

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - August 10, 2022

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 7:35 pm.

Present: Dorothy Miele, Debra Leporino, John Ferguson, Adam Butrico, and Pete Smith (council liaison)

Alternate members present:

Associate members present: Lisa Roseo (secretary)

Others: Dr. A. Tempel (environmental specialist)

Absent: Tom Walsh (e), Jonathan Walezak (e) and Brian Bythell (e)

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the July 13, 2022 meeting were reviewed and all were in favor of approval.

3. Invitation for Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

4. Budget - Dr. A. Tempel

- O&E (FY2022 = \$2,625) Since the last meeting we spent \$0. YTD spent = \$551.07. Balance = \$2,073.93.
- Clean Communities - The 2022 grant = \$49,621.17. Spent since July 13 = \$2,723 on: \$1,583 on wages for litter patrol & sign enforcement and \$1,140 for 2 month's litter can maintenance. Total spent since July 11 (when we used up the 2021 grant) = \$2,888. Balance = \$46,733.
- Signs Trust Fund – Spent \$0. The balance = \$640.12.
- Harris Steel Trust Fund – Since the last report we spent \$0. Deposits = \$0. Current balance is \$35,433.00. Dr. Tempel said the \$20 charge in April for bayberry seedlings was forgiven by the State. She discovered it when inquiring why we were not billed yet.

5. Committee and Liaison Reports

A. Council Liaison - Mr. P. Smith

- Pete reported that the parcel of land on the Woodbrook Road contaminated site that had the potential to be developed will now be proposed as a solar farm. This is something Pete had been rallying for.
- Pete will continue to work with the Library, Mayor & Council and the Planning Board to install solar stanchions behind Boro Hall when it is time to repave the lot. The Mayor & Council needs to start thinking about purchasing electric vehicles. The State is requiring a certain percentage of EV's for municipalities by 2025.
- Pete mentioned the Boro has not received or seen any information as it pertains to the suggested archaeological findings on the proposed Colonial Oaks site as reported by Larry Randolph at our May meeting. Until the Mayor & Council receives direction/information from the County or State, we cannot approach Harris Steel. Pete doesn't know if the State Office put a stop to the build. Dorothy said we probably need to contact the State Office of Historic Preservation directly. After further discussion, SPEC will write a letter to the Preservation office asking for information and expressing our desire to take possession of any findings.

- Cornell-Dublier – Pete said the property owners are challenging the redevelopment plan from Denholtz Properties. The owners are interested in constructing a warehouse, however, Denholtz was granted the redevelopment rights. Pete suggested to the owner to make the site a solar farm to avoid any issues with the EPA/DEP etc. Their response was that their profit would not be as great. Dr. Tempel said breaking the cap will add to the redevelopment costs considerably. It is uncertain why Denholtz has not proceeded with redevelopment.
- Pete mentioned that Bridgepoint, which is constructing the warehouse on New Market Avenue, has offered to buy several nearby owner’s properties. Discussion ensued on zoning, affordable housing obligations etc.

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

- There was no report.

C. Site Plan Review – Mr. A. Butrico

- Target (5000 Hadley Rd.) – Applicant proposes an additional 22 drive-up parking spaces. Adam recommends using ‘wet’ sandblasting when removing existing striping to prevent airborne particles.
- Komatsu America Corp. (2820 Hamilton Blvd.) – replace damaged lighted sign. The original sign was not conforming. Their plan shows proposed planting of Barberries. Adam said we should recommend replacing with natives such as Gray Owl Juniper, Winterbell Holly or Inkberry Holly.
- Bridge Acquisition (1 Cragwood Rd.) – Applicant proposes to replace office building with a warehouse. SPEC reviewed this some time ago. The proposed warehouse has been downgraded from 185,000 to 165,00 sq. ft. with 28 loading docks, 58 trailer storage & 216 parking spaces. The description reads removal of 149 trees (equals 261 factoring dbh). They are citing our tree ordinance stating that 50% clearing is permitted, 53% will be cleared, therefore, they are responsible for 3% replacement of the 261 trees = 8 trees. Dr. Tempel needs to check on the zoning and their plan calculations. Their EIS states that their tree planting and bio-retention basin will rectify any environmental impact. They claim, curiously, the air quality won’t be severely impacted from the use. Dr. Tempel asked if they included a LOI. Adam did not see one; he believes the wetlands will not be touched. The site plan shows the proposed building is outside the 50-foot required buffer.

D. ERI – Ms. D. Leporino

- There was nothing new to report.

