

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Avon Tree Commission
Held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building
On Wednesday, July 8, 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; Alex Boccabella; Megan Engelmann; Mary Johnson; 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 - John Gasior, Law Director

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AVON TREE COMMISSION HELD
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2026**

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, June 10, 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 ARBOR DAY 2026

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga reported that he will be attending the International Society of Arboriculture conference in Detroit, Michigan on August 10, 2026. He indicated that this conference typically offers a wide variety of new materials, pamphlets, and educational handouts relevant to Arbor Day planning. He has a tentative purchase order in place with the City but chose to defer any purchases until after the conference, as the event often surfaces new and useful items. Given that Arbor Day is approximately two months away, Mr. Varga expressed confidence that there is sufficient time to act upon returning.

Mr. O'Donnell presented an update on the Arbor Day scavenger hunt. Reflecting on feedback that last year's version was geared toward younger children and lacked challenge, he has developed a more advanced version. Mr. O'Donnell identified eight distinct tree species within close proximity to the park trail and created a corresponding chart. The proposed format would provide participants with a clue for each tree; participants would then locate the tree, identify the species using their phone or prior knowledge, and match it to a numbered marker. The Commission discussed retaining the simpler version of the scavenger hunt as an option for younger children, with discussion of an appropriate age breakpoint. The Commission responded positively to the two-tiered approach.

Ms. Wetzig also noted that they would hold off on ordering scavenger hunt prizes until Mr. Varga returns from Detroit, Michigan, as conference materials may include suitable prize options. Mr. Varga confirmed he would bring all relevant information to the August 12 meeting upon his return.

UPDATE ON THE TRAXLER ARBORETUM

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga opened the discussion on the landscape architect's plan for the Traxler Arboretum, copies of which were distributed to Commission Members, attached as Exhibit A. He noted that the Mayor wishes

to present this plan to City Council, and that the landscape architect is awaiting final input from the Tree Commission before proceeding. The next City Council meeting was confirmed to be July 13, 2026.

Commission Members offered the following comments on the plan:

Ms. Pajak suggested that the trail near the High School be made more prominently marked or enticing, noting that it represents an important focal point for students but is not clearly highlighted on the current map.

Mr. O'Donnell raised the question of a spring located beneath the parking lot that had been discussed at a prior meeting, inquiring whether there had been further development on potentially using it as an educational feature. Mr. Varga confirmed that the landscape architect is aware of the spring and is taking it into consideration, though the engineering implications are still to be determined.

Ms. Wetzig indicated the plan looks good overall and suggested the possibility of incorporating benches throughout the Arboretum, noting that the outdoor classroom is positioned on the far side of the property.

Ms. Johnson, who had missed the original presentation, asked for clarification on two items in the plan: "Successional Landscape" and "Garden Allée." Paul Burik, 37245 Carleen Avenue, who was present in the audience, explained that "Garden Allée" represents a more formal approach to landscape design, characterized by linear arrangements of trees or shrubs such as those seen at institutions like the Cleveland Clinic. He noted that including such an example in the Arboretum would serve an educational purpose in illustrating formal design techniques alongside natural growth areas. Ms. Johnson also suggested the possibility of seeking sponsorships from organizations such as the Avon Lions Club to support the installation of benches.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Boccabella indicated general satisfaction with the plan. Ms. Berges stated she had nothing to add and that the plan looks great.

The Commission also viewed a rendering of the proposed pedestrian bridge for the Arboretum. Mr. Varga noted that the preferred design is a steel structure similar to bridges found in the Metro Parks, and that the same contractor who completed the Riegelsberger Road Bridge is being considered, subject to a required public bidding process. Ms. Berges confirmed that at the July 13, 2026 Council meeting, Council will vote on a resolution authorizing the City to go out for bids on the project, with the hope of installation this year.

Discussion turned to the question of how to begin physical work on the Arboretum. Mr. Varga reported that, in consultation with the Streets Department and the Mayor, there was consensus that establishing asphalt pathways should be the first priority so that the public can begin accessing the property. Mr. Traxler noted some complexity in determining exactly where to place the paved path, pointing out that the existing road alignment differs from what is shown on the plan, and that certain areas are prone to flooding. He suggested that path number 2 on the plan may be a more practical route than path number 1 given drainage conditions. The Commission acknowledged that the specific routing of the asphalt trail would need to be further defined before work commences, and that the landscape architect's presentation to City Council would incorporate this information.

