MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN CITY TREE BOARD
October 7, 2026

Respectfully submitted by Mary Nell Murphy based on notes from Harshini Ratnayaka and ALCO video.
Confirmed by Board President Jen Birchfield

Betsy Elsaesser Date: Nov 4, 2026
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Vice-President Betsy Elsaesser called to order the Michigan City Tree Board for a regular meeting at Alco TV, 301 E 8th St #101, Michigan City, IN 46360, on Wednesday 10/07/26, at 5:40 p.m. local time; the date, hour, and place duly established for the holding of said meeting.

Members Present:
Dennis Brittain, Betsy Elsaesser, Harshini Ratnayaka, Quorum not satisfied. City Forester Phil Graf also present.

Members Not Present
Board Members: Jen Birchfield (prior notice), Mary Nell Murphy (prior notice), Denise Blau, Wendy Willis. Council Liaison Nancy Moldenhauer (prior notice).

Others Present:
Dr. Dominique Edwards, Director of Planning for Michigan City

APPROVAL OF AGENDA
No quorum, however members present had no objection to following the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENTS
Dr. Dominique Edwards, was present to discuss the progress on the Tree Ordinance. Her team has been reviewing Article 17 for the last several months and working interdepartmentally with Phil the City Forester, Sanitation Department, Legal Department:

- Article 17: Site Development Provisions
  - if a developer comes in, they have specific ordinances they need to follow but current ordinance is not clear. Some teams come in and clearcut lots without permission or communication which the city

does not want. She noted some past examples such as the corner lot at Hwy 12 and MLK Drive.

- Her team is looking at how to streamline the process for developers, looking at if the code was strong enough; making it more efficient.
- revisiting the code as new growth and development is happening in the city.
- Also checked other ordinances related such as stormwater ordinances and other related departments, input and feedback
- then goes to legal council for review, will then go to the planning commission. It will then go to first, second, and third reading at City Council meetings for public input.
- If there are any suggestions, Dominique is happy to take it into account as the new ordinance is being updated.

Betsy noted the Tree Board would like to review the draft as soon as possible. Dominique will have to talk to legal council before she can send it to Jen, who can then pass on to the entire board. Betsy noted we need to preserve healthy trees, and have a penalty for people who take down city-owned trees. She encouraged including motivation for invasive tree removal such as Tree of Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima),* and discouragement of planting ornamental invasives such as Callery Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*).

Phil noted the draft includes much of what the board has requested, and that an Advisory Board is there to advise so they will welcome the board's feedback. He also has concerns on clearcutting of lots such as at Tryon Meadows; that it's not the same ecologically to remove 100 trees and plant 100 trees so we need some kind of mitigation as the Tree Board has discussed.

Betsy would like a Tree Canopy Restoration Fund codified in the ordinance. Dennis asked about transparency and public input on the implementation of the ordinance.

Dominique agreed to return to the Tree Board once we have reviewed the draft ordinance. She also welcomed all to attend the 10/24 Walker Street Community Garden 6th annual harvest festival; am. Ribbon cutting at 10 am, activities 1-5pm.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Mary Nell had forwarded the monthly reports from the City Controller's Office to the Board prior to the meeting. Approval will be tabled until the next meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS

Emails:

- Friends 9/24 CommuniTree Planting and Maintenance Workshop
- National Wildlife Foundation: Happy Trees for Wildlife

Facebook: Friends of Michigan City Tree Board (243 followers)

- 9/04 DNR Arbor Day Poster Contest, deadline 4/2/27
- 9/04 Nat'l Wildlife Federation garden certification
- 9/08 President Jen Birchfield quoted in Post-Tribune: Trees offer benefits but require attention after recent storms: experts
- 9/10 City Forester's report on storm damage
- 9/14 NYT article: Saving Old Trees Might Save Lives
- 9/14 After the storm: Why a toppled tree can still have value
- 9/17 Two spare Oaks from CommuniTree need a home
- 9/29 Two school planting events 10/06 & 07

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Outreach & Engagement:

- Betsy ordered online 450 saplings from the Vallonia Nursery on 10/01 to be delivered to Jasper-Pulaski; total was $255.72, however receipt won't be sent until order is fulfilled
    - 100 northern white cedar
    - 100 persimmon
    - 100 sycamore
    - 100 grey dogwood
    - 50 white oak select (slightly bigger sapling/seedlings)

- CommuniTree grant for fall planting; Betsy requested 16 trees, being stored at Central Services; lots of excited school children assisted.
    - 1 tree at Pine School planted
    - 2 Oak trees at Paladin on Royal Road
- April 3 LaPorte Masters Gardener event. Betsy registered for a Tree Board table; $25 fee to be billed to us later
- Tomorrow 10/08: Betsy has organized a tree planting at Washington Park in conjunction with the Parks Department.

CITY FORESTER REPORT

Phil provided an abbreviated oral report. He met with Jen and Drew Hart, our US Forest Service grant administrator, on 10/18. Reviewing the remaining funds in

the grant, they decided to plant 100 more trees in the Spring, predominantly Oaks, Tulip Trees and Redbuds. The Mayor's Office posted on social media asking for parkway locations; great response. Phil also heard from Greenwood and Swan Lake cemeteries.

Phil has been working with engineer Al Wallace from the Sanitary District on a Save the Salmon project. The Cheney Run park is an important salmon spawning area that had been deforested due to a garbage dump cleanup. The plan is for 80 4-inch trees to be planted along a quarter-mile there, along with other improvements in the adjoining Karwick Nature Preserve. Funding is from a private industry partner. Phil will share with the board this proposal which is expected to begin this month.

Phil noted there will be a conference Nov 4-6 at the Blue Chip Casino on The State of Lake Michigan. Betsy plans to attend.

OLD BUSINESS

None at this time

NEW BUSINESS

None at this time

BOARD COMMENTS

Betsy noted a tree planting in Washington Park 9 am tomorrow 10/08.
Dennis noted NYC Mayor Mamdani is planting 16,000 trees.

Next Meeting Date and Adjournment

The next regular meeting will be 11/04/26 at 5:30 pm, at Alco TV location 301 E 8th St. Dennis moved and Wendy seconded adjournment; motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Member Name	Type	Term start	End	Role
Jennifer Birchfield	Mayoral Appointment	07/1/24	08/01/28	President
Mary Nell Murphy	Mayoral Appointment	01/01/24	12/31/27	Secretary
Denise Blau	Mayoral Appointment	08/01/25	08/01/28	
Dennis Brittain	Mayoral Appointment	07/01/24	07/01/27	
Betsy Elsaesser	Mayoral Appointment	07/01/24	07/01/27	Vice President
Harshini Ratnayaka	Mayoral Appointment	07/01/24	07/01/27	
Wendy Willis	Neighborhood Association	03/03/26	02/15/27	
Nancy Moldenhauer	City Council Liaison			