

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, March 11, 2026
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Mr. Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Megan Engelmann; Mary Johnson; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); Matt Smith; John Traxler; Liesa Wetzig; Chair, Richard Varga (non-voting Member).

Others in Attendance: Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

Absent - Olivia Pajak (non-voting Student Member); John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026**

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Johnson to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, February 11, 2026, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes".

The vote was 7 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

UPDATE ON THE TREE COMMISSION POWER POINT

Ms. Johnson

Ms. Johnson reported that she met with IT staff last week to discuss updating the Tree Commission PowerPoint presentation, which is over a year old and needs refreshing. Several additions and amendments were discussed, including adding a column about Student Members and talking about the Student Members, the Land Disturbance Ordinance, the Gold Leaf Award they just received, the work being done on Tree Campus USA, and progress on the Traxler Family Arboretum. She mentioned including activities from 2025, such as hosting the award ceremony, receiving grant money for bike racks, and the repair station and e-bike charging stations installed with grant funding.

Ms. Johnson indicated she is continuing to review the presentation for additional ideas and welcomed suggestions from other Commission Members. She suggested that if anyone has thoughts about something that should be added, they should feel free to contribute. Mr. Varga confirmed that Mr. Jenkins, the City's IT specialist, is ready to work with the Commission again on this project and that a discussion with Mr. Jenkins was held. Mr. Varga mentioned he has not communicated with Mr. John R. Gasior (son of the Law Director), who handles voice-over work, but plans to do so once they gather more information.

Mr. Varga also noted that Ms. Kish would be willing to assist with this endeavor. He expressed optimism that the updated PowerPoint would be impressive and valuable in showcasing their progress to City Council. Furthermore, he acknowledged that within a year and a half, they've accumulated quite a bit of information to add to the PowerPoint, emphasizing its importance in demonstrating the Commission's efforts and accomplishments.

UPDATE ON TREE CANOPY PROJECT

Mr. O'Donnell & Mr. Wible

Mr. O'Donnell and Mr. Wible provided a comprehensive update on the Tree Canopy analysis project, offering insights into their significant progress and methodologies. Mr. O'Donnell, in his detailed

explanation, outlined their use of remote sensing data and satellite imagery aimed at analyzing land cover changes over extended periods. By utilizing frequencies of light that reflect off different surfaces, they are able to classify various surfaces as vegetation, impervious surfaces, and other land types. These frequencies are crucial in distinguishing between different types of land cover and understanding the broader landscape dynamics.

Mr. Wible, during his presentation, introduced several visual materials. He displayed an animation showing land cover changes in Avon, specifically between 2002 and 2010. This animation, which was created using Landsat 7 data and processed in QGIS, captured significant changes during this 8-year span. The presentation was meticulously designed to cover timeframes from May through September to ensure it captured the maximum tree cover, thus providing a more complete representation of seasonal forestry changes.

In addition to the animation, Mr. Wible presented a series of charts that illustrated canopy cover changes from 1995 to 2025. These charts conclusively showed a negative trend in forested cover over this 30-year period, a concerning indication of significant forestry depletion. He further expanded on his findings by presenting data on urbanized land cover. This data highlighted noticeable increases in areas covered by roads, parking lots, significant buildings, and construction sites. The analysis showed an approximately 20 percent increase in urbanized land from 1995 to the year prior, reflecting ongoing urban sprawl.

Adding depth to his presentation, Mr. Wible also shared a ternary diagram (a triangular diagram) that plotted the distribution of various land cover types – forested, agricultural, and urbanized – over the years they had analyzed. This diagrammatic representation was crafted to give the Commission a clearer understanding of land cover dynamics over time.

Moreover, Mr. Wible explained his plans to produce a 30-second animation which vividly illustrates land cover transitions from 1995 to 2025. His goal is to utilize this animation as part of a comprehensive presentation tailored for both the Mayor and the City Council. The presentation aims to vividly demonstrate the extent of tree cover loss over time and substantiate the Tree Commission's efforts in advocating for increased tree planting across the City.

Mr. O'Donnell contributed to the update by noting that they have gathered data for every year since 1995. He elaborated that the team is currently finalizing the analysis for the remaining years between 2013 and 2016. Once completed, these findings will provide a fully continuous data set for the entire span being studied.

Mr. Wible kindly extended an offer to provide hard copies of the visual materials. He also proposed emailing electronic files to all Commission Members, facilitating broader distribution and promoting awareness across the Commission.

Emphasizing the significance of this undertaking, Mr. Varga expressed his intent to present the completed project to the Mayor. He mentioned he has discussed this initiative with the Mayor earlier that day, underlining his commitment to proceed once the analysis reaches completion. In doing so, Mr. Varga reiterated the fundamental importance of presenting substantive evidence to the City Council about the ongoing tree loss. He shared an anecdote from about six years ago when the Commission initially proposed aligning the City as a Tree City USA. During that time, he encountered notable pushback from several Council Members who had a negative view of trees due to past grievances, illustrating the challenges in gaining broad support for the project.

Reflecting on the contribution of Mr. Wible, given his extensive remote sensing work with the Commission, he formally requested consideration for joining the Tree Commission as a non-voting Member. Mr. Varga, recognizing the valuable expertise he brings, suggested Mr. Wible engage with the

Traxler Arboretum Committee. This involvement would inevitably include invitations to future Tree Commission meetings, enabling him to continue contributing his valuable insights and data-driven expertise.

UPDATE ON ARBOR DAY 2026

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga reported that preparations for Arbor Day 2026 are progressing well, with most elements established. The Commission has obtained permits and coordinated with various participants including the 811 utility marking service, petting zoo, jazz band for the National Anthem, and the Metro Parks. Mr. Varga expressed his intention to involve the Police and Fire Departments since they are located nearby, specifically exploring the possibility of having the ladder truck available for children to climb, though he acknowledged uncertainty about the legal logistics of such an activity. He noted that Fire Department personnel had shown up at a previous Arbor Day event without invitation and allowed children on their truck.

Further discussions around the event were held with Willoway Nurseries about handouts they want to distribute at Arbor Day. Mr. Varga suggested they attend the event to present their materials directly. He welcomed additional ideas for involving High School students beyond the existing activities for younger children, such as the scavenger hunt. In response to this, Ms. Engelmann suggested organizing "walk and talks," which would be guided tours through the walking trail in the wooded area. Commission Members during these walks could point out important native species, discuss ongoing improvements like the rain garden, and educate participants about actions they can take in their yards to help with runoff and other environmental issues.

Mr. Varga shared his experience with a tree walk in Buford, South Carolina, which featured identified trees throughout the walk with a map and educational booklet explaining tree species and their uses. He suggested this could create a lasting educational legacy that would continue to serve the community even after current Commission Members are no longer serving. Mr. Varga noted the potential for a similar initiative in Avon, advocating for a project that would include tree education while enabling community engagement in environmental initiatives for future generations.

Ms. Engelmann also proposed adding a craft activity for kindergarten through fifth-grade students, either in addition to or instead of tattoos, noting that many children who attended previous events wanted more interactive activities. Ms. Engelmann emphasized catering to the younger audience's enthusiasm for interaction, suggesting crafts as a way of educating them in an engaging manner. The discussion included suggestions for having High School students help with younger children's activities, ensuring they have a role and encouraging a mentorship dynamic.

In a reflective moment, Mr. Varga referenced his recent reading of "The World Without Us." He discussed how the book examines nature's recovery in areas where human presence has been removed, such as in examples like the Korean Demilitarized Zone. This book influenced his thoughts on the importance of environmental education, emphasizing the need to enlighten the public on not just plant-related topics, but broader ecological issues. He highlighted the significant role of education in raising awareness about persistent challenges such as plastic pollution and the necessity for proactive efforts in environmental restoration. Mr. Varga reflected on progress made over decades, paying particular attention to improvements like the cleanup of rivers, which once faced devastation to the extent of catching fire. This exemplified the importance of striving for a sustainable future, advocating for a balance between urban development and environmental conservation.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges reported that the Tree Commission webpage was updated to reflect the Commission's receipt of the 2025 Tree City USA Award and the Growth Award, which acknowledges their continued efforts in urban forestry management and conservation. She highlighted the mention of the prestigious Gold Leaf

