

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, May 13, 2026
At 7:30 p.m.**

The Chairman Mr. Varga, called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

PRESENT:

Commission Members: Mary Berges; Alex Boccabella; Megan Engelmann; Collin O'Donnell (non-voting Student Member); Olivia Pajak (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 - Mary Johnson; John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2026**

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Traxler to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission held Wednesday, April 8, 2026, and to approve said minutes as published, and the vote was: Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "abstain".

The vote was 5 for, 0 against and 1 abstention and the Chair declared the motion passed.

UPDATE ON ARBOR DAY 2026

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga led a review of the Arbor Day 2026 planning checklist, noting that the opening ceremony arrangements were largely in place. He acknowledged that, with Ms. Johnson absent, certain items related to the opening table and giveaways were pending her input.

Children's Educational Books: Mr. Varga raised the question of whether the Commission should move forward with purchasing children's tree-themed books from the International Society of Arboriculture. Mr. Smith expressed strong support, suggesting that sets of the four recommended books be donated to each elementary school in the City and to the Avon Public Library, and that additional copies could be used as raffle prizes at Arbor Day. Ms. Berges agreed the suggestions were worthwhile, noting that budget constraints would likely preclude giving a book to every child individually. The books were reported to be priced at approximately \$13–\$15 each. Mr. Varga indicated he and Ms. Berges would review available funds and proceed accordingly.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Berges to look into purchasing children's educational books from the International Society of Arboriculture and the vote was: Mr. Boccabella, "yes"; Ms. Engelmann, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes".

The vote was 6 for and 0 against and the Chair declared the motion passed.

Scavenger Hunt: Student Member Mr. O'Donnell noted he was still familiarizing himself with how the scavenger hunt was conducted in prior years, and requested access to last year's materials in order to help plan this year's event. It was also noted that additional prizes would need to be sourced for the scavenger hunt, as existing supplies were running low. Mr. Varga encouraged early planning, noting that the

Commission was currently at a stage equivalent to where they were during the awards ceremony at this same point last year.

Food and Beverages: The Commission reaffirmed its decision from the prior meeting to serve pizza, which was noted as having worked well operationally and avoided the complications of on-site cooking under Health Department regulations. The group briefly discussed adding a beverage option beyond water, with suggestions including lemonade or apple juice for the children. It was confirmed that existing inventory included 280 three ounce cups, three boxes of napkins totaling 840, and 210 paper plates, meaning no additional purchases in those categories would be necessary. The Commission also noted 200 tattoos remaining in inventory.

Tree Giveaway: Mr. Varga confirmed that the tree giveaway would follow the same format as last year, which was well-received. Mr. Traxler noted he would need to know which tree varieties were being offered in order to prepare the corresponding sign-up sheets. The specific varieties were to be determined.

Other Activities: Most demonstrations and entertainment elements were noted as substantially arranged. The question of whether a rain barrel demonstration would be included remained open. The Commission noted that Ms. Johnson had likely been in contact with the Lions Club regarding assistance with beverage service, though this could not be confirmed in her absence.

UPDATE ON THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga reported that the Commission had received a preliminary site plan from a landscape architecture firm engaged by the City to develop the Traxler Arboretum. The Mayor has requested that the Commission review the plan and convene a follow-up meeting in the Caucus Room with the landscape architects to present the Commission's collective feedback and ideas.

Mr. Traxler offered a detailed review of several concerns regarding the proposed plan, drawing on his direct familiarity with the property:

