

Environment Committee

Minutes of the Meeting on
February 2, 2026

**Village of Homer Glen
14240 W 151st Street, Homer Glen, IL 60491
Board Room**

1. Call to Order.

The meeting was called to order at 5:31pm by Chair Udarbe.

2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.**3. Roll Call.**

Members present were Chair Taylor Udarbe, Chris Chiappetta, Bea Hiznay, Andy Panelli, Fran Perveiler, Sharon Sweas and ex officio Mayor Christina Neitzke-Troiike, Trustee Schaller and Planning Director Gruba were also present at this meeting.

Quorum was established at the start of the meeting. Member Joe Turrise arrived after roll call, around 5:38pm.

Also present from the public was Lombard resident Cynthia Rataj, C.A.R.E group's Jenifer Garlitz, and Homer Glen resident Mike McGee.

4. Approval of Amendments to the Agenda.

Chair Udarbe made a motion to move up New Business Items before Old Business since Jenifer from C.A.R.E was present for the Data Center Item. Ex officio Mayor Neitzke-Troiike seconded the motion and the amendment passed.

5. Minutes.

Member Panelli made a motion to approve the November 4, 2025 Minutes and Member Perveiler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Member Panelli motioned to approve the January 5, 2026 Minutes and Member Chiappetta seconded the motion. The motion passed with Member Sweas making note that she was not present at the meeting.

6. Public Comment.

Cynthia Rataj from Lombard addressed the Environment Committee on the applicability of the Tree Preservation Ordinance for the Legacy Development on 159th Street (Arya). She saw this project was recently on the Board agenda and wanted to note that the tree ordinance should be in effect for the entire property not only the half with the trees since they already cleared around 7.5 acres and restitution should take this into account.

Jenifer Garlitz from Citizens Against Ruining the Environment (CARE) introduced herself and said she was at the meeting to discuss Data Centers. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike let her know that since her item is on the agenda, they will call her up to discuss this item during discussion item.

Resident Mike McGee reiterated to the committee that folks are very interested in this ordinance amendment and he hopes something more can happen.

Member Sharon Sweas read a public comment letter from resident Margaret Sabo into the record: "Dear Mayor, Members and Staff: It seems that the very reason Homer

Glen is so sought after is because of its environment and especially what makes it important are the trees. Yet, the village without realizing the problem allows without restraint the action of big tree cutting and clear cutting. This takes away its attractive appeal and makes loss of resources to become sterile. It is more than a decade since the Environment Committee has tried to improve the tree ordinance. When I was a trustee and chairman of the Environment Committee, the committee attempted to improve and bring up to date the Tree ordinance. The keeping of trees does not prevent the owner or developer from selling his property. Empty lots without trees are more available and plentiful. Updating it has been difficult. Other communities revere their natural gifts and want to save them we have to strive to keep up. It is unproductive to even think that chopping down trees will bring a higher price or even sell an empty lot over one with trees. This has proven not to work. Vacant lots can be found everywhere. I know of many properties where the owner has clear cut their property to sell it and it is still for sale. All of us have driven by these properties for years. At one time, Homer Glen was a leader among other towns in setting environmental standards. Other towns realized their own resources as something to protect. Homer Glen is now lagging behind. If we think of the many benefits that trees offer, we also know it takes a very long time for a tree to grow to maturity. Homer Glen is a town with easy access to transportation, easy access to other locals, like Chicago, while providing an inviting atmosphere of semi-rural quality with easy reach to amenities and larger properties. HG has been attracting people to locate here from their dense and crowded places. There is not a town that provides these opportunities that is so convenient as Homer Glen. In order for HG to continue to appeal, it must revere and protect what it has now. Amending the Tree Ordinance to benefit the property owner and the community is a positive move toward advancing the community's assets. Best wishes, Margaret"

7. New Business

Chair Udarbe explained to Member Turrise, who arrived during public comments, that we have moved up New Business to discuss Data Centers since Jenifer from CARE was present.

a) Memorial Tree

Chair Udarbe explained the applicant, Debra Urbonas, is proposing a Redbud tree and plaque for Culver Park. She explained she is looking for a consensus that the Environment Committee is okay with the application. There were no objections but Member Sweas wanted clarification on the location as it related to the natural near the fishing pond and wanted to make sure fishing lines do not snag on the tree. Chair Udarbe said she will finalize the location with Parks and Recreation but explained Parks had a grant to restore the native plants so she likely would not recommend the tree too close to the pond.

b) Data Centers

Chair Udarbe explained this item was requested to be on this agenda by Member Turrise but made a PowerPoint slide so she could review snippets of the Village's Zoning Code. She explained Data Centers require a special use permit in the C-5 and the I-1 Districts, which are not a very common districts so they are not just permitted in the Village by-right.

