

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, April 18, 2024

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7:20 PM at Town Hall in an Upstairs Meeting Room. An attempt to launch a zoom meeting was unsuccessful. As a result, Board Member Blane Roberts did not participate.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, J.T. Mackey, Arleen Sandrick, Richard Underkofler. Alex Robertson, Town Council's Tree Board Liaison; Connie Wachala, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability.

Absent: Blane Roberts and other invited employees of the Town and Agencies.

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

- Minutes: Mary Ann Brunt made a motion to approve minutes of the meeting held March 21, 2024. J.T. Mackey seconded the motion. Approved by unanimous consent of the members present.

Old Business:

- a. **2024 Arbor Day Event - Friday, April 26, 9:30 AM:** The event will be held with 41 students, staff and parents of Lincoln's Little Learners and the Kids First's Preschool that operate in Lincoln Center. Amber Horbovetz confirmed NIPSCO will donate a Lilac Tree. A Program Flyer was distributed showing Jim Colias providing opening remarks. Town Council President Philip Scheeringa will read the Town's proclamation. State Senator Dan Dernulc and State Representative Mike Andrade will provide seedlings for distribution to event participants from the Indiana DNR Forestry Nursery. Amber Horbovetz will distribute a "Right Tree, Right Place" coloring page and crayons to the students, their instructors and parents. ArborMetrics Forester Thomas Beckman will assist with an on-site demonstration about how to plant and care for a new tree and seedlings. Parks Director Trever Kinley flagged a location where the Lilac Tree will be planted near an irrigation system on the east side Lincoln Center Campus and secured 811 utility clearance for the site. Members of the Tree Board will help plant the donated tree during the event. The Parks Department will provide shovels, mulch, tables and a PA system for speaker presentations. At the conclusion of the program, members of the Tree Board and NIPSCO representatives will distribute NIPSCO "Right Tree, Right Place, Right Way" Pamphlets and seedlings to the students, their instructors and parents. On the day of this meeting, Mike Andrade posted a Facebook Notice inviting all of his District 12 residents including Highland, Munster, Griffith and portions of Schererville to stop by for a free tree seedling. He will provide another flyer showing species available on a first-come, first-served household basis and planting instructions.

- b. **NWI Tree Planting Consortium:** A Consortium Meeting was held 4/9/2024 remotely as a Microsoft Teams Meeting. Underkofler and Jackowski contributed to a presentation about the work of the Highland Tree Board, asked questions and received replies from representatives of other communities about tree care budgets, equipment and procedures. Connie Wachala and Cathy Perrin participated from Highland Neighbors for Sustainability. Board members were emailed the meeting's PowerPoint slide deck, which included hyperlinks for more information on grants and upcoming training events. Another copy was distributed with the agenda. Mélina Blanc reported, "A TreeKeeper Canopy software project is currently underway, marking significant progress in our quest to update maps utilizing various data layers. The overarching goal is to pinpoint priority planting locations. Thanks to TPC, you'll have free access to the TreeKeeper Canopy. A forester will also be available to analyze your maps, conduct site visits if necessary, and create some planting plans with specified species and exact locations for planting. These plans can serve as references for both immediate and long-term planting goals in your community depending on your needs, priorities, and capacities."
- c. **Park Cleanup Day:** Tree board members could go to Main Square for Park Cleanup Day Saturday, April 20 at 9:00 a.m.
- d. **Tree Planting and Maintenance Training:** Tree board members, Parks and Public Works Tree Care Staff are invited to a free online Tree Planting and Maintenance Training on Monday, April 22 from 9 to 10:30 am. This 90-minute online training is catered toward anyone interested in maintaining their community's urban forest. This training will be hosted by Davey Resource Group Senior Urban Forester and ISA Certified Arborist, Aren Flint. Topics include tree planting planning, planting techniques, pruning and a 30-minute Q&A. Ron Jackowski, Mackey and Underkofler will participate.
- e. **2024 NIPSCO Environmental Acton Grant:** Rich Underkofler applied on behalf of Highland Community Foundation, a nonprofit corporation, for a \$10,000 project for 200 trees to be direct mailed to Highland Homeowners, who order a 1-gallon tree online from the Arbor Day Foundation's Community Canopy Energy Saving Trees Program. The Community Foundation has pledged \$5,000 to match a \$5,000 NIPSCO Grant. The project would enable homeowner plantings in Fall 2024. *Postscript: The application was one of 86 requests submitted. Notice was received 4/22/24 the request was not selected for funding this year.*
- f. **Public Works Tree Removal and Plantings:** Ron Jackowski sent an email to board members reporting 95 trees were removed and stumps ground last month on both sides of Duluth Street from Parrish Avenue to 81st Street. More tree removals are planned in Homestead Park, areas east and south for an extensive, deep storm sewer and pump station capital improvement project scheduled over the next three years. This project will mitigate the reoccurrence of storm water overflows into the Little Calumet River. In minutes of a 3/11/24 Council Meeting Public Works Director Mark Knesek said, "Most of these trees were aging and well beyond their useful life. When the project is over, we are going to replant trees, giving everyone an opportunity to choose a nice parkway tree that's not going to raise up their sidewalks." Another Jackowski email reported the species of 25 replacement trees to be

