

Tree Advisory and Education Board

Minutes 1/14/2026

Attendees: Rita Stevens, Katie Kelleher, Mary Brown, Matt Bixenstine, Allison Welch, Sam Bonvssuto, Patrick Costello, Alex Martin, Bryan Evans

The Zoom meeting began at 6:02 p.m.

After a motion by Allison and second by Mary, the December meeting minutes were approved.

Board Change:

- Matt will be leaving TAEB, effective January 20, to assume the role of Ward 4 City Councilperson. Prior to leaving, he will send Rita a one-page document sharing any institutional knowledge he has.
- Per Bryan, TAEB will aim to fill this board vacancy quickly using pre-existing applicants.

Housekeeping Items:

- Per Rita, the TAEB bylaws are located on the [City's website](#). Please take a look to be familiar with how we operate.
- From a calendar standpoint, TAEB will continue to hold meetings on the second Wednesday of each month. However, since the second Wednesday of November falls on Veteran's Day, the November meeting will be moved to the third Wednesday – November 18.

City Council Update:

- Bryan suggested Tuesday, February 17 for the TAEB update to Lakewood City Council. Time TBD but likely at 6 pm.
- City Council's Housing, Planning, and Development Committee will be having a meeting that evening to discuss front yards plantings, which should serve as a natural synergy for our work.
- Rita offered to take the lead on developing a presentation but would like to run it by TAEB before she presents to City Council.
- Two big areas of focus:
 1. Who we are at TAEB and what our priorities are (reference the City's master tree plan).
 2. Our major initiatives including the Tree Giveaway Program, the public outreach and engagement activities we've undertaken (presence at Community Festival, contribution toward Garden Walk and Story Walk, collaboration on Cove Community Center Outdoor Intergenerational Learning Space, etc.), and our aspirations to establish the first in a series of city arboretums.

Spring Tree Giveaway:

- Rita and Michelle Nochta had a terrific conversation on January 12 with Kristen Bousquett, our new point of contact with the Arbor Day Foundation's Community Canopy Program.
- We are tentatively planning to host the Tree Pickup Event on Saturday, May 2, at Bernice Pyke Park.
- We are tentatively planning to launch our online tree portal at 10 am on Wednesday, April 8.
- As was the case last year, we are looking to offer eight species totaling 200 trees.
- We are already under contract with ADF as an ongoing program. ADF will be sending a Scope of Work agreement soon for Michelle to review.
- Rita will reach out to TAEB soon to discuss species selection. She recommends we once again focus on offering more understory trees.
- We need to provide content to Melissa Garrett by Monday, March 9, to ensure it gets included in the City's water/sewer bills sent to residents.

Sherwick Tree Steward Training Program by Western Reserve Land Conservancy

- Marco Oriella, a community member who participated in our December TAEB meeting, introduced Rita to this program. He's trained as a tree steward and assists residents with planting trees in Cleveland. He had a lot of good ideas for planting trees in Lakewood.
- Rita reached out to Tom Schreiber, Senior Manager of Community Forestry for WRLC, and pitched him on whether the existing set of tree stewards could be made available to assist with planting in Lakewood for Tree Giveaway recipients who aren't able to plant their own trees. Tom is excited to support us and believes the program has capacity. He was hoping to expand the program beyond Cleveland proper this summer anyway.
- Learn more about the program here: <https://wrlandconservancy.org/reforestourcity/sherwick-tree-steward-training>
- We would like to explore incorporating assistance with tree planting into our ADF portal on a limited basis (perhaps 20 or 30 assistance opportunities).
- Rita would like to attract some volunteers to assist us in this fashion during the Spring Tree Giveaway and then reevaluate.
- Could we also start to develop a set of volunteers in Lakewood who could help more sustainably in this manner? Having a group of trained tree stewards in Lakewood could be extremely valuable.

Mini-Community Forest Opportunities

- Per Katie, mini-community forests are a hot topic at her firm, MKSK. Her firm has a studio that does community-based, pro-bono work. We all agree this would present an exciting opportunity for Lakewood.
- Per Katie, the location would likely be important in determining involvement from her firm. Katie is not sure having it along the highway would fit her firm's mission, since they'd want it to be a space where people can visit and learn.
- Could we incorporate this into the Madison Park Master Plan, and then collaborate with Harrison Elementary School?

Arboretum Certification

- We would like to pursue ArbNet Level 1 Certification based on the work we're doing with the Cove Community Center Outdoor Intergenerational Learning Space.
- Criteria for Level 1 Certification includes a minimum of 25 different species, at least one annual public engagement event, presence of dedicated staff (the Cove staff) and oversight by an organized group (TAEB).
- Allison will draft a proposal for Level 1 certification for ArbNet. We can start small, get the certification done, and then increase this endeavor throughout the City. Every time we level up, it presents a new PR opportunity.
- Per Bryan, this would be a great step in positioning our City as a leader in urban forestry. Cove Community Center is the perfect place to start, and we could ultimately expand this concept to our parks – Madison, Kauffman, Wagar, etc.

SLF Mitigation Grant Opportunity

- TAEB was recently made aware of a grant opportunity for Spotted Lantern Fly mitigation being offered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- To support local efforts, a limited number of grants – up to \$15,000 each with an in-kind match of 10% – are available to organizations working to control SLF populations.
- Eligible projects range from removal of trees of heaven to organized community events focused on SLF control through swatting, squashing, egg mass scraping, or other approved methods.
- Learn more here: [SLF grant application form \(fillable\) 12.18.25.pdf](#)

- Here in Lakewood, we do not have many trees of heaven on public property, though there are some on the hillside of Lakewood Park and some around the railroad corridor.
- Since the grant application deadline (January 30) is fast-approaching, we will likely keep this grant on our radar for future consideration.

Additional Updates:

- The City's new Complete & Active Streets Education and Advisory (CASE) Board is aiming to have its first meeting in February. It would be useful for TAEB and CASE to interact at some point.
- The North Coast Urban Forestry Conference, an annual event for professionals managing trees in cities, is typically held in February. Some TAEB members are interested in participating if this event gets hosted during 2026.

Forestry Department Update

- The Forestry Department is still picking up leaves and anticipates dealing with snow for the next several months.
- They are also actively working to secure contractors in order to be ready once the spring tree planting season arrives.

Meeting adjourned at 7:02.

Respectfully submitted
Matt Bixenstine, Secretary