

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
June 15, 2023

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7:08 PM in the second-floor meeting room at Town Hall.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Jim Colias, Ron Jackowski, Blane Roberts and Richard Underkofler.

Absent: Board Members Elizabeth Herrejon, Joan Roback, Bernie Zemen, other invited employees of the Town and agencies.

Guest: Connie Wachala, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability

Public Presentation: Connie Wachala presented these topics:

- a. Invasive Species: Highland Neighbors for Sustainability (HNS) and the Highland Branch of the Lake County Library are co-hosting an invasive species workshop. It will be held August 2, 2023 at 6:30 p.m. and led by Mandi Glanz, a Regional Specialist Serving Northwest Indiana, the State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management Entity. The title of the program is **“Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas: Partnering for Conservation.”** Register on the Lake County Library Website to learn why invasive plants are a problem, how to identify and manage commonly found invasives, and how Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs) are formed to collectively combat the problem of invasive species spreading across the landscape. Rebecca Koetz emailed that she will ask Mandi Glanz to conduct a site visit to identify invasive species at sites in Highland. Rebecca wrote Mandi has a great report system to prioritize invasive plant control.
- b. CommuniTree Fall 2023 Plantings: We will seek a tree distribution at the Public Works Yard in the fall for homeowners to collect and plant in their yards to improve tree canopy on private property. HNS requests more small species for fall tree plantings in the embankment area on the hillside west of the Municipal Parking Lot at Highway & Kennedy Avenue. Jim Colias suggested and will research a suitable ground cover like INDOT uses to mitigate hillside soil erosion. If the Park Department will assume responsibility for watering the plants (perhaps with slow-release drip irrigation bladders), HNS will ask Drew Hart of the Forest Service and the Student Conservation Association to plant the ground cover and trees.
- c. NIPSCO 2023 Environmental Action Grant: A \$5,000 grant was awarded to HNS via Highland Community Foundation for an Erie Lackawanna Bike Trail Wetland Restoration Project from 81st Street to Grand Avenue. The project will restore the land to native plants, help absorb standing water, provide wildflower beauty, supply nectar and seeds to local pollinators, migrating birds and other wildlife. A supplemental Fish & Wildlife Service grant will enable retaining Stantec (an environmental services firm) to drill in the seed into the thatch after the Parks Department has completed site preparation.
- d. HNS Meetings: Highland Neighbors for Sustainability meets at the Green Witch Café, 2845 Highway Avenue on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. Tree Board members are encouraged to participate.

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

- Minutes: Jackowski made a motion to approve minutes of the meeting held May 18, 2023. Roberts seconded the motion; approved by unanimous consent of the members present.

Old Business:

a. Board Member Terms: Elizabeth Herrejon serves until her successor is appointed. Natalie Stromberg of the High School Sustainability Club was appointed to succeed Elizabeth, but she failed to apply. An invitation was sent to Sarah Beagle of Evans Tree Care urging her to apply, but Sarah also declined to apply. Underkofler suggested asking the Town Council to amend the Tree Board Ordinance to enable qualified nonresident board members such as Arborist Sharon Anderson of Evans Tree Care. Colias said he will post a recruitment flyer on the Board's Facebook site. Connie Wachala will inquire if a Highland Neighbors for Sustainability member would be interested in becoming a member of the Tree Board.

b. Transplanting Trees: A June 7th date to transplant sugar maple nursery trees at the homes of Elizabeth Herrejon and Bernie Zemen was canceled by Ron Jackowski due to a schedule conflict. These plantings will be rescheduled for Fall 2023. A recently transplanted tree at Merkley School was vandalized. Since this was the second planting at Merkley that has been damaged, the Board approved Jackowski's recommendation not to replace a tree at this site.

c. Federal Inflation Reduction Act Funds Appropriated to Forest Service:

- 1) The State DNR Forestry Department received IRA funds that it may subgrant to local governments for urban forestry projects. A state grant application may become available in September. The state grants will generally require a 50% match, but the match may be waived if an applicant proposes a project that will benefit Environmental Justice Criteria. Connie Wachala emailed a link to the EPA EJ map. A person can enter the town and click on pull-down screens for Environmental Justice Indexes as well as Socio-Economic Indicators. Two areas of Highland qualify: (1) the neighborhood east of the Erie Lackawanna Bike Trail and west of Kennedy Avenue from 81st Street to Grand Avenue (80th percentile for exposure to Particulate Matter and Diesel; 80th percentile for Low Income and Under Age 5); and (2) the Hamptons in Highland Apartment Campus north of 45th Street and west of Indianapolis Boulevard (90th percentile for exposure to Particulate Matter and Diesel; 80th percentile for Low Income). See a link at <https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>.
- 2) The scope of Highland's alternative IRA grant proposal to IDNR Forestry will be limited to retaining urban forestry management consultant services in an initial year to update to the tree inventory in the foregoing neighborhoods to verify trees removed and planted since 2017 in Highland's ESRI ARC-GIS data management system. The update would identify invasive species, trees now dead, and those that need substantial pruning together with a reforestation component. Reforestation will include tree acquisition, planting, mulching, watering and miscellaneous maintenance for three years by a qualified tree care contractor with employees with current ISA Arborist credentials.
- 3) Matching cash grants will be sought in subsequent years and geographic areas of the town from NIPSCO Environmental Grants, Highland Community Foundation and Legacy Foundation.

