

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, August 15, 2024

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7 PM at Town Hall in an Upstairs Meeting Room.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, Arleen Sandrick, Alex Robertson, Richard Underkofler.

Absent: Ron Jackowski, J.T. Mackey, Blane Roberts and other invited employees of the Town and Agencies.

Guest: Phil Graf, Municipal Arborist, Great Lakes Urban Forest Management

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 June 24, 2024. Arleen Sandrick seconded the motion. Approved by unanimous consent of the members present. The Board did not meet in July.

Old Business:

- a. **IAA Apprenticeship Program:** On 6/27/24, Jackowski and Underkofler participated in a meeting at the Lakefront Pavilion in Portage for those who desired to learn more about becoming a participating employer for an Arborist Apprentice. We learned Highland won't qualify because the Town does not employ a Certified Arborist.
- b. **CommuniTree Grant Trees:** An 8/7/24 email from NIRPC reported the Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant will not be finalized in time to offer a Fall 2024 tree distribution. NIRPC's Jennifer Birchfield anticipates tree distributions in Spring and Fall of 2025. Underkofler will notice to homeowners who were expecting a Fall distribution.
- c. **Mature Tree Maintenance Training:** On 8/9/24, Jackowski and Underkofler participated in a Whiting session hosted by Delta Institute for the NWI Tree Consortium. Aren Flint of Davey Resource Group led the training. She desires to receive our RFP for Tree Removal and Pruning Services. She said the arborist staff in Davey Offices in Chicago and South Bend provide these services. Aren offered to train Tree Board Members and our volunteers how to prune small diameter trees. Méline Blanc said she would inquire if Delta Institute's Forest Service Grant may be able to fund the expense of bringing Aren to Highland for this training.
- d. **State Grant for Tree Removal & Pruning Services:** On 8/12/24, The Town Council passed Resolution 2024-20 approving up to a 50% match from the General Fund for a State CUFA Grant to remove and prune trees identified as hazardous located in the downtown, parks, at the public works garage, other municipal properties and areas obstructing sight at intersections. Underkofler offered to apply for a \$25,000 grant to be managed by the Public Works Department. Phil Graf offered to prepare an update to the Tree Inventory to identify hazard trees in these areas. ***Postscript:*** On 8/15/24, Underkofler sent an email to Clerk-Treasurer Mark Herak, Public Works Director Mark Knesek and Assistant PW Director Kim Webb asking for help with copies of documents required for the application. Underkofler volunteered to prepare the grant, to serve as "Project Coordinator" and to undertake the work pro bono without

compensation, but an “Assistant Project Coordinator” had to be identified who has access to the Town’s accounting system to email copies of paid invoices, receipts, purchase orders, claim vouchers, canceled checks and bank statements to document all expenditures of grant reimbursable expense for transmittal to the IDNR grant managers. Mark Herak, Mark Knesek, Kim Webb and Deputy Clerk-Treasurer Chad Kinley all declined to accept these responsibilities. On 8/20/24, an email appeal was sent to Town Council members requesting a staff person to be assigned “Project Assistant Coordinator” duties for which no response or acknowledgement was received. The 9/4/24 grant submission deadline passed without a Highland application.

New Business:

- a. **Tree Steward Training:** NIRPC is hosting a Tree Steward training workshop on September 12 and 13 from 9 am to 3 pm at its offices at 6100 Southport Rd, Portage. Jackowski and Underkofler participated in the Tree Steward Program several years ago. Members were asked to register if available at a link provided on the agenda.
- b. **Partners in Community Forestry Conference:** This year’s Arbor Day Foundation Conference will be held at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago November 20-21, 2024. Notice and the agenda was forwarded to Board Members 8/13/24. Registration was required by August 19 before prices increased.

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.

- a. **Meet with Valparaiso Forestry Staff:** Since Ron Jackowski was absent, no report was submitted about answers to questions he identified about their community forestry operations.
- b. **Community Presentation:** Mary Ann Brunt reported she was unable to confirm a Zoom meeting led by the Morton Arboretum on a “Benefits of Trees” topic in August. Jim Colias said he would seek to coordinate a fall presentation by an Arborist from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.
- c. **Wind Damaged Limbs Overhanging Cady Marsh Ditch:** Alex Robertson forwarded an 8/15/24 email from James Robinson [mail: jrobi79789@aol.com]. “I have tried to contact everyone in Highland, including the project manager from county, in controlling limb removal caused by the recent high winds jeopardizing the ditch, and have been unsuccessful in anyone responding to my questions. No one in Highland seems to be interested either. So now I reach out to you in an effort to determine responsibility for said removal to a hazardous situation. If you are interested in viewing, or discussing, this situation, my address is 3415 Martha St., Highland, IN. My phone # is 219) 924-5234. My wife and I have lived here going on to 40 years. Thank You for taking the time to read this.” Subsequently forwarded to Mark Knesek and Tim Gembala.
- d. **Hazardous Trees:** Arleen Sandrick suggested a post on the Town’s website about how dead trees and limbs on public property can be reported to the Public Works Department.
- e. **Hessville Briar East Woods Greenspace:** A handout was distributed seeking signatures on a petition opposing a proposed “Governor’s Parkway Grand Avenue Overpass Bridge” that would remove trees in one of the last urban green spaces in Hammond, a dune woodland known as Briar East Woods. The Board was reluctant to submit comments for the Environmental impact Statement, but the members may do so as individuals.

- f. **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 in July and December – Decided 4-18-2024.
 5. Participate in Park Pride Day – Completed 4/20/24.
 6. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance – Assigned to Underkofler; completed 4/26/24.
 7. Resume Zoom Meetings - Ed Dabrowski offered to set them up 5-16-24.
 8. Post a Tree of the Month and Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site - Assigned to Colias.
 9. Secure 1-2 speakers per year for educational sessions on pertinent topics - A first session booked by Colias about Cicada Information occurred 5/21/24.
 10. Participate in the Independence Day Holiday Parade with Highland Neighbors for Sustainability coordinated by Mary Ann Brunt - Wednesday, 7/3/24.
 11. Attend Chamber of Commerce meetings to establish community partnerships and sponsorships. Assigned to Sandrick.
 12. Review whether the Approved / Unapproved Species List needs an update. Assigned to Jackowski.
 13. Secure utility clearance and transplant Jackowski nursery trees in Fall 2024. Assigned to Jackowski. Requests received: Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street.
 14. Formulate an RFP for a tree care contractor to provide pruning services. Assigned to Underkofler for future year budget requests. On 8/12/24 the Council approved up to a 50% match from the General Fund for a State CUFA Grant application, but the submission deadline passed when the Town would not appoint an Assistant Project Coordinator.
 15. Renew Arbor Day Foundation membership – Completed by 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, September 19, 2024.

Adjournment: The meeting ended at 8:02 PM on a motion of Blunt, second by Sandrick and approved by unanimous consent of the members in attendance.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary