

Meeting Minutes
Town of Highland Tree Board
Thursday, March 21, 2024

Time and Place of Meeting: Chair Jim Colias called the monthly meeting of the Tree Board to order at 7:00 PM at Town Hall in an Upstairs Meeting Room.

Roll Call:

Present: Board Members Mary Ann Brunt, Jim Colias, J.T. Mackey, Blane Roberts, Richard Underkofler. Joan Roback; Former Board Member; Connie Wachala, Highland Neighbors for Sustainability. All present introduced themselves with biographical information.

Absent: Ron Jackowski, Arleen Sandrick, Alex Robertson, other invited employees of the Town and Agencies.

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 February 15, 2024. Blane Roberts seconded the motion; approved by unanimous consent of the members present.

Old Business:

- a. 2023 Tree City USA Application: Highland's recognition for the fifth consecutive year was approved 2/29/2024 by the Arbor Day Foundation.
- b. 2024 Arbor Day Event: On 2/21/24, Highland Recreation Supervisor Alyce Van Drunen sent an email, "My preschool (Lincoln's Little Learners) along with the Kids First's Preschool, would love to be part of the tree planting on April 26 at 9:30 a.m. It would be approximately 41 students all together." On 3/11/24, the Town Council approved, and Council President signed a "**Proclamation Recognizing Friday, April 26, 2024 as Arbor Day in Highland**". Thanks to Clerk-Treasurer Mark Herak for drafting the proclamation.
- c. Arbor Day Poster Contest: On 2/28/24, Jim Colias sent a letter to principals and art teachers at the public and private elementary schools in an attempt to recruit 5th grade students, art and science teachers to participate in this year's IDNR Forestry poster contest.
- d. NIRPC CommuniTree Meeting: A Planning Meeting for the CommuniTree Grant Program was held Monday, 3/18/2024 from 9:30 to 11 AM at the NIRPC Office in Portage.
- e. NWI Tree Planting Consortium: A Consortium Meeting will be held remotely as a Microsoft Teams Meeting Tuesday, 4/9/2024 from 1:00 PM-2:00 PM. Meeting ID: 252 974 646 97 Passcode: HzSwz4. Secretary Underkofler has been invited to make a presentation about the work of the Highland Tree Board.

Discussion Topics:

- a. Cicada Information: Blane Roberts asked to discuss the issue of cicadas and young tree protection. Jim Colias replied "Purdue has a variety of online information regarding cicadas. I think this is a good start: www.extension.entm.purdue.edu/cicadas/. Colias posted this information on the Board's Facebook site.

- b. Speakers for Future Meetings: After our February meeting, Ron Jackowski sent an email to board members suggesting we should invite Merrillville Storm Water Manager Matt Lake and Valparaiso Arborist Matt McBain to one of our monthly meetings to make presentations about their community endeavors. Jim Colias contacted Matt Lake by telephone and discussed with him attendance at one of our meetings. He was receptive but explained that his schedule is very busy, and he may have difficulty attending. He did say that a Zoom meeting may be an option. He asked for information as to what we wanted to discuss with him. Jim asked Ron Jackowski to share his thoughts as to how we may interact with Matt Lake and Matt McBain. What should they be prepared to discuss?

Ron replied with an email on the meeting day apologizing for his absence due to illness. "Merrillville has been a Tree City for 13 years, I think. Someone in the Town must be managing that. They, along with Hobart and Highland, are the only towns in Lake County having tree inventories.

1. Find out if they have a Tree Board, staff arborist, or if volunteers manage all their urban forestry. Matt Lake is not an arborist; he is on the town staff for stormwater management. But I like his ideas.
2. Who handles their Arbor Day events, Tree City applications, new tree procurement?
3. How do they budget for tree maintenance, what types do they do and how frequently? Highland has, I believe, a \$25,000 annual tree budget for cutting down.
4. Do they own equipment, like watering trucks, stump grinders, etc., or do they contract or rent?
5. What types of citizen education and engagement do they do to try to build enthusiasm for trees? This is Highland's greatest challenge. Many townspeople emphatically do not want trees and the town street staff don't want to plant anything that grows taller than 15 feet. Are they able to get homeowners to care for newly planted trees, watering, mulching, etc. and how do they do that?

Matt Lake and Valpo's Matt McBain (who is an arborist) are 2 nearby experts who have great enthusiasm for promoting trees in their towns both as infrastructure and as property value and quality of life enhancers."

- c. Public Works Plantings: Inquire about the number and species of replacement trees to be planted this year by contractors along Parkway Drive for a water main project; Homestead Park and areas east in north Highland for a storm sewer project.

- d. 45th/5th Street Memorial Park: Check to see if trees have died that need replacement.
- e. CommuniTree Grant Plantings: Ask the Highland High School Sustainability Club for volunteers to help elderly and disabled homeowners to collect trees when distributed at the Public Works Yard and to plant and water new spring and fall plantings.
- f. Highland Neighbors for Sustainability: Connie Wachala reported Cathy Perrin has taken leadership of HNS. Mary Ann Brunt, Tree Board liaison to HNS, reported Perrin's contact information to be Email: ctperrin@sbcglobal.net; Phone: (219) 669-0157. Connie Wachala is now the Local and Regional outreach person. She suggested we should link our Facebook page with <https://www.facebook.com/HighlandNeighborsForSustainability/> so we may keep acquainted with their endeavors. Connie recommended a book "Finding the Mother Tree" by Suzanne Simard. She suggested looking up Suzanne on YouTube for her TEDTalks that could be a good Community Educational Presentation.
- g. Highway Avenue Festivals: The Redevelopment Commission is hosting festivals on the last Tuesday of July, August and September. These could be good opportunities to showcase our endeavors, identify homeowner planting sites and recruit volunteers. Joan Roback identified a site on Amazon where an inexpensive banner could be procured if we choose to participate with a Popup Tent or in a Storefront. The Zandstra or Scheeringa Farms and Greenhouses could be alternative venues.
- h. 2024 Action Plan: Other than deciding to resume Zoom Meetings, the members decided to postpone discussion on the Action Plan since the length of the meeting was getting to be too long.

Next Meeting: Thursday, April 18, 2024.

Adjournment:

- The meeting ended at 8:23 PM on a motion of Blunt, second by Roberts and approved by unanimous consent of the members in attendance.

Respectfully submitted,



Richard Underkofler, Secretary