d. Lake County Tree Planting Consortium: Ron Jackowski and Blane Roberts are encouraged to participate remotely in an inaugural consortium zoom meeting to be held Tuesday, June 20, 2023 from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81677499103>. Meeting ID: 816 7749 9103. A copy of a proposed Memorandum of Understanding is attached with these minutes.

e. Farmers Market: Board members will staff a pop-up tent Thursday, June 22 from 4-9pm at the Municipal Parking Lot, Highway & Kennedy Avenue. This project is intended to acquaint the community of our endeavors, identify homeowner planting sites and recruit volunteers for our board, tree planting and care projects.

New Business:

a. Update Board Action Plan: The Board reviewed and made these updates to its 2023 Action Plan:

January 2023 – December 2023

1. Seek Town Council appointments to update expiring Board Member terms. Done 1/23/23.
2. Become a member of the Indiana Arborist Association and participate in the IAA Annual Conference. Done 1/24/23 by Jackowski and Underkofler.
3. Cancel Board Meetings in July and December. Done 2/16/23.
4. Organize an annual Arbor Day Observance - Assigned to Colias at Highland Christian School. Completed 4/28/23.
5. Secure 1-2 speakers per year for educational sessions on pertinent topics. Assigned to Colias. The first community presentation was held at Highland Library 3/29/23; another is scheduled 9/27/23.
6. From the approximately 13 Jackowski nursery trees, secure utility locates and replace dead trees at the Merkley and Warren Schools, in parkways and street medians; plant new trees in yard locations requested by Elizabeth Herrejon and Bernie Zemen. Assigned to a weekend crew consisting of Jackowski, Underkofler, Roberts, Zemen and Colias with help from Highland Neighbors for Sustainability. 11 trees completed by 4/2/23; remaining two to be planted in Fall 2023.
7. Decide on events in which we will participate to acquaint the community of our endeavors, identify homeowner planting sites, recruit volunteers. Assigned to Roback as Lead. Park Pride Day completed 4/22/23; Farmers Market scheduled 6/22/23.
8. Update Unapproved / Approved Species List with photos of recommended tree species. Assigned to Jackowski (Last done for unapproved species 9/6/22).
9. Identify streets where there are open planting sites due to removal of dead trees; then survey the homeowners to inquire if they are willing to water and care for a replacement tree. Assigned to Roberts as lead with Roback for survey.
10. Maintain community partnerships with Chamber of Commerce & Highland Businesses. Monthly Chamber lunch meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at a local restaurant. Check the Highland Griffith Chamber Website for the restaurant location. Assigned to Roberts as Lead.
11. Apply for available grants and keep a running tally of trees that we procure. Assigned to Underkofler.
12. Update the tree inventory for tree removals, pruning and new plantings. See Underkofler's Federal Inflation Reduction Act Funding Proposal. A State Department of Forestry IRA grant may become

available September 2023.

13. Renew Arbor Day Foundation membership and share new ideas from this participation. Underkofler's membership renews 8/1/23.
14. Post a Tree of the Month & Tree Care Tips on the Board's Facebook Site. Assigned to Colias.
15. Periodic review of ordinances that need updating. Assigned to Underkofler
16. Establish a list of goals/accomplishments/key facts and publish in a media release to Gazebo Express, NWI Times and WJOB. Assigned to Underkofler.
17. Review the Action Plan and make any adjustments to assure commitment to goals and objectives of plan for the next year. Monthly board review.
18. Renew application for Tree City USA before December 31. Assigned to Underkofler.

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. Community Educational Sessions: Jim Colias scheduled a second session at Highland Library at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September 27th featuring ISA Certified Arborist Sharon Anderson.
- b. Future Arbor Day Plantings: Underkofler suggested Johnson School for a 2024 Arbor Day Event. Jim Colias reported trees planted at Warren and Highland Christian School are not being watered. Upon noticing their deplorable condition, Jim may have saved them by watering them once a week. He suggests not planting future trees on school campuses unless the school principal and facility maintenance director sign a Memorandum of Agreement pledging to water and care for newly planted trees.
- c. Specimen Tree Leaves: Ron Jackowski demonstrated Catalpa and Linden leaves commenting upon their distinctive fragrance.

Next Meeting: August 17, 2023. The Board will not meet in July.

Adjournment:

- The meeting ended at 8:18 PM on a motion of Roberts, second by Colias and approved by unanimous consent of the members in attendance.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary