

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, April 17, 2025

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

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt; Jim Colias; Ron Jackowski; Scott Polster; and Blane Roberts. Former Secretary Richard Underkofler. Council Liaison Alex Robertson.

Guests: Nicole Brown, President, Park Place Homeowner Association; Phil Graf, Great Lakes Urban Forestry, Inc.

Absent: John (JT) Mackey, Arleen Sandrick and other invited employees of the Town and other agencies.

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

- **Minutes:** Blane Roberts made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held March 20, 2025. Scott Polster seconded the motion. Approved by unanimous consent of members present.

Guest Participation: Nicole Brown of Park Place Homeowner Association asked questions and sought information about problems occurring in the parkway on 5th Street between Ridge Road and Clough Avenue. She said there is flooding despite a retaining wall. The irrigation system is exposed and creating a trip hazard. Some homeowners desire to have the trees removed. Phil Graf shared inventory images of 13 healthy trees along 5th street on his iPad. He and Scott Polster did not favor removing the trees because it would be expensive at Association expense and increase flooding. Instead, they suggested installing low ground vegetation to cover the irrigation system and absorb rainfall.

Old Business:

- a. **Tree Inventory:** Phil Graf reported the inventory of street trees and planting sites are done. About another month will be needed to inventory trees at parks, schools, town real estate, waterways, and quality control measures.
- b. **Duluth & Parrish Street Sanitary District Tree Planting:** Ron Jackowski forwarded some photos and asked Phil Graf to inspect plantings performed by a subcontractor on a Sanitary District Project. Stumps were not ground to a depth that would enable future tree planting; the nursery stock did not meet quality standards; wire baskets were not removed from their burlap bags and were left wrapped around the tree trunks; trees were planted too deep and too close together with volcano mulching; others will grow into overhead lines; three are too close to buried gas lines; another was too close to a driveway. A lady called Ron and said her arborist from Evans Tree Care in Crown Point agrees that this planting is suboptimal. Alex Robertson said he would ask Public Works Director Mark Knesek for a copy of the tree planting design plans and specifications and forward them to Phil Graf for review in preparing a report reporting the deficiencies and recommendations for resolving the problems. There may be sufficient funds in Phil's \$55,000 Great Lakes Urban Forestry contract for the time and expense to prepare the report.

- c. **Spring 2025 CommuniTree Grant:** A tree planning/care workshop and tree pickup date occurred on April 10th followed by a distribution to homeowners at Public Works on April 12 from 9-11:30 AM. Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, Blane Roberts and Underkofler showed up to manage the distribution. There were many unregistered persons who came expecting a “free” tree due to insufficient notice in the Gazebo Express. Underkofler emailed a spreadsheet presenting the distribution. Of 20 trees received, only one was not claimed at the time of this meeting. Tim Gembala will attempt to place it, or it may end up in a park.
- d. **Little Calumet River South Watershed Seedling Project:** Underkofler will meet with Joe Moore and the ECS hole digging crew on Thursday, April 24th at 9 am to assure the plantings will be at least 20 feet from the berm (levee). People assisting the ECS Crew with planting and mulching are asked to arrive by 1 pm on Friday, April 25th. Underkofler will donate the mulch. The Town’s Arbor Day event will begin at 4 PM, April 25th in the Rookery Parking Lot at North Liable Road. Catherine Perrin of Highland Neighbors for Sustainability (HNS) provided a Facebook Post, which has been posted on sites of HNS and Tree Board. Council President George Georgeff will read the Town of Highland’s Arbor Day Proclamation. The Board Chair Jim Colias will acknowledge contributions provided by Tree Board Members, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability, the Delta Institute, Joe Moore and ECS.
- e. **Highland Twilight Parade – July 3rd:** Last year the Highland Tree Board was represented on the Highland Neighbors for Sustainability Float. Mary Ann Brunt asked board volunteers to participate in the 2025 Highland Twilight Parade on July 3rd.
- f. **Review Approved/Unapproved Tree Species.** Ron Jackowski emailed an updated Approved/Unapproved Tree Species List to Board Members prior to the meeting. Scott Polster, Phil Graf and Ron will work together to make the document more “user friendly.”
- g. **Jackowski Nursery Tree Planting:** Ron Jackowski will select a date in May and secure 811 utility locates to transplant trees to homeowner yards of Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street and Chuck Haber, 8417 Cottage Grove Avenue.

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.

Action Plan: A review of the Board’s 2025 Action Plan was postponed until the next meeting.

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. Update the Approved / Unapproved Species List - Completed by Jackowski 4-14-2025, but consideration delayed for a more “user friendly” document.
4. Seek Town Council appointments to expiring Board Member and Chair terms. Completed 2-24-2025.
5. Vice Chair Jackowski and Secretary Mackey appointments. Completed 3-20-25.
6. Cancel Board Meetings in July and December.
7. Participate in Park Pride Day. Assigned to Mary Ann Brunt 4-26-2025.

8. Board member distribution of CommuniTree Grant Trees to homeowners at the Public Works Yard. Completed April 12th.
9. Organize an annual Arbor Day Week Observance – Scheduled April 25. Assigned to Underkofler.
10. Participate in the Independence Day Parade – Assigned to Mary Ann Brunt.
11. Post a Tree of the Month and Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site - Assigned to Colias.
12. Secure speakers for educational sessions on pertinent topics - Assigned to Colias.
13. Attend Chamber of Commerce and NWI Urban Waters Partnership Meetings to establish community partnerships and sponsorships. Assigned to Sandrick.
14. Secure utility clearance and transplant Jackowski nursery trees. Scheduled May 2025. Requests received: Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street and Chuck Haber, 8417 Cottage Grove Avenue.
15. Recruit new Board Members for Colias and Jackowski terms expiring in January 2026.
16. Renew application for 2025 Tree City USA recognition before December 31. Assigned to Secretary.
17. 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. Assigned to Secretary.

Next Meeting: Thursday, May 15, 2025

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:32 PM on a motion by Blane Roberts. Seconded by Mary Ann Brunt. Approved by unanimous consent of members present.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Underkofler

Richard Underkofler, Former Secretary