Jenifer Garlitz from CARE spoke to the committee on the environmental impacts of Data Center developments: use of large quantities of clean treated water which is reclaimed and clarified after being used to cool systems which is very energy intensive; large energy consumption which is largely from nonrenewable energy sources, and; increase energy costs to cover the necessary infrastructure updates to support data centers. Jenifer explained she included a handout for this item which included her information references.

Member Turrise explained a gigawatt will power around 750,000 homes, for reference, and said that Mark Zuckerberg's data centers will use up enough energy to power 5 million homes. He said the amount of energy and water data center use is huge.

Chair Udarbe reiterated to the committee that staff had fairly recently passed a code amendment to address data center uses. Director Gruba confirmed that the code, as written, makes it difficult to develop data centers in Homer Glen.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troike told the committee the Village has seen a few proposed data centers projects which had not even made it forward to the Board. She said they understand their concerns and she agrees with them.

Member Panelli asked Jenifer what CARE's opinion is on the solution. He offered a partial solution would be to push renewable energy sources since it may be difficult to actually slow down the demand for data centers. Jenifer agreed that required renewable energy could be a solution but there would be a lot to consider. They should also consider installing solar panels on roofs, but was not sure how to get around the water usage.

8. Old Business.

a) Update from Staff – Committee of the Whole on Tree Ordinance amendments

Director Gruba said it had been a while but explained that they had some feedback from the last Committee of the Whole meeting on our current regulations, how they are older and all over the place, and that these regulations are difficult to interpret and implement. He said they realize they should at least revise this ordinance to be easier to understand.

Feedback from the Committee of the Whole indicated that the proposed restriction and mitigation requirements were too high and that these numbers needed to be revised to make it more palatable to the Board. He explained he proposed new numbers as a response to that feedback and presented this in an excel showing the existing ordinance, what was proposed last year, and what is being proposed now.

He explained that what he had proposed was a final draft of an ordinance that works and the guts of the ordinance are good, but they need to work on these numbers to get to a middle ground and determine what this compromise could be.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike asked for clarification on what was being proposed. Director Gruba explained the new proposed costs are actually going lower than what our code currently offers because the new ordinance is first bringing down the threshold for applicability.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike explained that in 2021, the previous board had denied a previous text amendment to lower the lot sizing threshold from 5 acres to 2.5 acres. She said she thought that the Board may not have known exactly what they were voting for but said that if this committee can reduce the acres, that would be a quick win.

Director Gruba agreed and explained that if the acreage was brought down, then this new ordinance would now apply to more properties off the bat. It would seem the Village may collect less money from the ordinance but it would affect more properties. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike asked how many people or businesses complain about our current ordinance. Director Gruba said this current ordinance really only applies to larger developments, and Chair Udarbe said tree surveys are typically included in the rest of the site plans and surveys. Chair Udarbe added that it is mostly the single-family homeowners that may freak out when they see they need a tree survey but Director Gruba added that due to the 50% threshold before the ordinance even applies, most of the time staff can eyeball that development is not affecting close to that threshold. He added that the ordinance very rarely in those cases is even activated.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike asked if they have examples from ordinances in other communities and was worried about what Margaret Sabo said about our community falling to the wayside. She wanted to make sure our ordinance is just as strong or stronger.

Member Panelli said that Chair Udarbe had pulled other community examples in the past and asked if she could put it on the screen though they did not need to go over it now.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike said she remembers these were comparable from last time and Member Turrise said that a lot of northern suburbs have strong tree ordinances. He also noted that a lot of people are moving out of Illinois and communities need to offer unique feature to attract peoples, like Homer Glen's large wooded lots.

Director Gruba said while he was working with Frankfort their ordinance was always active and explained briefly how their code works. He said this committee could move forward with a few options: they can look at the ordinance they drafted in April 2025 and play with numbers or they could just adopt and tweak Frankfort's Ordinance. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike noted that Homer Glen's existing ordinance is too confusing and asked if the committee should look at other ordinances.

Member Perveiler asked if Frankfort's Ordinance is clear. Director Gruba said it was and said what the Village has now is multiple ordinances that need to

be repealed and replaced. This could be much simpler going down a new route. He wanted to go through some of the main discussion points to get notes to move forward: minimum lot size applicability, minimum tree size, and if they wanted to only work on residential or also nonresidential.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike said 5 acres is too large but though 1 acre may be too small. She said she would be okay with 2 acres, and thinks the Board would not go down to 1 acre. The committee said they were pretty set on asking for 1.5 acres and Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike said this number sounded good and encouraged the committee to present this, though the Board may think it is too big of a jump but we should see what they say. Member Chiappetta said showing examples to the Board to illustrate the importance would be useful.

Director Gruba also mentioned there has been discussion on codifying the building footprint area to allow single-family homes to have some allowance or no restriction in that area, but trees removed outside of that area would be penalized.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike asked Trustee Schaller what he thought. Trustee Schaller said he knows this has been going on a long time and said he has done his own research and had a draft that he developed as well. He said he agreed with the Mayor's and Director Gruba's description of the current code, in that it is too complex for staff to enforce and for people to understand. Trustee Schaller continued and explained they can always change the ordinance again but they cannot be so punitive with a strict code and punishments with high bills for water, utilities and taxes right now. He said they need something they can get approved at the Board level.

Member Turrise agreed the code is complex. He said he wants all properties to be subject to this ordinance but wants the code to be written to so nobody can clear cut properties. He explained he is okay with a few trees being removed for a pool installation but he does not want people to cut down all trees.

Trustee Schaller said he thinks this could be a blanket requirement for the whole town, with the exception of easements and utility easements but reiterated it needs to be simple and easy to administer.

Member Panelli added that the committee has been cognizant of the ability to enforce and ordinance. He said they should look into longer term goals or a 5-year outlook, where they have an end goal of all lots but maybe start at 1.5 acres for now. Member Panelli said a big goal and objective of the ordinance was to discourage clear cutting and also removal of heritage trees. He suggested maybe all lots are subject to Heritage Tree removal mitigation. He added this all needs work because they were getting into onerous fines.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike asked for a 5-year plan to be codified so landowners are not shocked when over time all properties are eventually subject to this code.

Member Turrise said they have tried to do this many times and they do try to compromise as to not shock the Village Board, and lot sizing has never reduced as recently as 2021.

Director Gruba wanted to go through a few more points including: minimum lot size applicability, minimum tree size, residential or also nonresidential; cost or replacement per inch removed, fines for trees removed without approval. He asked the committee if they liked how Frankfort protects 12 tree species. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike said that can maybe be part of the 5-year plan where they can start with 12 species and then go up to all trees that are not invasive. Director Gruba said they could do this.

Director Gruba directed the committee to look at the examples. Member Sweas said she did not like this new ordinance as proposed, using the Dunkin' project as an example. The committee discussed that currently with a 75% threshold, the ordinance is not strong enough but as proposed in April 2025, the fees were way too high for tree removal. Trustee Schaller said they should explore a cap for this ordinance and it could be, for example, proportionate to lot sizing.

Member Panelli said they can use Director Gruba's calculator as a tool to model some different scenarios because their goal for fees should be to have a balance for people to plant new trees rather than pay into the tree fund. Director Gruba confirmed that was the goal of the numbers being presented now.

Member Panelli asked if there was a path forward where they can meet to discuss this outside of a regular meeting. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike liked that idea and suggest they meet next week and every week to get it done. Member Panelli said they would be committed to finishing the ordinance and said they have a few paths to move forward with.

Director Gruba told the committee he will email out this calculator but that it is also on the screen. They can play with it and see how numbers shake out. Staff confirmed they can call special meetings but they just have to follow the Open Meetings Act.

Director Gruba said if they can answer the big questions, staff can prepare new examples and new codes.

Member Turrise noted that most committee members are retired so they could plan something during office hours so staff did not have to stay late.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike had to leave the meeting around 6:30 pm. She wanted to let the committee members know they can contact her directly over the phone or pop into the Village Hall if they have anything they want to speak with her on and it does not have to only be through public comments. She also explained that not every committee has a trustee but that she is technically on the committee as ex-officio and Trustee Schaller has expressed interest in the committee as well. She said Chair Udarbe is doing a fine job and the committee agreed, but the committee members were very pleased that a trustee could represent them. Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike told the committee they also should

look to ComEd as they seem very open to planting trees on their property especially along the bike path.

Member Turrise wanted to note they should put language in the ordinance because of the residents that live near utility properties or with easements and if language can be added to help them out.

Ex officio Neitzke-Troiike wanted the record to also note to look into the 15 vs. 7 acres for applicability for the Arya project before she left.

Director Gruba asked if they wanted to continue the discussion or if they had enough feedback to move forward. Member Panelli said he was not in a hurry to get out of the meeting and offered to stay and continue the discussion. Chair Udarbe offered that the staff compile the discussion topics and feedback and send it out to the committee so they could have more background materials in front of them for the next discussion.

Trustee Schaller said he also wanted to share his rough draft with staff to review as well.

Member Turrise said last year, the biggest stumbling blocks was the tree survey as Homer Glen only requires 1 survey. He asked Trustee Schaller what he thought about how Hawthorne Woods required 1 survey before and 1 after and said that it is a big cost. Trustee Schaller said tree surveys are the best way to ensure there is a clean and fair review every time. Member Turrise asked if the Village had just 1 arborist to hire for all survey for a cheaper price to residents. Trustee Schaller said they could discuss this.

Member Panelli asked if it was possible to estimate when an alternative suggested plan could be brought forward and if they could send dates to review and discuss and revise, for example, Frankfort's revised ordinance. Director Gruba said this was difficult to answer but that he really would like to just send out Frankfort's ordinance so they could read it. Member Sweas said she would want to see what Trustee Schaller had come up with. Trustee Schaller offered to put both codes in AI and see what comes out and go from there.

Member Panelli asked again about the timeline. Member Turrise asked if staff had enough time to work on something and Director Gruba said he did not have a timeline yet but they needed more consensus. Member Panelli suggested they go through it at this meeting.

Director Gruba asked if there is a consensus on lot size: is it 1.5 acres or 2 acres? Member Turrise again said all lots but Trustee Schaller reminded the committee they should look at a tiered approach starting at 1.5 or 2 acres. Member Panelli confirmed the Committee of the Whole agreed at 1.5 acres.

Trustee Schaller told the committee his goal was to have a great standalone ordinance and was hoping he could send out what he has produced. He said he could send this out and Chair Udarbe said she will forward along their contacts.

Member Perveiler just wanted to note that she is pleased that to have a Trustee interested in this committee. Trustee Schaller explained his background dealing with ethaline oxide gas emitting from an industrial building and said environmental issues are near and dear to his heart especially ones injurious and harmful to people.

Director Gruba asked to confirm the minimum tree size is 5" and the committee agree.

He asked if they want this only to apply to residential. The committee discussed how they wanted all districts, but agreed to compromise by not changing commercial at this time.

Director Gruba asked for a cost per inch and asked if they had any ideas. Member Panelli reiterated that they need to look at this to encourage the trees to be planted instead of just paying the Village.

Director Gruba said he will get out information to Trustee Schaller and we will come back with another draft before we reconvene.

Member Turrise said for a smaller lot with a large tree, they will need a combination of planting and payment.

Chair Udarbe said she will send out available dates and times for a special meeting.

b) Update from Staff – Homer Fest Conservation Event

Staff explained they are working on a conservation event for Homer Fest this year based on the Environment Committee discussion and Events Director Waddick and Communication & Engagement Coordinator Blank. She explained this would be a great opportunity to increase visibility in the community.

They narrowed down 3 initiatives they can take based on recommendation to present to Homer Fest Committee. Chair Udarbe provided details for water refill station rentals in order to reduce the need for single-use water bottles along with a reusable souvenir cup. She explained she is proposing the Environment Committee cover the costs of the water refill station but cost share with Homer Fest for the cups. Chair Udarbe also presented the options for plastic-free utensils for vendors where everyone interested would get a fixed number of utensils for an Environment Committee sponsored day.

Chair Udarbe explained their budget currently includes \$7,500 for conservation events which includes spending the full amount on the Paper Shredding event or the Household Hazardous Waste and Electronic Recycling event, with those switching every other year. She explained for their Homer Fest event, she is requesting an increase to this budget by \$7,500 to cover the water refill station, utensils and reusable cups.

Member Sweas noted that they should not go for the plastic cups since they are looking to reduce plastic. Chair Udarbe agreed and said she did want to present both options for the plastic cups and the aluminum cups since there is a bit of a cost difference.

Member Turrise asked if instead of a cup they have an air-conditioned water fountain but Chair Udarbe was not sure where they could have an air-conditioned area for Homer Fest.

