



**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD**

December 3, 2025

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy

Confirmed by Board President Jen Birchfield

Jen Birchfield

Date: 12/3/25

The Michigan City Tree Board met in a regular meeting at Alco TV, 301 E 8th St #101, Michigan City, IN 46360, on Wednesday 12/03/25, 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, Laura Henderson, Mary Nell Murphy. Quorum of four satisfied. City Forester Phil Graf and Council Liaison Dr. Vidya Kora also present.

Not Present (with prior notice):

Members Betsy Elsaesser, Harshini Ratnayaka
Council Liaison Nancy Moldenhauer

Public Present:

Leslie Shad

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Laura moved and Denise seconded approval of the agenda; motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Denise moved and Dennis seconded approval of the November minutes; motion passed.

COMMENTS - Public

Leslie Shad said she would wait to hear the City Forester's report.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The City Controller's Office provided the monthly reports; Mary Nell emailed these to the Board prior to the meeting. There were no disagreements.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Indiana DNR's winter tree ID workshop on Dec. 17 near Indianapolis.
- City Clerk's office had requested signed minutes from a few months past; Jen has sent them in.
- Laura confirmed that the Earth Month Extravaganza will be held at the Senior Center on Saturday April 25 from noon to 3 pm per Andie Jahnz-Davis. Laura will request 3 indoor tables for our tree giveaway. Jen moved and Dennis seconded a motion to reimburse Mary Nell \$38.97 for the purchase of 500 tree tags last year and the upcoming year for the tree giveaways.
- Facebook: we now have over 200 followers. Mary Nell will post progress on USFS grant, and on the tree giveaways.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach & Engagement:

After a very busy month of school plantings in October, no new events. Denise noted a recent NWI Times article on urban forestry mentioned the Michigan City Tree Board and the USFS grant.

https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/gary/article_d6fe2b9d-17e8-4f96-85e3-9fe5b3c8ec36.html

CITY FORESTER REPORT

Jen had sent Phil's monthly report to the board prior to the meeting. Phil noted these highlights:

- **Tree planting:** Goal of 500 trees planted completed! (actually 510 since there were a few CommuniTree trees available). Phil reported that contractor Dogwood Hills Tree Farm has done an outstanding job.
- **Tree removals:** 110 of the 350 high-priority trees have been removed. Dr. Kora asked on behalf of his constituents how to tell if a tree is diseased. Phil said residents can contact him. The City Forester request form is available online <https://michigancityin.gov/forms/forester-request-form/>
- **Tree Watering:** There were 3 bids but all would deplete remaining grant funds. Phil is exploring options with city resources. Denise suggested hiring part-time workers for the April-October work. Phil said he would look into using Work One.

Other discussion:

- Phil continues to work with Director of Public Works Wendy Vachet on the Tree Protection Ordinance. She would like to speak at an upcoming meeting as her schedule allows. Phil noted the goal will be to balance not discouraging development along with protecting the canopy.
- Jen noted the city has outdated chainsaws, and that \$5K from the USFS grant could be spent to replace these.
- Mary Nell asked the status of Student Conservation Association (SCA) participation since the USFS grant proposal included partnering with them. Phil noted that federal cuts has shifted their involvement. He also noted the prior forester had used some of the workforce development funds in the grant for the (now discontinued) apprentice.
- Laura inquired about the need for a truck for watering; costs could be \$30-70K depending on how it is purchased, leased, or other arrangements. The prior forester arranged for a bucket truck to be purchased by the city; Phil noted it is being utilized by the city for tree work. Phil noted he will meet with Drew Hart on re-allocating grant funds.

OLD BUSINESS

- **Mayor's Community Activation Grant:** Jen emailed the \$3K grant proposal she drafted on tree signage using a central map and QR codes that could be implemented at Michigan City parks and schools.
Laura moved and Dennis seconded a motion to move forward with this proposal by submitting it for consideration.
- Updates from the running to-do list: Mary Nell continues to send the board the action items from the board meetings.

NEW BUSINESS

- Arbor Day Tree City application due 12/31/25; submitted for Mayor's signature 11/21; Mary Nell will re-send to Kelley Smith for the Mayor's signature.
- Yearly checklist of annual activities for January:
 - Nominating Committee: confirm officers for the year
 - Welcome City Council liaison (if new)
 - Confirm member roles, expir dates, contact info
 - Apply for Master Gardener's Spring Show: Dennis and Laura noted there will not be a show this year, but will inform us if another group hosts one

- Dennis inquired about a tree survey or inventory, with signage at Friendship Gardens where he is active. Phil suggested a separate conversation. It was noted there's an online list of Licensed Arborists on the City's website: <https://michigancityin.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025arboristlicense.pdf>

COMMENTS

Council Liaisons:

Dr. Kora said it was a great meeting, and noted the high-level of activity.

Board:

- Mary Nell noted the City's postal letter re the September 23 security breach and the security monitoring services available to us by Kroll.
- Mary Nell will not be able to attend the February meeting; Laura agreed to take the minutes.

Next Meeting Date and Adjournment

Jen reminded us that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 01/07/26 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. Laura moved and Dennis seconded adjournment; motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 6:28 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	