

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, May 15, 2025

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7:01 PM in a Town Hall Upstairs Meeting Room.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, Blane Roberts and Arleen Sandrick. Former Secretary Richard Underkofler took the minutes in the absence of Secretary Mackey. Council Liaison Alex Robertson arrived at 7:40 PM.

Absent: Board Members John (JT) Mackey, Arborist Scott Polster, other invited employees of the Town and agencies.

Guests: Connie Wachala and Cathy Perrin, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability.

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 the minutes of the meeting held April 17, 2025. Blane Roberts seconded the motion. Approved by unanimous consent of members present.

Old Business:

- a. **Tree Inventory:** Phil Graf sent an email reporting that the inventory update has been completed. About another month will be needed for quality control measures and completing the report.
- b. **Little Calumet River South Watershed Seedling Project:** On April 24 and 25, over 200 hundred seedlings were planted. Chairperson Jim Colias thanked the Board Members, the Delta Institute, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability, Joe Moore and his ECS personnel for making this a reality. Cathy Perrin submitted a report on review of the plantings along the southeast section of the project. Of 124 seedlings observed as of 5-15-25: Deer nibbled 14 sticks; 5 were not found; 3 were uprooted and replanted; 44 were leafed out; 58 had buds forming. Unopened sacks of mulch still remain along the bike trail that need to be placed around the seedlings when weather and ground moisture conditions are suitable.
- c. **Sanitary District Tree Planting:** Ron Jackowski took photos and asked Phil Graf to provide an assessment of the plantings along Duluth and Parish Street following a storm sewer infrastructure rebuild project. They found the work had issues with design and planting. Alex Robertson asked Public Works Director Mark Knesek for a copy of the tree planting design plans and specifications and forwarded them to Phil Graf for review in preparing a report reporting the deficiencies and recommendations for resolving the problems. Phil Graf sent a 4/25 report to Mark Knesek, Ron Jackowski and Rich Underkofler. The report accompanies these minutes. Derek Snyder, the Town's Arborist Engineer of NIES Engineering disagreed with some of the recommendations. Alex said work may be in progress for replacing some, but not all of the deficient trees.
- d. **Highland Twilight Parade:** Last year the Highland Tree Board was represented on the Highland Neighbors for Sustainability Float. Mary Ann Brunt asked for ideas to collaborate again in the 2025 Highland Twilight Parade on July 3rd.
- e. **Review Approved/Unapproved Tree Species:** Scott Polster, Phil Graf and Ron Jackowski are working together to make the document more "user friendly."
- f. **Jackowski Nursery Planting:** Ron Jackowski selected Tuesday, May 27 as the date to transplant tees to homeowner yards of Bernie Zemen, 2736 43rd Street and Chuck Haber, 8417 Cottage Grove Avenue. Ron will request 811 utility locates. Meet at Ron's home at 3105 Strong Street at 11 AM.

g. NWI Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Arleen Sandrick and Ron Jackowski joined the Zoom Session held April 24, 2025.

h. Community Orchard Maintenance and Care: Blane Roberts and Ron Jackowski participated in a 2-hour Delta Institute / NWI Tree Consortium training in Merrillville on May 15th. Hosted by Davey Resource Group, the session covered planning and planting a community orchard, ongoing maintenance tips, as well as orchard pest and disease management.

i. Spring 2025 CommuniTree Grant: Blane Roberts will perform a windshield survey of the trees planted by homeowners to monitor their care.

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. Specifications for Stump Removal & Tree Planting:** Jim Colias will contact Public Works Director Mark Knesek to request changes to the standard specifications of the Department for contracts dealing with stump removal and tree planting to comply with ANSI and standards of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).
- b. Fiber Optic Cable:** Ron Jackowski will contact AT&T to request mapping locations where cable will obstruct parkway planting.

Action Plan: The Board reviewed and made these updates to its 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. Update the Approved / Unapproved Species List - Completed by Jackowski 4-14-2025, but consideration delayed for a more "user friendly" document by Polster and Phil Graf.
4. Seek Town Council appointments to expiring Board Member and Chair terms. Completed 2-24-25.
5. Vice Chair Jackowski and Secretary Mackey appointments. Completed 3-20-25.
6. Cancel Board Meetings in July and December.
7. Board member distribution of CommuniTree Grant Trees to homeowners at the Public Works Yard. Completed 4-12-25.
8. Organize an annual Arbor Day Week Observance – Completed 4-25-25.
9. Participate in Park Pride Day. Completed by Brunt and husband 4-26-25.
10. Participate in the July 3rd Independence Day Parade – Assigned to 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 27, 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, June 19, 2025