- **Drainage and the Boardwalk Overlook (Area 3):** Mr. Traxler emphasized that this area is historically very wet, with established drainage patterns that predate current development—originally related to grape cultivation in Avon. He cautioned that constructing a walkway across this zone would disrupt the existing drainage infrastructure. He further noted that this area is particularly valuable as wildlife habitat, providing refuge for deer, turkey, blue herons, and other species.
- **Creek Walk Alignment:** Mr. Traxler suggested the more natural and appropriate route for a trail would follow the creek itself, particularly given the presence of sandstone cliffs up to 20 feet tall in certain areas, which he characterized as a significant scenic feature worth preserving.
- **Area 9 (near the Cahoon House):** Mr. Traxler noted this wide stretch of creek has remained undisturbed, which he viewed positively, as it supports species such as blue herons that are sensitive to human activity.
- **Parking Area (Area 8):** Mr. Traxler noted that the proposed parking location sits atop a spring, making that specific placement impractical. He recommended the parking area be shifted away from the creek to avoid the wet conditions in that zone.
- **Trail Surface and Access (Areas 1 and 6):** Mr. Traxler raised questions regarding the designation of a shared-use asphalt path (Area 1) that passes through a flood-prone section of the property, suggesting it would not function reliably as a vehicular access route. He identified an unlabeled road near Area 6 as the more suitable entry point from that direction.

Mr. Varga also raised the idea of potentially incorporating a natural spring located on adjacent property into the Arboretum's interpretive features—perhaps as an educational exhibit highlighting natural spring water. Mr. Traxler confirmed the spring flows consistently and noted that area residents historically drank from it.

The discussion broadened to include trail naming and wayfinding. Student member Ms. Pajak suggested measuring the total trail distance and incorporating distance markers, proposing that the main loop could potentially be marketed as a mile-long walking loop. Other members supported this idea, referencing examples at Schwartz Road Park and the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio. The concept of naming individual trails after local wildlife—such as turkey or heron—was raised as a way to add interpretive character to the park.

Mr. Varga encouraged all members to review the landscape plan and, if possible, walk the property over the coming two weeks to note their observations, which would then be compiled and shared with the landscape architects ahead of the planned follow-up meeting.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges announced that on Monday, May 18, at the City Council Work Session, Student Members Mr. Collin O'Donnell and consultant Mr. Leo Wible, along with Mr. Varga, would be presenting the tree canopy analysis work previously shown to the Commission. She encouraged members to attend and show their support.

Mr. Boccabella had no comments.

Ms. Engelmann had no comments.

Ms. Johnson was absent.

Mr. O'Donnell asked whether members had reviewed the slideshow distributed following the last meeting and invited any feedback or suggested improvements. No substantive concerns were raised.

Ms. Pajak had no comments.

Mr. Smith had no comments.

Mr. Traxler had no comments.

Ms. Wetzig had no comments.

Mr. Varga reported that he had been coordinating with a contact in the City of Chagrin Falls, which is conducting a street tree inventory with the participation of high school students. He noted he and Mr. O'Donnell were developing an approach for a similar inventory in Avon, with the primary objectives of cataloguing tree species and sizes in the tree lawn, and measuring tree lawn widths to inform species selection for future plantings. He expressed a reservation about the City's existing recommendation list, which includes oak trees for tree lawns—noting that while oaks offer longevity and superior carbon sequestration, their ultimate size poses a risk in residential settings where structures are in close proximity. He cited a historical example in Bay Village where silver maples planted in tree lawns in 1954 ultimately caused structural damage to several homes. Mr. Varga also reported that he had recently responded to inquiries from residents in the Highland Parks subdivision regarding tree lawn trees, and had personally delivered planting recommendations to those homeowners.

Mr. Varga additionally described a proposed educational tree walk modeled after one he experienced in Beaufort, South Carolina, organized by the Beaufort Garden Club. The walk would involve a mapped route through the aquatic area of the City—which he noted has among the greatest species diversity in Avon—with labeled trees and interpretive signage covering not only trees but also larger shrubs and bioswales. He indicated that informational signage about the bioswales and the species within them would be a valuable long-term addition to the area.

AUDIENCE:

There were no comments from the audience.

ADJOURN: 8:04 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. Engelmann, “yes”; Mr. Smith, “yes”; Mr. Traxler, “yes”; Ms. Wetzig, “yes”; Ms. Berges, “yes”; Mr. Boccabella, “yes”.

The vote was 6 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, June 10, 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