



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

January 7, 2026

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

*Mary Nell Murphy* Date: *1/7/26*

The Michigan City Tree Board met in a regular meeting at Alco TV, 301 E 8th St #101, Michigan City, IN 46360, on Wednesday 01/07/26, 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. Quorum of four satisfied. City Forester Phil Graf and Council Liaison Nancy Moldenhauer also present.

**Members Not Present**

Denise Blau (with prior notice), Harshini Ratnayaka

**Public Present:**

Faye Moore, Tom Nazimek, Leslie Shad

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Betsy moved and Dennis seconded approval of the agenda; motion passed.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mary Nell moved and Laura seconded approving the amended November minutes; amendment is to replace "Licensed Arborists" with "Tree Services" on the link to the City's website; motion passed. (Jen will follow up separately with Phil and City staff to clarify language on the website.)

**COMMENTS - Public**

Tom Nazimek and neighbors are interested in native non-invasive trees following the removal of a Silver Maple. The board provided several suggestions and offered to continue discussion after the meeting. Leslie Shad said she was wanted to hear about the tree ordinance. Faye Moore noted she was attending her first

meeting to hear more about the Tree Board.

### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

The City Controller's Office provided the monthly reports; Mary Nell emailed these to the Board prior to the meeting; she noted the \$3,000 increase in the Donations Fund from the Mayor's Community Activation Grant. Betsy moved and Laura seconded accepting the reports.

### **COMMUNICATIONS**

Emails:

- IDNR Community & Urban Forestry Program will be hosting a forum for recipients of the Arbor Day Foundations Tree City; 3/11 Terre Haute
- IDNR Rachel Stenger - [2025 Indiana Community and Urban Forestry Symposium Day 2](#)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fG\\_L8QERV5c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fG_L8QERV5c) and grants attachment

Jen reminded the board of the Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form and Board & Commission Form; all present confirmed they completed these.

Friends of Michigan City Tree Board Facebook page: we have over 200 followers. Mary Nell recently posted on the DNR's Fifth Grade Arbor Day Poster Contest; winter care of trees; Christmas tree care; and the Susan Mihalo NWI Times article on tree plantings. She will post on progress on USFS grant, and on the tree giveaways.

Jen noted NIRPC is hosting a workshop on tree ordinances in the coming year; more details to follow.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

#### **Outreach & Engagement:**

- This year the LaPorte County Master Gardeners will not be having a gardening fair, however Porter County's is 1/31. Jen will attend as part of another group and will bring flyers announcing the Board's 2026 tree giveaways.
- Jen noted the Michigan City Coho Club symposium in February that may be an outreach opportunity for the Board.
- DNR's Pear Removal grant webinar is 1/14; Jen plans to attend.
- DNR's virtual tree planting workshop on 2/12; must register by 2/06 to [jaspernursery@dnr.IN.gov](mailto:jaspernursery@dnr.IN.gov) as noted on FB post.

## CITY FORESTER REPORT

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

- **Tree planting:** Past month was mainly oversight: verified all 500 trees were planted, properly mulched, straight. Phil noted contractor Dogwood Hills Tree Farm did an exceptional job.
- **Tree removals:** 300 high-risk trees have been removed.
- **Tree Watering:** Phil clarified the bids did not deplete remaining grant funds. Watering was contracted out for next summer and funds still remain for a smaller number of trees to be planted and for removals.

Nancy thanked Phil, Jen and the Mayor's office for their work in Ward 6 for the removal of a high-risk Beech tree on an easement that was disputed by neighboring residents. It was a delicate situation but was resolved. When cut down, the 100-year-old tree showed obvious signs of decay. Jen requested the beech tree planting be expedited if possible.

Dennis noted he is in conversation with Phil on Friendship Gardens projects.

## OLD BUSINESS

- **Mayor's Community Activation Grant:** Jen reported we received the \$3K grant for the tree signage using project. She will work with Phil on this.
- Arbor Day Tree City application has been approved by State Forester 12/15; we are awaiting Foundation approval (last year we were notified in March).

## NEW BUSINESS

- Postponed: Public Works Director Wendy Vachet on Tree Ordinance progress
- Election of Board Officers: Mary Nell noted the City's website defines the Board is seven members including the Council Liaison who has voting rights. Mary Nell was asked to contact the City Clerk for clarification. Laura moved and Dennis seconded accepting the re-election of the three Board officers: Jen as President, Betsy at Vice President, May Nell as Secretary. Motion passed.

- Jen welcomed returning City Council liaison Nancy and thanked Dr. Kora for his service on the Board.

**COMMENTS**

**Council Liaison:**

- Nancy and Faye noted there is a Boards & Commissions workshop at City Hall on 1/14 at 5 pm.

**Next Meeting Date and Adjournment**

Jen reminded us that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 02/04/26 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8<sup>th</sup> St. Laura moved and Dennis seconded adjournment; motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 6:35 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	