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 7:56 PM on a motion by Blane Roberts. Seconded by Arleen Sandrick. Approved by unanimous consent of members present.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Underkofler

Richard Underkofler, Former Secretary



Tree Evaluation/Arborist Report

Client: Town of Highland, IN

Street Address/Location: Duluth Street between 81st Street and Parrish Avenue

Arborist: Phil Graf, ISA Certified Arborist #IL 1553-AM Municipal Specialist

Inspection Date: April 9, 2025 4-5pm

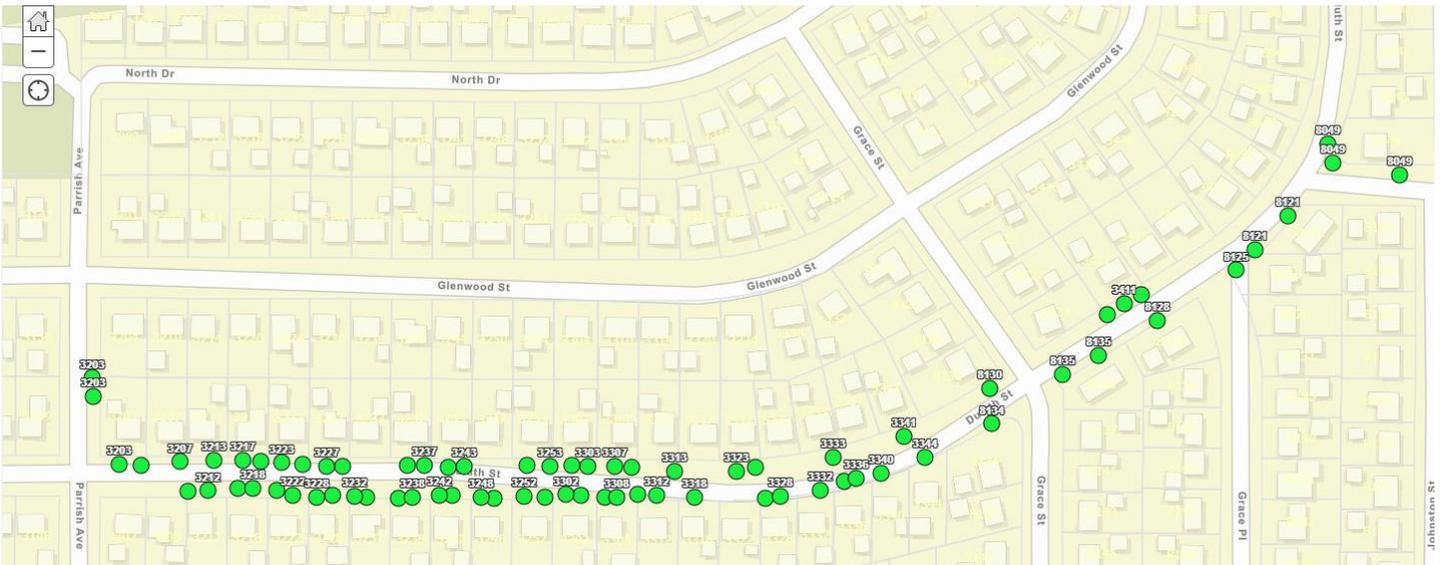
Report Date: April 25, 2025

Concern:

The Town is concerned about a recent tree planting done in the fall of 2024 as part the restoration after an infrastructure rebuild project. It was reported that the planting appeared to be sub-standard and they asked for a professional 3rd party objective assessment of the trees and the site.

Observations:

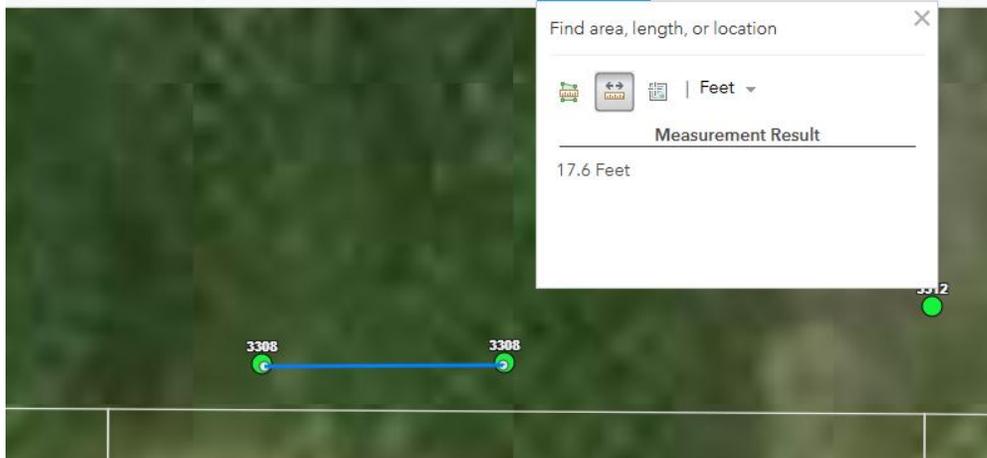
Eighty trees were planted on this stretch of Duluth Street, the distribution map of which can be seen below. Each green dot represents a newly planted tree.



