

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - August 9, 2023

1. Call to Order

Notice having been filed with the S.P. Observer and TapInto SP, Chairwoman Dorothy Miele called the Environmental Commission meeting to order in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act at 7:33 pm.

Present: Dorothy Miele (chairwoman) Tom Walsh, Debra Leporino, John Ferguson, Adam Butrico, Genevieve Helbo and Melanie Mott (council liaison).

Alternate members present:

Others: Dr. Alice Tempel (Environmental Specialist) and Lisa Roseo (secretary)

Absent: Planning Board Liaison (e)

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the July 12, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed and all were in favor of approval.

3. Invitation for Public Comment

There were several members of the public present:

Jeel Soni, a South Plainfield resident, Junior at SP High School and member of the High School Environmental Club was joined by other students. Jeel Soni explained they are part of a recently established community hub in South Plainfield that supports the 'Sunrise Movement'. The primary goal of the movement is to bring awareness to the climate crisis and 'Green New Deal' to the community at large. There are currently eight members in the hub. The students plan to bring their information to the school this coming year. They want to raise awareness about clean energy and ensure the High School has a clear plan if climate disaster strikes. Jeel said they are passionate about passing the resolution that rejects permits for the proposed gas-fired power plant in Woodbridge. Jeel went on to explain the environmental issues associated with the existing power plants in Woodbridge. Student, Nivash Balkarran mentioned the effects air pollution/record heat has had on him, his family and others around the world.

Charlie Kratovil, Central New Jersey Organizer at Food & Water Watch was present. The organization has over 70,000 members in New Jersey and over 2 million supporters nationally. Charlie Kratovil stated the organization is working on getting support from municipalities to stop the proposed power plant in Woodbridge which lies only about six miles from South Plainfield. Some of the reasons to protest the plant are a likely increase in storms, fires, floods and poor air quality days. The proposed power plant project is pending approval of an air permit that the NJDEP has the ability to suggest the EPA deny. The organization's campaign is focused on getting Governor Murphy, via the NJDEP, to reject that permit. A great tactic to build political pressure is to have local leaders who know the environmental impacts voice their objections. Charlie went on to offer some scientific data. He asked for SPEC's leadership in recommending the Mayor & Council adopt a resolution opposing the power plant. Based on SPEC's discussion and official vote of no action at our July meeting, Chairwoman Dorothy Miele informed Charlie Kratovil that we won't be discussing the issue further. Dorothy thanked the attending public.

Walter Kalman was also in attendance.

4. Budget - Dr. A. Tempel

- O&E (FY2023 budget = \$2,625) Since the last meeting we spent \$0. YTD spent = \$662.71. Balance = \$1,962.29.
- Clean Communities – 2023 grant (\$55,655.96) – Spent since the 7/12 meeting = \$3,026 on: \$1,478 on salaries for litter removal/enforcement; \$570 on litter can maintenance; \$330 for brakes on Truck 8; \$340 on dog waste bags and \$307.50 for Promos. Total spent = \$16,214. Balance = \$55,375.47.
- Signs Trust Fund – Spent \$0. Deposited \$500. The balance = \$1,140.12.
- Harris Steel Trust Fund – Since the last report we spent \$0. Deposits = \$0. The current balance is \$35,283.

5. Committee and Liaison Reports

A. Council Liaison - Ms. M. Mott

- Melanie said there was nothing new to report.

B. Planning Board Liaison - Mr. R. Houghton / Mr. B. Bythell

- There was no report.

C. Site Plan Review / Land Use- Mr. A. Butrico / Dr. A. Tempel

- Nakash (previously Jordache) (200 Helen Street) – Adam reported this is a 750,000 square foot warehouse with a variety of tenants – skateboard repair, bus parts & repair, warehouse/trucking /shipping, Class A recycling facility and office space. The applicant is proposing an additional 170,000 sq. feet to the existing warehouse, a new driveway, loading docks and reconfigured parking. The existing detention basin will be filled, and two underground detention basins will be installed. They did not provide an inventory of trees to be removed and they claim no environmental impact. They do propose planting 169 Sea Green Junipers which are shrubs. Adam expressed concern for poorer air quality over the estimated additional 100 truck and 200 car trips just for the new portion being proposed. The Celebrations housing complex is only about 200 feet away. The traffic will probably be audible from the housing complex. The applicant asked for a recycling plan waiver. SPEC will ask for 'No Idling' signs, a formal recycling plan and tree removal/replacement plan. Dr. Tempel asked Adam if he would be willing to draft the comment letter to the Planning Board which she will formally type. Adam said yes.
- 40 Cragwood Rd. – They applied to the NJDEP for a wetlands transition area averaging plan to allow redevelopment of the property with a warehouse.

