

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Town of Highland Tree Board**  
**May 18, 2023**

Time and Place of Meeting: Vice Chair Ron Jackowski called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7 PM in the second-floor meeting room at Town Hall. The meeting could be joined remotely in Microsoft Teams.

**Roll Call:**

Present: Board Members Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, Joan Roback, Richard Underkofler and Bernie Zemen at Town Hall. Jim Colias and Blane Roberts joined the meeting remotely.

Absent: Board Members Elizabeth Herrejon, Sarah Beagle, other invited employees of the Town and agencies.

**Public Presentation:** Mélina Blanc remotely presented Delta Institute's proposed Lake County Tree Planting Consortium accompanied by two PDF slides.

- Restoration of the urban canopy is a top priority in Northwest Indiana, where 7.7% of total forest area was lost between 2000 and 2016.
- Tree canopy and habitat loss is happening most rapidly in low-income designated communities that are dealing with flooding, water quality and heat island issues.
- Delta Institute will receive a 3-year \$333,344 Forest Service Federal Landscape Scale Restoration Grant to expand regional forest canopy acreage by organizing a regional Tree Planting Consortium to increase planting and forestry management capacity in Lake County.
- The Lake County Parks Department will assume a lead role in six pre-selected demonstration projects on property owned by the County.
- The project is intended to promote community education and capacity building by the Student Conservation Association planting site demonstrations; in-person trainings, a Best Management Practice (BMP) toolkit and webinar for continued tree planting care.
- A State DNR Forestry grant may be available in September for updating Highland's 2017 Tree Inventory and Urban Forest Management Plan to identify invasive species, trees now dead, and those that need substantial pruning together with a reforestation component.
- An inaugural consortium Microsoft Teams meeting at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81677499103> will be held Tuesday, June 20, 2023 from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

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

- Minutes: Bernie Zemen made a motion to approve minutes of the meeting held April 20, 2023. Blane Roberts seconded the motion; approved by unanimous consent of the members present.

**Old Business:**

a. Board Member Terms: Elizabeth Herrejon serves until her successor is appointed. Natalie Stromberg of the High School Sustainability Club was appointed to succeed Elizabeth, but she failed to apply. An invitation was sent to Sarah Beagle of Evans Tree Care urging her to apply, but Sarah also declined to apply. Consider asking the Town Council to amend the Tree Board Ordinance to enable qualified nonresident members.

b. CommuniTree Spring 2023 Plantings: Funding for the CommuniTree Grant Program is made possible through a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant awarded to the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission by the USDA Forest Service. A table presenting planting locations of 20 trees was attached to the agenda.

c. Federal Inflation Reduction Act Funds Appropriated to Forest Service: We intended to apply via the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission's CommuniTree Program for the federal IRA funds. If not, the Tree Board would apply for a \$541,000 Highland specific project. On 5/4/23, Jennifer Birchfield sent this email, "NIRPC will be very supportive of a proposal from Highland and will be happy to partner and provide a letter of support and language to reference that you are a long-term and vital partner in CommuniTree. Unfortunately, we do not have the capacity to apply on behalf of all of our many regional communities. Best of luck with your proposal." The application was due by 6/1/23 and would require a pledge from the Town Council to match 50% of the project cost. Unfortunately, the application was not submitted because the Public Works Department was unable to submit a match citing "aging infrastructure priorities". Nor were other departmental funding sources able to pledge funds by the application due date.

#### **New Business:**

a. Fall 2023 Distribution of Trees: Since we are experiencing difficulty identifying homeowners willing to request and care for street parkway trees, Public Works Operations Director Tim Gembala suggested a well-publicized tree distribution at the public works yard for homeowners to collect and plant in their yards to improve tree canopy on private property. This proposal was approved by Mark Knesek, Public Works Director. It's been successful in other Tree City USA communities. Subject to approval of NIRPC, we will request this distribution method in our grant application for CommuniTree Fall 2023 Plantings.

b. Transplanting Trees: Wednesday, June 7, 2023 from 4 to 6 pm was canceled by Jackowski to plant sugar maple nursery trees at the homes of Elizabeth Herrejon and Bernie Zemen. Another recently transplanted tree at Merkley School was vandalized.

c. Farmers Market: Board members will staff a pop-up tent Thursday, June 22 from 4-9pm at the Municipal Parking Lot, Highway & Kennedy Avenue. This is intended to acquaint the community of our endeavors, identify homeowner planting sites and recruit volunteers for our board and projects,

d. Update Board Action Plan: The Board reviewed and made these updates to its 2023 Action Plan:

#### **January 2023 – December 2023**

1. Seek Town Council appointments to update expiring Board Member terms. Done 1/23/23.
2. Become a member of the Indiana Arborist Association and participate in the IAA Annual Conference. Done 1/24/23 by Jackowski and Underkofler.
3. Cancel Board Meetings in July and December. Done 2/16/23.
4. Secure 1-2 speakers per year for educational sessions on pertinent topics. Assigned to Colias. The first community presentation was held at Highland Library 3/29/23; another is scheduled 9/27/23.
5. From the Jackowski nursery trees, secure utility locates and replace dead trees at the Merkley and Warren Schools, in parkways and street medians; plant new trees in yard locations requested by Elizabeth Herrejon and Bernie Zemen. Assigned to a weekend crew consisting of Jackowski, Underkofler, Roberts, Zemen and Colias with help from Highland Neighbors for Sustainability. 11 trees completed by 4/2/23; remaining to be planted fall 2023.
6. Decide on events in which we will participate to acquaint the community of our endeavors,

identify homeowner planting sites and recruit volunteers. Assigned to Roback as Lead.  
Park Pride Day completed 4/22/23; Farmer's Market scheduled 6/22/23.

7. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance. Assigned to Colias at Highland Christian School. Completed 4/28/23.
8. Update Unapproved / Approved Species List with photos of recommended tree species. Assigned to Jackowski (Last done for unapproved species 9/6/22).
9. Identify streets where there are open planting sites due to removal of dead trees; then survey the homeowners to inquire if they are willing to water and care for a replacement tree. Assigned to Roberts as lead with Roback for survey.
10. Maintain community partnerships with Chamber of Commerce and Highland Businesses. Assigned to Roberts as Lead.
11. Apply for available grants and keep a running tally of trees that we procure. Assigned to Underkofler.
12. Update the tree inventory for tree removals, pruning and new plantings. See Underkofler's Federal Inflation Reduction Act Funding Proposal; Snuffed 6/1/23, maybe another opportunity 9/2023.
13. Renew Arbor Day Foundation membership and share new ideas from this participation. Underkofler's membership renews 8/1/23.
14. Post a Tree of the Month & Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site. Colias posting monthly.
15. Periodic review of ordinances that need updating. Assigned to Underkofler
16. Annual idea sharing, new ideas to keep Board moving forward. All Board Members.
17. Establish a list of goals/accomplishments/key facts and publish in a media release to Gazebo Express, NWI Times and WJOB. Assigned to Underkofler.
18. Review the Action Plan and make any adjustments to assure commitment to goals and objectives of plan for the next year. Assigned to Underkofler.
19. Renew application for Tree City USA before December 31. Assigned to Underkofler.

**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.

**Community Educational Sessions:** Jim Colias is scheduling a second session at Highland Library Wednesday, September 27<sup>th</sup> featuring ISA Certified Arborist Sharon Anderson.

**Maple Tree Seeds:** Ron Jackowski demonstrated the difference between Silver and Red Maple whirlybird seeds. Silver Maple are larger than Red Maple.

**Next Meeting:** June 15, 2023.

**Adjournment:**

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

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary