

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, January 14, 2026
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Mr. Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Megan Englemann; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); Matt Smith; Liesa Wetzig; Chair, Richard Varga (non-voting Member).

Others in Attendance: Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - Alex Boccabella; Mary Johnson; Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member); John Traxler; John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025**

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Wetzig to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, December 10, 2025, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Ms. Englemann, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

The vote was 4 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

UPDATE ON ARBOR DAY

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga provided an update on preparations for the upcoming Arbor Day event scheduled for Saturday, October 3, 2026, emphasizing the necessity of timely planning to ensure a successful event. He reported that several key tasks have already been completed. Among these, Mr. Varga highlighted that he has submitted the form for the 8-1-1 trailer, which was utilized the previous year, and has also completed all necessary paperwork to file the permit through the City, thus making the date officially established as October 3rd. Additionally, Mr. Varga has confirmed the date's availability with the Parks Department, ensuring no scheduling conflicts for the event.

To further enhance the event's appeal and to cater to diverse attendee interests, Mr. Varga mentioned that Betsy Thayer from the zoo has been secured to participate, which will add an exciting attraction of a petting zoo. Moreover, in line to provide refreshments, the beer distributor has been successfully arranged, ensuring that there won't be any hiccups in satisfying the thirst of attendees. Mr. Varga also touched upon the entertainment aspect of the event, noting that there are plans to contact the jazz band before the school year ends. This strategic timing aims to circumvent the communication difficulties typically encountered during the summer months, thereby securing the band's participation well in advance.

Additionally, Mr. Varga shared the positive feedback received from the vocalist who performed the National Anthem last year, stating that she has expressed interest in returning for this year's event. He considered this a positive indication of continuity and support, which would further uplift the Arbor Day celebrations. Beyond the aforementioned arrangements, Mr. Varga expressed his determination to ensure all aspects of the event are meticulously organized, indicating that while significant progress has been made, there is still ample time to refine the plans and incorporate any further elements that may contribute to the event's success.

UPDATE ON THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga reported that the City has initiated the clearing of the area designated for the Traxler Arboretum Visitor Center. Mayor Jensen required an official name for the Center to facilitate grant applications. After deliberation, the Commission agreed upon the name "Traxler Family Arboretum Education Center," which provides a broader designation to encompass both a visitor and educational center. The discussion considered several naming options, such as "Traxler Arboretum Visitor Center" or "Traxler Arboretum Educational Center." However, the consensus favored the inclusive term "center," which would cover all potential activities and uses.

In collaboration with Mr. O'Donnell, Mr. Varga is organizing a partnership with Avon High School. This initiative plans a strategic meeting in March with key participants, including Avon High School Principal Christina Buller, the interim superintendent Michael Zalar, Mayor Jensen, and members from the Avon Street Department. The central focus of this meeting will be to explore the establishment of a pathway connecting the School's boundary to the Arboretum, fostering both accessibility and educational opportunities for students.

Mr. Varga underscored the significance of aligning with multiple participants to ensure meticulous planning and execution of this initiative. The goal is to strengthen the relationship between the Arboretum and educational institutions, thereby promoting environmental education and interaction with natural spaces. The March meeting is positioned as a pivotal step in refining these plans, ensuring all parties are aligned, and in establishing a clear course of action for future developments.

Beyond the Arboretum Center's formalization, Mr. Varga and the Commission are keen on using this opportunity to integrate community and educational resources, setting the stage for what could be a modeled interaction between City planning and educational engagement.

PRESENTATION OF A MODEL OF THE PROPOSED TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Burik

Mr. Paul Burik gave a comprehensive presentation on a meticulously crafted physical model of the proposed Traxler Arboretum. This intricate model showcased a variety of features aimed at enhancing both functionality and aesthetics:

