MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD
October 1, 2025

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy
Confirmed by Board President Jen Birchfield

Date: 11/5/25

The Michigan City Tree Board met in a regular meeting at Alco TV, 301 E 8th St #101, Michigan City, IN 46360, on Wednesday 10/011/25, at 5:30 p.m. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Members Present:
Jen Birchfield, Dennis Brittain, Betsy Elsaesser, Laura Henderson, Mary Nell Murphy, Harshini Ratnayaka. Quorum of four satisfied. City Forester Phil Graf and Council Liaisons Dr. Vidya Kora and Nancy Moldenhauer also present.

Members Not Present:
Member Denise Blau

Public Present:
Dakota Euler

APPROVAL OF AGENDA
Laura moved and Dr Kora seconded approval of the agenda, motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Mary Nell moved and Betsy seconded approval of the September minutes; motion passed.

COMMENTS - Public
Dakota Euler of Emma Street spoke on his concern on nuisance trees. He had contacted the City Forester, Phil then met with him and reviewed the diseased, dead and dying trees. Phil recognized that the trees are of concern but on private property. Phil will consult with the City attorney on how to proceed. He noted an upcoming 10/08 meeting that Jen will also attend that will touch on these and development issues.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The City Controller's Office provided the monthly reports; Mary Nell emailed these to the Board prior to the meeting Mary Nell moved and Betsy seconded approval of the financial reports; motion passed.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Mary Nell noted an email received from DNR's Rachel Stenger encouraging the Tree Board to complete a survey on urban forestry funding. The Board requested Mary Nell complete the survey.
- 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.
- Facebook: we now have 194 followers. Mary Nell recently posted the new City Forester Request form link on the City's new webpage.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach & Engagement:

- NIRPC/CommuniTree Grant: NIRPC granted 10-12 trees for 4-5 schools: St Stanislaus, Queen of All Saints, Marsh Elementary and two locations for Paladin (Headstart and Imagination Station). The schools plan to include the students in the planting during class, and to be responsible for watering. She will need to call back to 811 within two weeks of planting. The board thanked Betsy for her work on this. Jen will reach out to Joy Elementary. Jen also noted CommuniTree has some unclaimed trees that could be planted at these schools.

- Farmers Market:
    - Tree Board will staff a table at the last farmers market 10/04. Dennis, Denise and Laura will attend. Jen will set up and bring flyers. There was discussion on text and QR codes for the flyers. Betsy requested printing tags for new trees. Jen and Betsy to discuss.

CITY FORESTER REPORT

Phil had not prepared the monthly report for the board since it was not yet the end of the month. He will complete it and send to Jen; she will send on to the Board. In the meantime, he provided these highlights:

- **Tree removals** for 350 high-risk trees as identified in the Tree Inventory was to have begun 9/15 but there were communications issues with Homer Trees contractor. The new start date is 10/06 with a 12/31 deadline.
- **Tree planting** with Dogwood Hills contractor was revised per last month's meeting and consultation with Forest Service's Drew Hart. Several non-native species were removed from the planting list. Contractor hopes to begin 10/07 but dry conditions may delay that. Deadline is 11/30.
- **Non-Grant** activity: Ordinance meeting is scheduled.

Betsy noted she wants this info for a Beacher article that she will submit. She and Jen will discuss the City's press release that is being worked on.

OLD BUSINESS

- Mayor's Community Activation Grant: Jen noted the funds must be spent by March. Phil will present a demo at the next board meeting on tree signage using a central map and QR codes.

- Order DNR tree seedlings for Earth Day events: 1 Wildlife Packet: 10 each of American Plum, Black cherry, Black Gum, Chinkapin Oak, Common Chokecherry, Elderberry, Grey Dogwood, Hazelnut, Silky Dogwood, Persimmon, Red Oak, Shagbark Hickory, Washington Hawthorn, White Oak (140 altogether); plus 100 each of Black Gum, Redbud, Baldcypress (since White Cedar sold out) for a total of 440 trees. DNR Nursery will send an invoice. Jen said she can pick up the trees in the Spring.

- Moore Road development: no fines have been levied at this point. There appears to be a two-year statute of limitations in Indiana. Phil will provide more info after the 10/08 meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Dennis asked for recommendations on tree pruners. Phil noted there's a list of Licensed Arborists on the City Forestry page: https://michigancityin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025arboristlicense.pdf

COMMENTS

Council Liaisons:

- Dr Kora thanked the board for its work and commitment.

- Nancy thanked Phil for dropping Japanese Lilac trees from the Grant's planting list and noted bird migration will be discussed at the next Green Drinks Zoom: Naturalist-artist Jennifer Johnson will discuss the signs of fall migration for birds during the next Michigan City Green Drinks meeting at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 2. Link: https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86344354737

Board:

- Betsy asked Board members to attend the two upcoming school planting dates; details upcoming.
- Laura thanked Phil for the native tree replacements on the Grant's planting list. Phil noted that with the additional CommuniTree 10-12 trees, we will now have over 75% natives.

Next Meeting Date and Adjournment

Jen reminded us that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 11/5/25 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. Betsy moved and Laura seconded adjournment, motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 6:43 pm.

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	