Award on the webpage, which is a testament to the Commission's dedication to tree planting and care initiatives. Ms. Berges took the opportunity to remind Commission Members about the impending application deadline for membership in the Ohio Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), which was due that evening. She reassured the Commission Members that the City would cover the \$20 cost associated with email newsletter subscriptions as a part of this membership, while noting that student memberships were offered complimentary, making it a win-win situation for eligible applicants. She urged interested Commission Members to ensure submission of completed forms to Ms. Kish before leaving the meeting premises. In addition, Ms. Berges reiterated the importance of capturing the moment by reminding everyone to take a group photograph for the newsletter prior to their departure, thereby promoting the team's collective achievements and fostering community engagement.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann provided an update on community outreach initiatives that were discussed in detail during the previous month. In her efforts to identify opportunities for the Tree Commission to engage with the community, she undertook a thorough review of the Avon calendar. However, she discovered a scarcity of scheduled events that could facilitate their participation. To counter this, she proposed a proactive approach by posting on Avon's larger informal social media groups. Her intention was to extend an offer for the Tree Commission's participation in various neighborhood, school, or organizational events. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining professional standards consistent with the City organization's reputation, she sought feedback from the Commission Members on the advisability of this approach, particularly whether it would be appropriate for her to post as herself while clearly identifying her affiliation with the Tree Commission.

In discussing specific outreach opportunities, Ms. Engelmann suggested several potential avenues, including establishing contacts with local schools, participating in the Garden Club's annual plant sale in May, engaging in the Fishing Derby, and contributing to PTA events. She emphasized the strategic value of aligning Commission Members' unique skills and expertise with relevant events. For instance, she proposed that those who are comfortable working with children could manage youth activities, while Commission Members well-versed in tree-related information could effectively engage with adult learning audiences. Reflecting on past experiences, she referenced their involvement in the previous year's Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony. Despite the challenges posed by cold, windy weather conditions during that event, she noted the potential benefits of exploring indoor alternative engagements, such as the Fishing Derby.

Ms. Engelmann's insight into different outreach venues underscored her commitment to fostering community interaction and engagement. The Fishing Derby, in particular, she highlighted as an opportunity to connect with both children and adults in a more accommodating environment, contrasting it with the harsh weather conditions faced during outdoor events like the Tree Lighting Ceremony. Through this multifaceted approach, she aimed to enhance the visibility and impact of the Tree Commission's initiatives, ensuring that various segments of the Avon community are aware and educated about their objectives and activities.

Ms. Johnson had no comments.

Mr. O'Donnell had no comments.

Ms. Pajak was absent.

Mr. Smith had no comments.

Mr. Traxler had no comments.

Ms. Wetzig had no comments.

Mr. Varga reported receiving three recent emails from residents concerning tree lawn trees, with particular focus on requests for alternatives to Bradford Pear replacements. These inquiries point towards a broader pattern, as he noted that 98 percent of resident questions revolve around either dead trees situated in neighbors' yards or issues related to tree lawn trees. In one of the emails, a resident inquired about whether trees would be distributed at any other time of the year apart from Arbor Day. Mr. Varga responded by clarifying that tree distribution is confined to the annual Arbor Day event, and there are no provisions for distributions outside of this occasion.

Mr. Varga underscored how these inquiries illuminate the significance of the tree canopy project, which aims to effectively demonstrate the ongoing tree loss within the City. The deteriorating condition of Bradford Pear trees, coupled with the lack of replacements by residents, emphasizes a pressing need for sustained tree replacement efforts. He stressed the role of the Tree Canopy Project in bringing tangible evidence to City Council, showcasing the importance of maintaining and expanding the City's tree canopy. This effort is vital in reinforcing the Commission's mission to preserve the urban forest landscape and to promote environmental sustainability throughout Avon.

AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

ADJOURN: 8:03 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Wetzig to adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission, and the vote was: Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes": Ms. Berges, "yes".

The vote was 7 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, April 8, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council

PASSED: _____

SIGNED BY: _____
Rick Varga, Chair

ATTEST:

Anne Kish, Assistant Clerk of Council