- A simplified entrance design is proposed for the Traxler Arboretum, which aims to emphasize a straightforward path across the Arboretum. This design prioritizes both navigational ease and optimal visitor flow, thereby enhancing the overall visitor experience. Mr. Burik, during his detailed presentation, highlighted the importance of this direct pathway, noting that it simplifies movement throughout the Arboretum. The design plans reflect an effort to run it straight across, suggesting that this simplification will function effectively without the need for complex navigation. This approach not only aids visitors in orienting themselves easily within the Arboretum's landscape but also helps in maintaining an unobstructed aesthetic charm that complements the natural surroundings.
- Designated handicap parking spaces conveniently located near the entrance, ensuring accessibility for all individuals, including those with mobility requirements. This strategic placement prioritizes ease of access to the Arboretum, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity by accommodating visitors with varying needs. By situating these parking spaces near the main entrance, visitors benefit from minimized travel distance, enhancing their ability to enjoy the Arboretum without unnecessary physical strain. This approach underscores the Arboretum's dedication to welcoming all guests and aligning with best practices in accessibility standards for public spaces.

- A gravel drive, proposed by Mr. Burik, has been considered as a preferable choice over traditional paved surfaces for the Traxler Arboretum. This proposal aims to better integrate with the natural setting of the Arboretum and minimize any environmental disruption. During his presentation, Mr. Burik emphasized the practical and aesthetic advantages of using gravel over paving. While the immediate area near the two designated handicap spots by the entrance would need to be paved to ensure necessary accessibility, the rest of the drive can maintain a gravel surface. This decision reflects a deliberate effort to preserve the natural ambiance and avoid unnecessary hardscaping.
- A planned location for a trash bin is thoughtfully designated within the Traxler Arboretum layout to enhance visitor convenience while ensuring that it remains aesthetically pleasing. The strategic placement of the trash bin emphasizes not only its functional role in maintaining cleanliness and environmental standards but also underscores the importance of preserving the area's visual appeal. The Arboretum's design incorporates a screening feature for the trash bin, effectively blending it into the natural surroundings and minimizing any potential visual disruption to guests. This careful planning reflects a commitment to creating and maintaining an inviting and enjoyable environment for all visitors, reinforcing the Arboretum's dedication to both functionality and overall visitor experience.
- A central pine tree is included in the plan, intended to offer continuous visual interest throughout all seasons. This all-season appeal is not just about aesthetics but also provides an opportunity for decoration during holiday times, thereby enhancing the Arboretum's festive atmosphere. Mr. Burik highlighted the advantage of having a pine tree, emphasizing its evergreen nature which ensures year-round beauty and its potential utility during festive occasions as it could be adorned with decorations. This choice offers the Arboretum a focal point during celebrations, making it not only an element of natural beauty but also a central hub for community gatherings tied to various festivities. Its presence underscores a strategic decision to blend ecological design with community spirit, as the pine tree stands as an embodiment of enduring cheer and seasonal celebration.

Mr. Burik further outlined several proactive next steps for advancing the project, articulated as follows:

1. **Developing cost estimates:** In this crucial next phase, the project will be advancing through a series of collaborative efforts with builders, as Mr. Paul Burik assumes leadership in creating extensive design development drawings. These drawings will serve as instrumental blueprints, facilitating precise estimation and comprehensive financial planning. Mr. Burik emphasized his willingness to engage with builders, leveraging their expertise to integrate appropriate materials and construction techniques. Having been retired for 16 years, Mr. Burik highlighted his need to rely on the current market insights of builders to navigate the costs associated with the Arboretum project.

Mr. Burik's tactical approach involves structuring the design development drawings to reflect both aesthetic and functional considerations. He expressed confidence in his architectural acumen to outline an efficient framework, which would then guide discussions with construction professionals regarding materials and implementation strategies. Meanwhile, the City of Avon, with its established network of builders, provides an array of resources that Mr. Burik hopes to tap into, ensuring the project's financial viability.

Moreover, Mr. Burik is resolute about maintaining ecological and design alignments, underscoring the importance of using sustainable building materials that complement the natural environment of the Arboretum. By collaborating closely with knowledgeable builders, there is an intention to refine design details to balance functionality, aesthetics, and cost-effectiveness. This

methodical collaboration aims to set a foundational precedent for informed decision-making as the Arboretum project advances through its developmental stages.

2. **Planting the Central Tree:** The proposal to plant the central pine tree is intended not merely as the initial event of the Arboretum project but also as a significant symbolic gesture, commemorating America's 250th anniversary. The choice of a pine tree is particularly strategic, offering continuous aesthetic appeal throughout the year. Its evergreen nature ensures that it remains visually impactful across all seasons. The Arboretum's plan envisions this tree as a focal point that can be decorated during holiday periods, thus enhancing the Arboretum's festive ambiance.

Mr. Burik, during the meeting, discussed the potential of the tree to become a central feature of community celebrations. Its presence not only marks the commencement of the Arboretum's development but also serves as a tangible milestone in the project's progression. The use of a pine tree is particularly fitting for its ability to maintain visual interest and serve as a beacon during special occasions, offering the community and visitors a consistent reminder of the project's intent and the broader celebrations linked to the anniversary.

This tree planting also aims to kick off a series of developments within the Arboretum, setting the stage for further enhancements to the landscape. By starting with such a meaningful gesture, the Commission hopes to inspire ongoing community involvement and interest in the Arboretum's growth and evolution, aligning with the larger objectives of environmental stewardship and community engagement.

3. **Expanding tree planting initiatives:** Focused on broadening Avon's green landscape, this expansion is particularly concentrated on two key areas:
 - **Near the new City Hall location:** Positioned at the old Avon Village School on Detroit Road, this site has been strategically chosen to enhance both aesthetic and environmental qualities in the surrounding municipal area. Mr. Burik, during the meeting, highlighted that the City's initiative to congregate municipal buildings—encompassing the new City Hall, fire station, and police station—offers a significant opportunity for tree planting. The intent is to create a more pedestrian-friendly and visually appealing environment, aligning with urban design goals to enhance the district's environmental framework.
 - **In the vacant lot located directly across from the new City Hall:** Despite the presence of a sewer easement, which typically presents challenges for development, this area still holds potential for incorporating additional trees to improve urban greenery. Mr. Burik proposed filling this space with a variety of trees, which aligns with a broader vision to mitigate the 'missing tooth' phenomenon often seen in urban landscapes. Filling such gaps with trees not only improves the visual allure but also utilizes unbuildable land effectively. Additionally, Mr. Burik suggested that this initiative could coincide with America's 250th anniversary celebration, proposing to name it the 250th America's Anniversary Park, thus infusing it with historical significance and fostering communal spirit.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges informed the Commission about the ODNR Conservation Teen Advisory Council, which is open to applicants for students entering grades 9-12 for the academic year 2026-27. She encouraged participation from Avon students, highlighting that the previous year saw the appointment of three students from Bay High School, thus expressing the desire to see a similar representation from Avon students in the upcoming term. The opportunity provides a platform for students to actively engage in

conservation efforts and contribute significantly to environmental initiatives, aligning with the educational and community-oriented goals of the Avon Tree Commission. The participation of Avon students would not only bring valuable representation but also potentially influence local conservation projects and strategies, fostering a deeper connection with the community's ecological ambitions.

Ms. Berges shared insightful information regarding the Spring Grove Cemetery located in Medina. Not only does this site function as a cemetery, but it is also recognized as an Arboretum, boasting over 600 trees and more than 80 different species. Ms. Berges highlighted the potential benefits of the Avon Tree Commission visiting the Spring Grove Cemetery, as it stands as a nearby example of an Arboretum that could serve as a learning resource.

In proposing the visit, she emphasized that the diverse array of tree species and the well-maintained Arboretum setting offer a valuable reference point for the Commission. The goal is to garner practical ideas and inspirations valuable in the planning and development of Avon's own Arboretum. By engaging with an established Arboretum, the Avon Tree Commission could gain insights into effective management practices, species selection, and the overall integration of trees within a landscape that also serves other public functions. Such an experience could inform decisions regarding Avon's Arboretum, ensuring the Commission can create a similarly diverse and sustainable environment that meets both aesthetic and ecological goals for the community.

Mr. Boccabella was absent.

Ms. Engelmann had no comments.

Ms. Johnson was absent.

