

Highland Tree Board
Agenda for Monthly Meeting
Thursday, February 20, 2025 – 7 PM
Upstairs at Town Hall, 3333 Ridge Road

Roll Call:

Board Members: Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, John (JT) Mackey, Blane Roberts, Arleen Sandrick, Richard Underkofler. Alex Robertson is the Town Council's Tree Board Liaison. webupdates@theideafactory.us.com c/o Theresa Badovich & Robin Carlascio.

Invited Town Staff: George Georgeff, Council President; Mark Herak, Clerk/Treasurer; Mark Knesek, Public Works Director; Tim Gembala, Public Works Operations Director; Alex Brown, Superintendent, Parks & Recreation Department; Trever Kinley, Parks Director; Maria Becerra, Redevelopment Director.

Others: Doug Van Ramshorst, Highland Community Foundation; Drew Hart, USDA, Forest Service; Jennifer Birchfield, NIRPC; Rebecca Koetz, Lake County Purdue Extension Educator; Connie Wachala & Cathy Perrin, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability; Mélina Blanc, Delta Institute; Phil Graf, Great Lakes Urban Forest Management; Nina Brown & Monica Kurz, Teacher/Co-Sponsors Highland High School Sustainability Club; Joe Moore, Erosion Construction Services; Arborist Scott Polster; Dan Repay, Little Calumet River Basin Commission; Mike Repay, Lake County Commission.

Minutes: A motion is requested to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held January 16, 2025. A copy is distributed with this agenda.

Board Member Appointments: The terms of Blane Roberts and Richard Underkofler have ended. Roberts seeks reappointment; Underkofler does not. Members serve until a successor is appointed. Highland Arborist Scott Polster (Email: arborscott@sbcglobal.net; Phone 219-365-6778) has applied for the vacant position. The Town Council has not nominated, nor has new Council President George Georgeff appointed new board members.

Appointment of 2025 Officers: When a new Town Council President is selected, he/she will appoint a chair from the board members. When appointed, the chair will make a motion to appoint a Vice Chair and Secretary. J.T. Mackey expressed interest in the Secretary position.

Old Business:

a. **Update Tree Inventory:** On 2/5/2025, a meeting was held at the Public Works Department with Mark Knesek, Tim Gembala, Rich Underkofler, Phil Graf and his field staff. See the attached Contract and Project Manifest. The Project deliverables should be completed by 6/15/2025.

b. **Little Calumet River South Watershed Seedling Project:** Erosion Construction Services (ECS) has sent its form of contract to Public Works Director Mark Knesek for his signature and will limit watering sessions so that the project cost will not exceed \$15,000. Seedlings are scheduled to be planted during the week of Arbor Day 2025 from April 20 to April 25. Underkofler will be on-site to ensure the holes are dug in the appropriate locations and will be the point of contact for coordinating with volunteers.

c. **Spring 2025 CommuniTree Grant:** An application for 20 trees was submitted to NIRPC. A tree planting/care workshop and tree pickup date will occur at NIRPC, Thursday, April 10th. Board distribution to homeowners at the Public Works Yard is scheduled Saturday, April 19th from 9 to 11 AM.

d. **NIPSCO 2025 Environmental Action Grant:** Only nonprofit corporations are eligible for these grants. Highland Community Foundation does not have sufficient cash to pledge a match for this grant as in previous years.

e. **Arbor Day Poster Contest for 5th Grade Students:** Mary Ann Brunt contacted all six schools and emailed the Forestry Flyer to all the fifth-grade teachers.

f. **NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership:** Arleen Sandrick volunteered to represent the Tree Board and participated in its 1/23/2025 meeting.

g. **Griffith Tree Consortium & Park Board:** Member Daniel Perez was sent two emails asking if these groups would support a collaboration for a potential nursery and community garden at St Timothy's Episcopal Church in Griffith. No reply was received.

h. **Indiana Arborist Association Annual Conference:** Ron Jackowski and Blane Roberts participated in the January 21st 2025 IAA Conference at the Indianapolis Marriott East.

New Business: No topics identified.

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. **Tree Planting:** Select a date and time for volunteers to transplant Jackowski nursery trees at homeowner yards of Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street and Chuck Haber, 8417 Cottage Grove Avenue.

b. **Crown Point & Merrillville Tree Board Operations:** Ron Jackowski will report to the board on a meeting planned with Matthew Lake (who is a member of the Crown Point Tree Board and employed by Merrillville Public Works) about questions he identified about their community forestry operations. Phone: (219) 472-8668; E-mail: mlake@merrillville.in.gov.

c. **Action Plan:** The Board may adopt a 2025 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 1/21/25 by Jackowski and Roberts.
3. Seek Town Council appointments to expiring Board Member terms.
4. Seek Board Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary appointments.
5. Cancel Board Meetings in July and December.

6. Participate in Park Pride Day.
7. Board member distribution of CommuniTree Grant Trees to homeowners at the Public Works Yard. Scheduled Saturday, April 19th from 9 to 11 AM.
8. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance – Scheduled week of April 20 to April 25.
9. Post a Tree of the Month and Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site - Assigned to Colias.
10. Secure 1-2 speakers per year for educational sessions on pertinent topics - Assigned to Colias.
11. Attend Chamber of Commerce and NWI Urban Waters Partnership 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. Scheduled Spring 2025. Requests received: Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street and Chuck Haber, 8417 Cottage Grove Avenue.
14. Recruit new Board Members for terms expiring in January 2026.
15. Renew application for 2025 Tree City USA recognition before December 31.
16. Establish a list of 2025 accomplishments/key facts and publish an Annual Report for a media release to the Town Council, Gazebo Express, NWI Times and WJOB.

Next Meeting: Thursday, March 20, 2025.

Adjournment