planted this spring along Parkway Drive in follow-up to last year's water main replacement project in Brantwood Subdivision.

Discussion Topics:

- a. **Cicada Information:** Jim Colias scheduled a community education session by a DNR Entomologist about the issue of cicadas and young tree protection for Tuesday, May 21st at the Lincoln Center in Room 116 beginning at 7 PM. Notice was requested to be given in the Town Newsletter and Calendar.
- b. **Plant Blooming Tree Species:** Arleen Sandrick suggested acquiring flowering species like cherry trees for parkway plantings along north access routes into town.
- c. **Meet with Merrillville and Valparaiso Forestry Staff:** Ron Jackowski reported he will meet with Merrillville Storm Water Manager Matt Lake and Valparaiso Arborist Matt McBain to secure answers to questions he identified in the March 2024 meeting minutes about their community forestry operations.
- d. **Apprentice Arborist:** Phil Graf of Great Lakes Urban Forestry (formerly Graf Tree Care, the consultant who prepared Highland's Tree Inventory, Urban Forest Management and Reforestation Plan) sent an email reporting the Indiana Arborist Association (IAA) is receiving a \$250,000 Grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resource's Community and Urban Forestry program for an Arborist Apprenticeship and Workforce Development Program in Northwest Indiana (NWI). The apprenticeship program will be a collaborative effort with several partners in NWI including Purdue University Northwest (PNW), Purdue Extension, and the Center for Workforce Innovation who will assist in the education and training of arborists who will go on to care for trees in disadvantaged communities of NWI. The IAA is seeking employers to launch the first workforce development program dedicated to training certified arborists from underserved and disadvantaged communities in Northwest Indiana. This grant is funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry program. Underkofler replied to Graf that the Highland Tree Board is interested in hosting an arborist apprentice.
- e. **Action Plan:** The Board reviewed and updated its 2024 Action Plan.
 1. Monthly idea sharing of new ideas to keep the Board moving forward - all Board Members.
 2. Become a member of the Indiana Arborist Association and participate in the IAA Annual Conference. Completed 1/23/24 by Jackowski and Underkofler.
 3. Seek Town Council appointments to expiring Board Member terms. Completed 3/11/24.
 4. Cancel Board Meetings again in July and December.
 5. Participate in Park Pride Day – Completed 4/20/24.
 6. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance – Assigned to Underkofler; scheduled 4/26/24.
 7. Post a Tree of the Month and Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site - Assigned to Colias.

8. Attend Chamber of Commerce lunch meetings to establish community partnerships and sponsorships - Assigned to Sandrick.
9. Secure 1-2 speakers per year for educational sessions on pertinent topics - Assigned to Colias. A first session about Cicada Information is scheduled for 5/21/24.
10. Resume Zoom Meetings - Assigned to Jackowski.
11. Review whether the Approved / Unapproved Species List needs an update. Assigned to Jackowski.
12. Secure utility clearance and transplant Jackowski nursery trees. Assigned to Jackowski.
13. Participate in the Fourth of July Parade with Highland Neighbors for Sustainability to be coordinated by Mary Ann Brunt - Wednesday, 7/3/24 6:30 PM.
14. Formulate an RFP for a tree care contractor to provide pruning services that would contain specifications, a schedule for a multi-year project by geographical area, budget by year and method of compensation. Assigned to Underkofler for Town Council Budget Request.
15. Renew Arbor Day Foundation membership – Assigned to Underkofler 8/10/24.
16. Renew application for 2024 Tree City USA recognition before December 31. Assigned to Underkofler.
17. Establish a list of 2024 accomplishments/key facts and publish an Annual Report for a media release to the Gazebo Express, NWI Times and WJOB. Assigned to Underkofler.

Next Meeting: Thursday, May 16, 2024.

Adjournment:

- The meeting ended at 8:20 PM on a motion of Blunt, second by Mackey and approved by unanimous consent of the members in attendance.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary