees and encourage natural areas in Michigan City. My first thought is that it would be great if the City could do it all, but I am unsure if the City wants to take on more than it is already committed to. The attached is intended to outline some ideas and get feedback from the Tree Board. The attachment is a draft vision to explain the idea to an outside audience of people who are tree-neutral or in any case not tree advocates, and to explain some initial steps that might be taken to advance the vision. Many thanks for your time and all that you are doing for Michigan City and its tree canopy.*

Jen asked for time to review Leslie's proposal. Phil noted the USFS grant included the now-completed Tree Inventory with canopy cover, and that LIDAR is available to show a map of canopy gaps, land cover types, ability to quantify tree statistics.

Betsy asked Leslie if she has approached the Parks Department yet, she has not. Betsy does not think it is in the Tree Board's power to create a Tree Conservancy, and that we have very few volunteers. Jen would like to explore the idea with other similarly-minded groups.

Jen noted that Michigan City has received a certification for Old Growth Forest.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Laura moved and Dennis seconded approval of the June minutes; motion passed.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The City Comptroller's Office provided the monthly reports; Mary Nell emailed these to the Board prior to the meeting. Laura noted that Accounts 411 and 413 are repeated under both General Fund and Grant Fund.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Jen received an email from Nancy regarding the right-of-way tree removals along Moore Road near Hwy 12. Phil clarified that two older diseased Sycamores, and a large diseased limb had been cleared from the area. After concerns noted on NextDoor, he checked the job site and wood chips pile and all seemed to be done professionally. Jen will contact Storm Water MS4 coordinator with the Planning Department to clarify if proper procedure was followed by the contractor for removal of the trees from the ongoing development.
- Mary Nell provided the Board with printed copies of the 2024 Indiana DNR seedling order list (2025 not yet available). October 1 is the date to place our order, so we need to review the list to decide how many and which native trees and shrubs to order. Jen successfully gave away the remaining seedlings from this year's tree giveaway at the June Pride Fest. She noted feedback favored shrubs and smaller trees.
- Facebook: we now have 185 followers. Recent posts included 1) importance of watering during this drought 2) proper way to mulch trees (NOT Volcano Mulch) 3) the June 12 Beacher article on the CommuniTree native tree program at MC schools.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach & Engagement:

- NIRPC/CommuniTree Grant: tree planting project at MC elementary schools
 - Betsy and Jen continue to water trees at these sites over the summer when school is not in session.
 - Betsy would like to expand the program to other MC schools.
- Farmers Market:
 - Jen noted the application to Farmed & Forged has been approved for the Tree Board on first Saturdays of the month.
 - Laura and Denise will staff the table for this Saturday July 5.
 - Betsy suggested we provide information on the tree permitting process.
- Betsy noted the June 12 article that she was able to get into the Beacher

Arbor Day Foundation activities:

- Mary Nell let Phil know she will be reaching out to him for some statistics on per capita spending on tree planting and removal

CITY FORESTER REPORT

- Phil prepared a monthly report for the board, it will be included with the minutes provided to City Hall.
 - In a meeting with the Mayor, there will be a “Tree Blitz” concentrating on high-risk trees and tree planting.
 - Phil submitted RFPs for pre-approval of tree procurement, planting and removals with a 7/21 deadline.

OLD BUSINESS

- Annual budget request: Jen submitted our rolling request for \$500 each for Operating Supplies and Operating Expenses.
- University of Wisconsin survey progress: Jen submitted the survey.

NEW BUSINESS

- Dennis suggested the Board Members provide a brief introduction since we have two new members. The Board welcomed the new members following these intros.

- **Mayor's Community Activation Grant:** Jen had asked for ideas from the board. Mary Nell suggested either tree ID signage on native trees in central areas, or a blitz to remove all the Trees of Heaven and/or the Callery Pears – especially those on City Hall grounds. Following discussion, Jen will discuss with Laura and Mary Nell to hash out a proposal. Jen will contact the Parks Department on this project. Phil noted he has done similar self-guided tree tours for other communities using a QR code and GIS. The project must be completed by 3/15/26.
- **Vice President's position:** Betsy agreed to be considered for the open Vice President's position with the caveat that she is not interested in rolling into the President's position at this time. Dennis moved and Mary Nell seconded the motion to elect Besty as our Vice President. Motion passed.

COMMENTS

Council Liaisons:

- Dr Kora noted that the new appointments had been approved by the City Council.

Board:

- Denise inquired who maintains the median plantings and streetside plantings since she found one in need of maintenance. It was suggested Denise contact the City's Streets department. Jen will also try to find a contact.

Public:

- Drew Hart of the US Forest Service provided an update. He noted the Inflation Reduction Act grant had a recent change that will allow us to plant in adjacent communities of similar situations. He noted the SCA has a great track record in working on projects like ours.

Next Meeting Date and Adjournment

Jen reminded us that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 8/6/25 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. Mary Nell moved and Laura seconded adjournment, motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 7:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy

Confirmed by Board President Jen Birchfield

_____ Date: _____