D. ERI - Ms. D. Leporino

- Debra said there was no progress to report at this time.

E. Clean Communities - Dr. A. Tempel / Ms. D. Leporino

- Dr. Tempel reported the County has signed up for 'Recycle Coach' Clean Communities app. We will be able to post events on the Recycle Coach calendar and volunteers can sign up through the app. There is also a recycling calendar with reminders, blogs, educational videos and a library of social media promotional messages.
- CCAB – Decided on 9/30 for the Fall Cleanup.
- Debra said she spoke to Mr. Thomas Flynn who John Ferguson recommended to be a speaker/presenter for our SPCCC kick-off sometime in October or early November. Date and time to follow soon.

- Adopt-a-Spot – Debra said the Lions Club indicated they have diminished membership to handle their spot located on Hamilton Blvd. Debra would like a formal letter stating they can no longer honor their contract. Debra also asked Mr. Innis, Cedarcroft Bible Chapel, to submit a letter that they can no longer co-sponsor their adopt-a-spot as they indicated. Maryann Williams at Keystone Community submitted their revised application. There was one 3rd quarter renewal. Dr. Tempel said she was approached by the manager of Home Depot at National Night Out. He expressed interest in offering supplies for our next cleanup. Dr. Tempel politely said we do have supplies, but would they want to take a more active role in the littered spot across the street on Hamilton Blvd (former Lions Club spot). She did not hear back; we may have to re-approach him. Dr. Tempel said Americold is planning to adopt both Walnut Street Park and Shadyside Park.
- Cleanups – In July, Luke Melick cleared 72 storm drains and picked up 12 bags of litter plus 60 lbs. of roadside debris.
- Litter Can Survey – Dr. Tempel had asked the Recycling Center Litter Crew to survey public litter cans so she could update the specifications for the litter can contract and solicit quotes for a new contract. The quotes went out last week. We haven't heard back yet.

F. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico

- Champion Tree – Adam said Dorothy read over his proposal for “Big Trees of SP’ campaign. It was decided to change the first tree to the Pin Oak. Adam will post this in the usual outlets. He created an email for submissions – BigtreesSP@gmail.com.
- Melanie asked if SPEC sent a tree planting recommendation for Norwood Avenue as discussed last month. Dr. Tempel said she walked Norwood Avenue and wrote a detailed email to Len Miller who forwarded it to John Freeman, project manager. Dr. Tempel suggested Ivory Silk Tree Lilac/Serviceberry for the side where there are over-head wires. On the other side, Gingko/Lacebark Elm/Littleleaf Linden/Hackberry. John Freeman will have his landscape architect design a planting plan.

G. Highland Avenue Woods / Public Education - Mrs. D. Miele

- Dorothy said there was nothing new to report.

H. Historical Sites Preservation - Mrs. D. Miele / Mr. L. Randolph

- Dorothy said she hopes that by our next meeting, we should have some information from Grubb Associates on the determination of the artifacts at the proposed Colonial Oaks site on New Brunswick Avenue. September is when the State requires all paperwork involved with the dig to be filed with the State Preservation Office. We will then be privy to all the filings and hopefully the plan to bring the artifacts for display.

I. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- Adam asked if in the draft letter he gives to Dr. Tempel on the 200 Helen Street site plan, should he propose paying into the tree fund based on the additional car/truck trips as we discussed. Dr. Tempel said there is no legal justification for that. The Planning Board could request compensation, but why just for that applicant. Dr. Tempel thinks the Boro would need to adopt an ordinance. SPEC discussed further. Adam will draft a letter for members to review. Considering the space in the Boro to plant trees keeps shrinking, Dr. Tempel suggested SPEC update the ERI. We would need to do an on-ground survey of what open space still remains and the location for new trees. Debra said she can request and updated report from Mary Frances to update the open space index (ROSI) in the computer.

- John reported that the USGS released a report on our water systems; 45% of the nation's water systems are contaminated with PFAS. Middlesex Water Company is supposed to be up and running well. They are suing the 3M Company who they claim put the PFAS in the water.
- Woodbrook Road – Tom reported on the meeting with the EPA that took place at Borough Hall on 7/27. They offered information on their ‘Explanation of Significant Difference’. It summarized the changes of the cleanup from the 2018 estimate of cleanup costs to the 2023 updated costs: from \$45 million to \$70 million. They wanted a public response by 9/13. There are still negotiations going on between the EPA and the cleanup company.

J. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Tom said the GT met on 7/27. We are moving along with action items. Dr. Tempel and Bob Longo are communicating and working with ‘Solar Landscape’ as previously mentioned. The program should be rolled out within a month or so.
- Tom will be reaching out to Glenn Cullen and Len Miller to get the bill of sale for the two new hybrid vehicles purchased for the Police Department to submit for one of our action items.
- The next GT meeting will be on 8/31.
- Dr. Tempel mentioned the GT had a booth at ‘Christmas in July’ and ‘National Night Out’. At National Night Out, the High School Environmental Science Club students operated the prize wheel. The GT concentrated on promoting Community Solar.

K. Public Information & Technology - Dr. A. Tempel / Mr. C. Cioffi

- Dr. Tempel’s report: in July, SPEC’s Facebook page carried 7 posts plus 1 post shared from the Raptor Trust feed – reached 2,666 people, 118 engagements, 26 reactions, 10 shares and 3 comments.

L. Stormwater Advisory Committee - Mr. J. Ferguson

- Dr. Tempel mentioned she ordered 7600 copies of a new stormwater management flier for inclusion in the July sewer bill mailing. Also, we are progressing with the rain barrel workshop.
- John reported information on an EPA ‘Water Technical Assistance’ program being implemented. The purpose is to help with developing and implementing corrections on poor water delivery and/or stormwater systems in under-served communities. It is exciting because not every municipality has the resources to secure the expert assistance needed for all the phases.
- The State of NJ now has flood disclosure laws. They want to have municipalities put the information out and show the flood prone areas and whether homes had a loss/repetitive loss. In South Plainfield we have 845 properties that have a greater than 26% chance of being severely flooded. 191 out of 490 commercial properties are also at risk.
- John as part of EOM, received a ‘tool kit’ for first responders. It is intended to make sure all emergency responders know about water & sewer systems in the event of terrorists, hackers etc.
- GBFCP – Dr. Tempel attended the 8/5 Memorial Service. There was an unprecedented crowd of residents there, due to some announcement on Facebook that was a ‘call to arms’ of sorts to get answers about why the project is taking so long. Dr. Tempel said Ray Murray, Commission Director, spent time giving the USACOE’s status report. They are having trouble with real estate acquisitions because of uncooperative property owners who own land where the Corps needs to put floodwalls and levees. The property owners have not allowed access to their properties to do testing. The USACE has initiated condemnation proceedings on some of the properties. Dr. Tempel also noted that our Boro

should be paying attention to the USACE's plans for the Lower Basin. Our portion of the plan's engineering stage may be reached by 2030 and that part of the project is expected to complete by 2032. This will have an effect for the Boro, particularly in HAW.

M. Environmental Specialist - Dr. A. Tempel

- There was nothing additional to report.

N. Chairwoman's Report - Mrs. D. Miele

- Dorothy informed Charlie Kratovil that SPEC did in fact discuss the proposed energy plant at our July meeting. In our discussion we were thoroughly convinced that his group had met a couple of times with our Mayor & Council and was told there would not be a commitment to support protest of the plant. Therefore, that would be the same stance SPEC would take. Whatever happens with Charlie's organization's campaign, it was great to see the SP students getting involved and standing up for what they believe in. Charlie said he will be putting in an OPRA request for our recorded meeting minutes.

6. Incoming / Outgoing Correspondence

- A list of correspondence was provided.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for September 13, 2023 @ 7:30 p.m. in the Borough Hall Conference Room.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lisa Roseo
Environmental Commission Secretary

Acronyms

ANJEC	-Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions
BOA	-Board of Adjustment
CBA	-Clean Business Association
CCA	-Clean Communities Association
CCAB	-Clean Communities Advisory Board
DOT	-Department of Transportation
DPW	-Department of Public Works
EIS	-Environmental Impact Study
EPA	-Environmental Protection Agency
EWA	-Edison Wetlands Association
FEMA	-Federal Emergency Management Agency
FOW	-Friends of the Woods
GBFCP	-Green Brook Flood Control Project
HAW	-Highland Avenue Woods
KCS	-Known Contaminated Sites
LEEDS	-Lead in Energy and Environmental Design
LOI	-Letter of Interpretation
MCDSWM	-Middlesex County Division of Solid Waste Management
MCOEM	-Middlesex County Office of Emergency Management
NJCF	-New Jersey Conservation Foundation
NJDEP	-New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
NOV	-Notice of Violation
OTOSP	-Oak Tree Open Space Parcel
PRP'S	-Potentially Responsible Parties
ROSI	-Recreation and Open Space Inventory
ROW	-Right of Way
SPBA	-South Plainfield Business Association
SPEC	-South Plainfield Environmental Commission
USACE	-United States Army Corp of Engineers