

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, February 15, 2024

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7:00 PM at Town Hall in an Upstairs Meeting Room.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, Blane Roberts, Alex Robertson Richard Underkofler. Alex Robertson was appointed the Town Council's Tree Board Liaison. He agreed to be characterized as a board member like Bernie Zemen, his predecessor. Town Council President Philip Scheeringa appointed Jim Colias 2024 Board Chair at its February 12, 2024 meeting. All board members introduced themselves with biographical information. Parks Director Trever Kinley arrived at 8:00 PM after attending a meeting of the Parks and Recreation Board.

Absent: Other invited employees of the Town and Agencies.

General substance of matters proposed, discussed, or decided - record of all votes taken by individual members if there is a roll call:

- Minutes: Mary Ann Brunt made a motion to approve minutes of the meeting held November 19, 2023. Blane Roberts seconded the motion; approved by unanimous consent of the members present. The board did not meet in December 2023; the January 2024 meeting was canceled due to expiration of three board member terms.

Old Business:

- a. Tree Board Handbook: Jim Colias distributed the Arbor Day Foundation "Tree Board Handbook. It's a comprehensive guide to help board members understand their role and how they can best contribute to the board.
- b. 2023 Tree City USA Recognition: An application was submitted, approved by the State Forester and is awaiting approval by the Arbor Day Foundation.
- c. 2024 Indiana Arborist Association Conference: Jackowski and Underkofler participated in the Community and Urban Forestry Day of the Indianapolis conference Tuesday, January 23, 2024.
- d. NW Indiana Tree Planting Consortium: A Consortium Meeting was held remotely Tuesday, 2/13/24 at which Jackowski and Underkofler participated. Underkofler forwarded a PowerPoint Presentation from the meeting to the board members, which included hyperlinks and presenter slides. Guest presentations were made by Aren Flint, Davey Resource Group; Racheal Stenger, INDNR; and Matt Lake, Merrillville Storm Water Management. Among other topics, Stenger reported the 5th grade arbor day poster contest submission deadline has been pushed back to April 1st.
- e. Pruning Services: Underkofler intends to formulate an RFP for a tree care contractor to provide pruning that would contain specifications for a scope of services, a schedule for a multi-year project by geographical area, budget by year and method of compensation. He is hoping Highland pruning work could start in Fall 2024 after leaves have fallen.

- f. NFWF SGOL Grant: On 2/8/2024, Delta Institute's Méлина Blanc emailed that there's a Fish & Wildlife Foundation Grant available from the "Sustain Our Great Lakes Program" for which Pre-Proposals were due 2/16/2024. Individual grant awards will range from \$200,000 to \$1,000,000. It enables acquisition, planting and maintenance of at least 500 trees. On review, it was determined Highland would not be able to submit a competitive application unless a site could be identified in low-income area that could accommodate this many trees and a match up to 50% could be pledged for the project cost whether by cash or in-kind labor.
- g. January 2024 Tree Planting Survey: Joan Roback donated stamps and sent 124 surveys to homeowner addresses where there are vacant parkway tree planting sites identified by a November 2023 windshield survey conducted by Blane Roberts and Roback. This is the second survey we've done. The first was in Sandalwood Subdivision and along Highway Avenue. A tabulation of results received as of January 22 was distributed with the agenda. Seven more surveys were received after the meeting. Comments of those who declined a tree were interesting, but typical of persons who are physically unable to plant and maintain trees. Some fear roots will elevate sidewalks and others just don't like to rake leaves. As updated, the survey shows 7 homeowners request Spring 2024 trees.
- h. Arbor Day Poster Contest: Jim Colias volunteered to contact principals and teachers at the public and private elementary schools in an attempt to recruit 5th grade students, art or science teachers to participate in this year's poster contest.
- i. 2024 Arbor Day Event: Trever Kinley reported the Parks and Recreation Department would be willing to host the celebration on the grounds of the Lincoln Center. He said students from the Pre-School Program could be asked to take part by asking Recreation Supervisor Alyce Van Drunen if preschool management would be willing to let the students take part in this year's event.
- j. 2023 Annual Report: Underkofler distributed the Board's Annual Report, which he emailed to Members of the Town Council, Clerk-Treasurer, Department Heads and other parties that receive board meeting agenda. He intends to send the report to the NWI Times and WJOB Radio for potential interview opportunities.

New Business:

- a. 2024 Arbor Day Event: Underkofler contacted Recreation Supervisor Alyce Van Drunen [mail: avandrunen@highland.in.gov] to ask if management of the Lincoln Center Preschool would be willing to let the students take part in this year's event and, if so, an acceptable date and time.
- b. Board Vacancy: Mary Ann Brunt will recruit at the Highland Sustainability Group for a member.

Discussion Topics:

Comments from Board Members, the Public and/or Visitors: This item of business is confined to announcements of intention to bring a future action, or requests for the preparation of administrative work product for future consideration. In no instance may a matter for final action be taken up under this item of business.

- a. Tree Planting Survey Comments: Members discussed comments received from the January Tree Planting Survey. Distribution of trees at the Public Works Yard will not work for persons who are not physically capable of collecting, planting or maintaining trees. Volunteers could be recruited to assist. Jim Colias will post information on our Facebook site from an Arbor Day Foundation Bulletin about tree and sewer/sidewalk conflict myths.
- b. Speakers for Future Meetings: Ron Jackowski sent an email after the meeting encouraging members to take a closer look at the 2/13/24 presentation from the Tree Consortium meeting. "Specifically, an in-depth look at how Merrillville has approached its urban canopy planning from a stormwater management perspective, by Matt Lake. See pp 26 – 61 "Trees are the new technology to retain water" https://merrillville.in.gov/departments/stormwater_management/index.php." See also information on Valpo's Arborist Matt McBain, who won an Arbor Day award at this year's IAA conference <https://ci.valparaiso.in.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=1061> and <https://ci.valparaiso.in.us/civicalerts.aspx?aid=972>.
- c. 4th of July Festival: Mary Ann Brunt inquired if the Board would be willing to staff a booth to acquaint the public of our endeavors. Underkofler and Colias said there would be some expense for the space rental fee and a banner to place on a tent or table.
- d. The Board began to review, change and update its 2024 Action Plan:
 1. Annual idea sharing, new ideas to keep the Board moving forward. All Board Members.
 2. Become a member of the Indiana Arborist Association and participate in the IAA Annual Conference. Done 1/23/24 by Jackowski and Underkofler.
 3. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance – Assigned to Blunt and Underkofler.
 4. Confirm whether Board Meetings will be canceled again in July and December.
 5. Seek Town Council appointments to update expiring Board Member terms. One board vacancy presently exists.

Next Meeting: Thursday, March 21, 2024.

Adjournment:

- The meeting ended at 8:17 PM on a motion of Roberts, second by Brunt and approved by unanimous consent of the members in attendance.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary