



MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD

August 6, 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 08/06/25, 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 Nancy Moldenhauer also present.

Members Not Present:

Council Liaison Dr. Vidya Kora

Public Present:

Leslie Shad

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Nancy noted that Council Liaisons are not voting members of the Tree Board (unless that are also Mayoral Appointments). She asked Jen to check with Roberts Rules of Order for clarification. Betsy moved and Laura seconded approval of the updated agenda, motion passed.

COMMENTS - Public

Leslie Shad requested the tree ordinances be updated to more strongly protect trees, and expressed concern for tree removals throughout Michigan City and suggested a Tree Conservancy could be formed.

Jen commented (as discussed at last meeting) that it is not in the Tree Board's purview to create a Tree Conservancy, and suggested other similarly minded groups could be approached such as Save the Dunes and Shirley Heinz Land Trust.

All agreed that more developers need to be educated on the city's tree ordinances. Laura noted there is a Builders Conference in January that the Tree Board could attend with instructive flyers. Jen and Phil have been working on a handout. Phil recognized that the tree-permitting ordinance is not well-known; he

is working on its update which will include mitigation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

TREASURER'S REPORT

The City Controller's Office provided the monthly reports; Mary Nell emailed these to the Board prior to the meeting along with the Controller's note that budget discussions have begun with the Council. Laura moved and Betsy seconded approval of the financial reports; motion passed.

After discussion of our two City-funded line items, with \$500 in 1101-421 Office Supplies, members suggested we split the \$500 into \$200 for 1101-421 Office Supplies and \$300 for 1101-422 Operating Supplies (which would include trees, etc.). Jen will send our request to the City Controller, Mary-Lynn Wall.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Mary Nell noted two emails received: Tim Werner sent Stormwater Drainage handouts that she posted to the Facebook page; and the Mayor's office sent Denise Blau's re-appointment notice.
- Facebook: we now have 188 followers. Recent posts included how to apply for NIRPC's Fall 2025 tree planting through the CommuniTree Grant Program; Stormwater Drainage conference handouts; caution for Oak Wilt to not prune or remove oaks until after frost; request for tree-watering volunteers at the four elementary schools.
 - Jen provided info on CommuniTree's replacement program. Residents can remove an invasive tree and get a free native replacement. Mary Nell will post to Facebook page.
- NextDoor post requesting tree-watering volunteers over the summer. Betsy coordinated the volunteer responses. Pine and Edgewood schools are now covered by these volunteers. We still need volunteers at Springfield and Marsh schools. Betsy will water at those schools until we get more volunteers.
- Jen reminded the board that sending emails to other board members could constitute a quorum without public input so to refrain from email discussions. However, an outreach coordinator can email the group regarding logistics, but members should respond only to the outreach coordinator, not to the group.

Dennis volunteered to be the outreach coordinator for the Spring Master gardener event.

- Jen noted she is working on a press release on progress on the USFS grant.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach & Engagement:

- NIRPC/CommuniTree Grant: tree planting project at MC elementary schools. Covered above. Betsy would like to expand the program to other MC schools: Joy Elementary (Jen to reach out); Queen of All Saints, St Stanislaus, Paladin, and more to Marsh since they just planted two trees. Jen purchased a water tank (bladder) for these large watering projects. The board encouraged her to submit her receipt
- Farmers Market:
 - Tree Board did not staff a table at the August 2nd farmers market.
 - The board agreed to not staff a table at the September 6th market, but will for the last market of the season on October 4th staffed by Laura, Denise, Dennis.
- Order DNR tree seedlings for Earth Day events: There was a brief discussion favoring more small trees/shrubs, to be decided at the September meeting. Mary Nell distributed the order form listing species available. Seedlings are paid for from the Tree Board's donations fund (currently \$988.84).
- Phil has been working with the Mayor on community engagement. She would like us to use existing city events. Jen is working with Izabelle in the Mayor's office on a survey for residents. They are also developing signage such as a Selfie Screen, benefits of trees, Tree Hugger sign.
- Oktoberfest will be 8/28-9/1 from noon-8 pm in Washington Park. Betsy expressed interest; others may be able to work in shifts. Jen will contact the board on staffing.

Arbor Day Foundation activities:

- Mary Nell let Phil know she will be reaching out to him in early December 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. Major points included:
 - Board of Works met on August 4th and agreed on the two contractors for tree removals: Homer from Lockport; and tree planting: Dogwood Hills from Middlebury.
 - Estimated total expenditures by end-of-year will be \$615K plus any outreach expenses.
 - Unfortunately due to delays and other obstacles, we won't be able to plant 1,500 trees as detailed in the original grant proposal. Phil hopes to plant 1,000 trees.
 - Phil noted that City Hall's new communications service Kintone is working well. No change to public, only internal improvement.
 - There will be a new Forestry page on the updated City Hall website that will include information on the USFS grant and on licensing and permitting.

OLD BUSINESS

- Mayor's Community Activation Grant: Jen noted the funds must be spent by March. Phil will present a demo of tree signage using a central map and QR codes.
- Boys & Girls Club trees: Two trees were planted last week. Phil and Jen worked to straighten and stake the previously-planted trees that went in askew.
- Leslie Shad's tree conservancy proposal – discussed earlier
- Moore Street development: after discussion on the various tree ordinances, fines, education of contractors, Phil will bring this up with City Council.

NEW BUSINESS

- City Nature Challenge using iNaturalist app. On July 14, Mary Nell sent the board the link for on this project, she asked board members to review for future discussion. Jen noted \$2K grant available from Project Learning Tree to be used in all schools.
- Laura agreed to take the minutes for the September meeting in Mary Nell's absence.

COMMENTS

Council Liaisons:

- Nancy thanked the board for its work and noted there is a lot of activity!

Board:

- None

Next Meeting Date and Adjournment

Jen reminded us that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 9/3/25 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. Mary Nell moved and Betsy seconded adjournment, motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy

Confirmed by Board President Jen Birchfield

_____ *Date:* _____

Member Name	Type	Term start	End	Role
Jennifer Birchfield	Mayoral Appointment	7/1/2024	8/01/28	President
Mary Nell Murphy	Mayoral Appointment	1/1/2024	12/31/27	Secretary
Denise Blau	Mayoral Appointment	08/01/25	8/1/28	
Dennis Brittain	Mayoral Appointment	7/1/2024	7/1/2027	
Betsy Elsaesser	Mayoral Appointment	7/1/2024	07/01/27	Vice President
Laura Henderson	Council Appointment representing Elston Grove Neighborhood Association	02/15/25	02/16/26	
Harshini Ratnayaka	Mayoral Appointment	7/1/24	07/01/27	