The issues observed here can be broken into two categories: 1. Design issues, and 2. Planting issues

1. Design Issues

My initial general observation when first seeing the site was that the design work was not done to a typical municipal specification, specifically tree placement and spacing. Typical municipal specifications require that trees are planted 10 feet from driveways, street signs, and intersections, while also maintaining 35 feet between trees. Several of the trees violate this specification. There are several instances here where trees are within 10 feet of driveways, and others where the spacing is approximately 17-22 feet between trees.



Many of the areas between driveways are suitable for one tree but have two trees. This area would have been better suited for 40-50 trees, instead of 80.

Two trees were observed as being planted directly under power lines; one of which is already almost in contact with the wires and has not yet begun to grow. This can be seen planted on the left side of 3203 Duluth Street. It is a Sugar Maple tree, which is a shade tree that can grow to 50-60 feet tall in this setting.

Only three species of trees were planted on this site: Sugar Maple, Hybrid Elm, and Heritage Oak. This lack of species diversity does not comply with ISA Best Management Practices for diversity and species selection. For a tree planting of 80 trees, it would have been much more desirable to plant 10-15 distinct species to prevent future insect or disease issues.

2. Planting Issues

As for the actual planting of the trees, several issues were observed. First and foremost, after ocular estimates, and minor excavation, it is noted that many of the trees are too deep in the root ball they were packaged and delivered in. This is not an uncommon problem in the nursery industry today. It appears that the root flare, which should be visible at grade (or even slightly higher in clay soil) is much deeper. In the picture to the right, the root flare was identified 5 inches below the top of the root ball.



In every case observed, the burlap packaging was left on top of the root ball, which can cause a “wicking effect” leading to future water management issues. The twine that was used to wrap the burlap packaging is anticipated to girdle the trunk above the root flare (pictured below). I suspect that this twine is non-bio-degradable or “treated” green twine, which will likely not decompose in time for the tree to begin to grow, but it is hard to be sure of that. I would like to investigate that further.



I also noticed that many of the Hybrid Elm trees were not planted straight and are leaning severely. They are very loose in the ground and can be moved several inches.

Lastly, in many cases, there was an overabundance of mulch piling high above the root flare, that will hold moisture to the trunk and lead to accelerated decay.

Mitigation/Remediation Recommendations:

The first thing that should be done as soon as possible before these trees begin to grow, is to re-dig and re-locate 30-40 of them to another street or location. Others will need to be moved to center them in between driveways to maintain the spacing specifications described above. Time is of the essence, and this should be done as soon as possible before the roots begin to grow out of the packaging.

When re-planting, all trees must be planted with a visible root flare at, or slightly above, the existing grade. All burlap packaging must be removed from as much of the root ball as possible without having the root ball come apart. At the very least, the top of the root ball must have no burlap. All twine must be removed from around the tree trunks. If the trees begin to lean as a result of this, they must be staked for one full season.

Mulch should be used, encircling the trees at approximately 3-4 inches of depth, but NOT piled against the trunk above the root flare.

The trees should be watered at least once per week in the absence of one-inch of rainfall, twice per week if it is above 90 degrees. 10 gallons of water must be used for each watering. Water bags may be used. Please ask residents NOT to fill the water bags. Overwatering can be equally as detrimental to the tree as no water at all.

Conclusion:

Having not been given the specifications for the contract for which this work was performed under, I am in no way suggesting that the planting contractor be liable to perform my recommended remediations. It is up to the Town to decide whether or not to ask the planting contractor to be financially responsible to remediate these issues.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at your convenience. I will be glad to meet on site to discuss further.

Thank you,

Phillip M. Graf

Phil Graf, Consulting Forester
Great Lakes Urban Forestry, Inc.



*Please note this report is not to be considered a Tree Risk Assessment, it is only a report regarding the general condition of the subject tree. A Tree Risk Assessment can be done at the request of the City, and will require a consultation additional fees.

** Photos credit: Ron Jackowski – Highland Tree Board.

End of Report.