Mr. O'Donnell presented a detailed overview of his work involving a tree canopy analysis using iTree tools, a sophisticated online platform designed for assessing large regions of tree coverage. In this analysis, he highlighted several crucial insights:

- **Data Update Needs:** He noted that the existing data, dating back to 2021, is outdated. Despite providing essential metrics like carbon sequestration and air pollution removal, this older dataset no longer represents current conditions.
- **Access to New Data:** Mr. O'Donnell has identified a more recent dataset from 2023 available through the USDA Department of Forestry. He conveyed the limitations of the new data, primarily its format—a 6-gigabyte file encompassing the entire continental United States. Due to its size, efficient usage requires downloading and processing substantial amounts of data, which poses logistical challenges for individual users.
- **Solutions and Suggestions:** Recognizing the need for updated and localized data, discussions arose among the Commission Members about potential solutions. They considered leveraging the City's resources to download the data onto a designated computer. This approach would allow centralized access to the extensive information, facilitating its analysis without burdening personal computer systems.
- **Enhanced Utility:** The availability of such comprehensive data could prove invaluable for future planning and assessments. Updated insights would support ongoing efforts to preserve and expand Avon's tree canopy, enhance environmental benefits, and provide a more accurate picture of local ecological dynamics.

Through these concerted efforts, Mr. O'Donnell and the Commission aim to harness the full potential of advanced data resources to guide Avon's urban forestry initiatives effectively.

Ms. Pajak was absent.

Mr. Smith had no comments.

Mr. Traxler was absent.

Ms. Wetzig had no comments.

Mr. Varga had no comments.

AUDIENCE:

Leo Wible (3450 Long Road) proposed his expertise to support the Commission in mapping the tree canopy distribution and cataloging tree species within Avon:

- He brings substantial experience with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) programs and remote sensing, specifically utilizing federal satellite data to achieve comprehensive analyses.
- Mr. Wible elaborated on a research project he undertook, focusing on the land cover of Avon, which provides insights up to the year 2024. This project demonstrates his capability to handle significant environmental data, which could immensely benefit the Commission's objectives.
- Additionally, he suggested the application of satellite data to facilitate the mapping of various tree species present throughout the City, offering a broader understanding of the local ecosystem.
- Mr. Varga responded affirmatively, indicating he plans to coordinate with the Mayor to find effective ways to incorporate Mr. Wible's expertise into the Commission's ongoing projects.

Paul Burik (3724 Carleen Avenue) provided valuable insights on the existing tree requirements outlined within the City Code, highlighting several key issues:

- He noted that the City Code includes several requirements, such as mandating the presence of front yard trees and the inclusion of tree islands in parking lots. Specifically, for land development, there is a stipulation mandating a minimum number of trees based on development size, such as the requirement on parcel development to plant a certain number of trees proportional to the site area—like the example he pointed out where a development on parcel 611 would require the planting of 15 trees. Despite these stipulations, he expressed concern that these requirements may not be consistently enforced. This lack of enforcement could result in developers not adhering to the Code, which contributes to inconsistencies and potential gaps in the City's urban greenery. Mr. Burik highlighted the need for systematic enforcement to encourage tree planting and maintenance, thereby ensuring a harmonious and sustainable urban landscape that aligns with Avon's ecological and aesthetic goals.

The Commission actively acknowledged the enforcement challenges pertaining to tree planting and urban development codes. The discussion revealed a shared recognition among Commission Members of the need for systematic enforcement to ensure that developers comply with these provisions, which are vital for maintaining Avon's ecological and aesthetic integrity. In response, the Commission detailed their ongoing efforts to address these compliance issues. They emphasized their commitment to enhancing urban landscape improvement by actively engaging participants and seeking to establish more stringent enforcement protocols. This proactive approach is aimed at fostering a harmonious urban environment that

aligns with Avon's ecological goals and maintains the community's green spaces in accordance with the City's established environmental codes.

ADJOURN: 8:10 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission, and the vote was: Ms. Englemann, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”.

The vote was 4 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

The Chairman announced that the next meeting of the Avon Tree Commission is
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

PASSED: _____

SIGNED BY: _____
Matt Smith, Chair ProTem

ATTEST:

Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council