Member Panelli liked the idea of setting up multiple stations in separate areas for the fest and said people could still reuse the cups or bottles they purchase from vendors for other drinks. Chair Udarbe explained that because of the potable water source in the park, they are limited to either a 50 foot or 100 - foot radius from that source but they could look into splitting them up into a few locations if they go with the water bars. Member Panelli asked about looking into a larger size water tank that would not need to be hooked up. Chair Udarbe explained those usually are for purchase only and would need to be filled throughout the day which may be difficult logistically.

Member Chiappetta liked this idea and said putting it near the food area is perfect.

Chair Udarbe explained to the committee that while they may be questioning if this water rental is necessary, the Homer Fest staff have said something like this would be appreciated for attendees. She also explained to the committee that unfortunately the recycling at this event had not been as efficient as we had thought so the mindset to reduce plastic to begin with is best. She also explained that they likely would not have the budget to give everyone a reusable cup, but that the committee would also push out a bring your own bottle campaign. She reminded the committee this information will be presented to the Homer Fest Committee to make sure it is feasible.

- c) 2026 Calendar of Events/Activities
 - 1. Free Tree Seedling Grant
 - 2. Mayor's Monarch Pledge
 - 3. Seedling Event date
 - 4. Spring 2026 Village Newsletter Content

Staff Udarbe wanted to go through a few updates for this item. She told the committee they have another grant from the National Wildlife Foundation's Trees for Wildlife program so they will be doing another free tree seedling handout. She said she will update the committee when they come in as she will need help packaging the seedlings.

Chair Udarbe verified the committee wants to do the Monarch pledge again and they agreed. She explained she will work with Fran for the Milkweed seed handouts as well.

Chair Udarbe asked the committee if they were interested in a Dark Sky Week for 2026, which is the last week of April. Staff recommends they do a proclamation at the Village Board meeting and extra marketing for Stargazing.

She told the committee she has looked into the Dark Sky Community signage in the Village. She explained that Economic Development Director Patch is not sure about the exact plans for the Bell Road gateway sign, but staff thought including a Dark Sky Community Sign on the same post as our existing Arbor Day sign would be a good idea, too. She said she could come back with updates in the future.

Chair Udarbe explained their packet has both Environment Committee master schedule and the Village's event schedule. She explained they need to decide the Heritage Park's kids planting dates. The committee decided that May 16th from 10am to noon is a good day for this year.

Chair Udarbe confirmed that May 22nd and October 16th will be the 2026 Stargazing dates. She told the committee she is working with the Ability Awareness Committee on adding an hour before the event so their committee can access to the animals before large crowds arrive. She said the extra costs could be offset through events or Ability Awareness budgets. She told the committee that Crosstown Exotics for the Spring and Wings and Talons for the Fall are up next and there were no objections.

Chair Udarbe explained they are working on Newsletter Content and she had a few examples from the years prior. Member Hiznay asked about doing a spring cleanup event. Chair Udarbe said they could look into it but has to make sure it works with the fiscal year budget. Member Hiznay said spring is an optimal time as the snowmelt reveals a lot of garbage and there is less vegetation. Member Turrise said they use to have an Earth Day/Arbor Day event at Konows but they were not able to get enough volunteers on it.

Member Turrise explained that the Village of Homer Glen has entrance signs and wants the Dark Sky signs in that area. Staff Udarbe said she could look into adding signs in a public right-of-way. She said, for example, the one on 151st and Will-Cook Road is sitting low so adding something to that sign would not be feasible. The committee thought adding them all together would be a good idea. Chair Udarbe said she could look into this more.

Chair Udarbe asked again if the committee had content for the newsletter. The committee said they wanted to include Homewood Disposal's recycling guide, Dark Sky lighting information and upcoming events. The committee also discussed the issues with those permanent residential building mounted lights. Chair Udarbe said she will get this information to Amy for publishing.

Director Gruba told the committee they are looking to tidy up their Lighting Ordinance as well.

9. Announcements/Committee Member Communication.

Member Turrise reminded the committee that CARE is having a seed exchange at White Oak Library this February 7th from 10am-2pm.

Trustee Schaller told the committee that Will South Cook Soil & Water Conservation District is hosting their online plant and fish sale.

10. Adjournment.

Member Sweas made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:33pm and Member Hiznay seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted:



Taylor Udarbe
Committee Chair/Senior Planner