DISCUSSION OF THE TREE ORDINANCE

Ms. Berges

Ms. Berges provided a summary of the Commission's ongoing work to amend Chapter 1028, which contains the City's Tree Ordinance (Ordinance No. 90-21). She reported that Mr. Varga, Mr. Smith, and herself met with the Law Director, Mr. Gasior to develop several proposed amendments.

Key changes under development include: the addition of definitions; incorporation of the Urban Forester title alongside the City Arborist wherever referenced in the Code; a new section further defining the roles and duties of the City Arborist and Urban Forester; provisions addressing the planting and removal of trees and associated permitting requirements; a new section on the preservation and removal of trees on public property; and penalties for the abuse or mutilation of public trees.

The next steps identified were to draft the changes in writing, distribute them to Commission Members for review and input, and then return the finalized language to the Law Director to be written up as a formal Ordinance for City Council's consideration.

Ms. Berges also noted two additional initiatives. First, the Commission is working to develop an informational pamphlet for distribution by the Planning Department to developers at the time of planning application submission. The pamphlet would cover tree preservation guidelines aimed at protecting the City's tree canopy, enabling planning coordinators to engage developers on tree retention and planting efforts. Second, the Commission is pursuing a requirement that all landscape plans be reviewed and approved by the City Arborist or Urban Forester prior to approval — a significant step beyond current practice. This would be similar to the architectural review that is required in the French Creek District.

Mr. Varga underscored the urgency of these efforts, citing a continuing stream of resident complaints regarding tree removals associated with the Providence Church development on Shakespeare Lane and another site near Martin's Deli. He noted that in the Providence Church situation, he was consulted only after the landscape plan had already been approved, limiting the Commission's ability to effect change. He characterized the Ordinance updates as critical to giving the Commission the tools needed to preserve trees proactively rather than reactively.

From the audience, Mr. Burik offered a comment noting that the parking lot tree requirements Mr. Varga referenced were deliberately written into the code to ensure shade in parking areas, and briefly discussed the relative merits of locust trees as urban street trees, which Mr. Varga acknowledged while noting practical concerns about their root systems.

RESIGNATION OF MEGAN ENGELMANN

Mr. Varga

Mr. Varga acknowledged the resignation of Ms. Engelmann, who is relocating to Tremont at the beginning of August. Ms. Engelmann addressed the Commission, expressing gratitude for her time on the Tree Commission and her hope that the knowledge and experience she gained would carry forward into her future civic involvement. Members offered warm farewell remarks, and Mr. Varga extended an open invitation for her to attend Arbor Day.

A motion was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Ms. Johnson to accept the resignation of Megan Engelmann, 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.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Ms. Berges reported that Aaron Crane, a City employee, was recently promoted to the Grounds Manager position and will be working with the Tree Commission to develop the Shade Tree Plan for the fall. She anticipated that work on this plan would begin within the next month or so.

Finally, Ms. Berges took a moment to commend Ms. Engelmann for her contributions to the Tree Commission. She appreciated Ms. Engelmann's efforts and creativity, which significantly impacted their work and community. Ms. Berges encouraged Ms. Engelmann to continue her involvement in civic duties as she moves to Tremont, believing that her energy and insight would benefit any community she joins.

Mr. Boccabella expressed appreciation towards Ms. Engelmann for her work and contributions to the Commission. He acknowledged the impact she had during her time as a Member and wished her the best in her future endeavors. He noted that the Avon Tree Commission and the City of Avon benefited greatly from her participation and efforts.

Ms. Engelmann expressed her gratitude to her fellow Commission Members, thanking them for having her on the Tree Commission. She shared that she truly enjoyed her time with the Commission and learned a lot from everyone. Ms. Engelmann announced her plan to move to Tremont at the beginning of August and conveyed her excitement about getting involved in the community there. She thanked everyone for their concern and support, expressing hope that the insights and experiences she gained from this Commission will benefit her in future civic engagements.

Ms. Johnson expressed her appreciation for Ms. Engelmann's contributions and remarked on the impact she had on the Commission. She learned a lot while working alongside Ms. Engelmann and enjoyed collaborating on various projects. Ms. Johnson wished Ms. Engelmann the best on her move to Tremont and encouraged her to continue her civic involvement there, emphasizing that her energy and creativity would be missed. She added that Ms. Engelmann's presence had been a valuable asset to the Commission and hoped that their paths would cross again in the future, possibly at future Arbor Day events, where Ms. Engelmann is always welcome.

Mr. O'Donnell offered his appreciation to Ms. Engelmann for her active participation and contribution to the Commission's initiatives. He acknowledged her creative input. He wished her the best in her new endeavors in Tremont, expressing confidence that she would continue to make a positive impact within her new community. Mr. O'Donnell also hoped that the experiences and insights she gained during her time on the Commission would enhance her involvement in future civic activities.

Ms. Pajak expressed her gratitude for Ms. Engelmann's contributions to the Commission, acknowledging the energy and creativity she brought to the group. She highlighted Ms. Engelmann's passion for engaging with the community through events such as Arbor Day and emphasized how her positive attitude and innovative ideas were beneficial to the Commission's projects. Ms. Pajak reiterated the sentiment that Ms. Engelmann's presence would be missed and expressed hope that Ms. Engelmann's relocation to Tremont would be rewarding and fulfilling. She encouraged her to carry forward the experiences gained from the Commission and her dedication to urban forestry as she embarks on her new chapter, confident in Ms. Engelmann's ability to make significant contributions wherever she goes.

Mr. Smith expressed his gratitude towards Ms. Engelmann, acknowledging her efforts and contributions to the Tree Commission. He noted how her creativity and dedication significantly enhanced the Commission's activities and he appreciated her involvement. Mr. Smith shared his best wishes for her future endeavors in Tremont and expressed confidence that her commitment to community involvement would benefit her new surroundings.

Mr. Traxler expressed his gratitude towards Ms. Engelmann, highlighting her contributions and the positive impact she had on the Commission. He noted the energy and creativity she brought to their meetings and expressed his appreciation for her efforts in enhancing the Commission's activities. Mr. Traxler wished her well in her future endeavors in Tremont, sharing his confidence that she would continue to make meaningful contributions in her new community.

Ms. Wetzig expressed her appreciation for Ms. Engelmann's contributions to the Tree Commission. She acknowledged the dedication and energy Ms. Engelmann brought to the projects, noting how her involvement in developing engaging community activities impacted their success. Ms. Wetzig wished Ms. Engelmann the best in her future endeavors and encouraged her to continue applying her passion for urban forestry and community engagement in Tremont. She emphasized how Ms. Engelmann's positive attitude and innovative ideas left a lasting impression on the Commission and expressed hope that her new chapter would be as fulfilling and successful.

Mr. Varga invited Ms. Engelmann to attend Arbor Day, ensuring her that she is always welcome at community events. He expressed appreciation for her dedication to the Tree Commission, noting how her creative ideas and passion for urban forestry significantly contributed to the Commission's initiatives. Mr. Varga thanked Ms. Engelmann for her service and extended his best wishes as she makes her move to Tremont. He encouraged her to continue applying her environmental knowledge and enthusiasm in her new community, confident that she would make a positive impact there as well.

AUDIENCE:

Paul Burik, 37245 Carleen Avenue, raised two points: first, he noted that the Arboretum plan is largely contingent on the construction of the proposed new road connecting the High School parking lot to Stoney Ridge Road, and asked how certain that road's construction is. Mr. Varga responded that the Mayor has assured him that all necessary land has been purchased and that engineering is the remaining step. Second, Mr. Burik asked whether it was accurate that the State had awarded the City \$500,000 for the Traxler property. Ms. Berges confirmed this is correct and clarified that the grant is specifically designated for the pedestrian bridge.

ADJOURN: 8:09 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"; Ms. Johnson, "yes"; Mr. Smith, "yes"; Mr. Traxler, "yes"; Ms. Wetzig, "yes"; Ms. Berges, "yes"; Mr. Boccabella, "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, August 12, 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