E. Clean Communities – Dr. A. Tempel

- The CCAB met on July 20. Chose 9/17 for the Fall Litter Cleanup. Dr. Tempel will publicize. As soon as the students get back to school, Kathleen Benton, High School Environmental Science Club advisor, will ask them to sign up. Also made plans for continued Bag Up NJ education
- We participated in ‘Christmas in July’ and ‘National Night Out’. Set up tables to give away reusable shopping bags, Plastic Bag Ban fliers and Adopt-a-Spot program information. Debra, Bob Longo and Dr. Tempel distributed over 170 bags at the Christmas in July event. Dr. Tempel said we have two cartons (200) of canvas bags left; we have distributed 600. We also have used up the 200 blue foldable bags. We have about 400-500 cheaper polypropylene bags to give out. We can give out bags at the Labor Day picnic.

- Dr. Tempel said after reaching out to Amy Bengivenga, she invited her to meet with the Public Celebrations committee to make her pitch for a 'Litter-Free Labor Day. They were amendable and will include it in their publicity and will place 'litter-free' signs up.
- Dorothy forwarded a survey sent by ANJEC, about how we perceive 'Bag Up NJ' is going. Dr. Tempel commented on how many retailers are providing disposable (paper) bags instead of requiring consumers to bring their own.
- Debra said Dorothy gave approval to have an additional meeting on 10/19 to discuss ideas for the SPCCA membership kickoff.
- Adopt-a-Spot – Debra reported that we received several inquiries at the 'Christmas in July' event. A few people/businesses took information and a contract.

F. Land Use - Dr. A. Tempel

- There was nothing new to report.

G. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico

- Dr. Tempel said Linda Hansen, Library Director, asked her opinion about removing red cedars planted around the library because some of the library board members view them as fire hazards. There have been one or two mulch fires. Dr. Tempel offered an opinion but suggested she consult a Certified Tree Expert.
- Dr. Tempel reported the Boro is planning on repaving Norwood Avenue including curb and sidewalk reconstruction. They need to remove many large old trees that have heaved sidewalks. Len Miller and Glenn Cullen have asked SPEC for advice on which species to use for replanting; something with a narrower trunk and less aggressive roots. They also asked for info on planting techniques to keep roots in order. Adam suggested elms which don't tend to lift sidewalks. Dr. Tempel said the Lacebark Elms seem to be resistant to Dutch Elm disease. Adam did a quick web search which recommends Princeton American Elm, Yellow Buckeye and Autumn Gold Maidenhair. Adam and Dr. Tempel will research.

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

- Dorothy said she got a call from Dr. DeVito. She explained to Pete that Dr. DeVito was extremely excited to inform her he found several Lady slipper Orchids in bloom within the deer protection fencing. These native orchids haven't been spotted in the woods in a very long time. He would like to get the Mayor & Council into HAW to see the regeneration of plants within the fence. Alternatively, a PowerPoint presentation could also be put together to show the benefits and ask for funds for additional fencing. Dorothy explained that within 9 years the fence was erected, many plants have regenerated. Dorothy said from 1995 to 2002, she and her daughter spent countless hours cataloging every species in HAW. That amounted to 7 binders of information. Most of those species have disappeared. But we do know now that plants are capable of making a comeback. She explained we received one grant in 2013 to fence off a ½ acre. Subsequent grant applications have been declined. Pete said he has no problem proposing a site visit and/or a PowerPoint presentation. He will bring it up at the 8/15 Mayor & Council meeting for a possible proposal at a September meeting. Pete said he is always in favor of advocating when provided with the information needed. Dr. Tempel added that there is so little nature left in town at this point, making this more significant. Dorothy will provide Pete with a bullet-point document of the proposal with possible dates to present.

I. Historical Sites Preservation - Mr. L. Randolph

- Dorothy said she will follow up with Larry Randolph and write the letter to the State Office of Historical Preservation asking for findings on the proposed Colonial Oaks site.

J. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- Adam presented his thoughts on a possible vehicle pollution 'credit system' which would tie-in to site plan traffic studies. Traffic studies do not differentiate between types of vehicles. One tractor-trailer's pollution can equal 50 cars. Dr. Tempel said we would need to document that stat to begin with. Good data can be offered to Bob Bucco, Planning Board Engineer, to ask him what he thinks about making sure EIS's include hard data on 'air quality'. Dr. Tempel explained the board requires EIS's but has no particular standards. So, we tend to get standard 'boiler-plate' data from developer's engineering/consulting firms. As SPEC makes comments to our boards on issues that should be addressed, firms tend to learn to include that additional data in their EIS. Dr. Tempel has been suggesting the Boro add 'air quality' data to the Environmental Impact Studies that are part of the Development Review Ordinance. Applicants always claim there will be no measurable impact, but they never present any data to demonstrate that. Dr. Tempel said she doesn't know what particular data could be presented on request. We would probably need to convince Bob Bucco that this is something to look into. Adam asked if the Boro has done an air quality study. We can ask the County Health Department. Adam said he will consider reaching out to Bob Bucco on behalf of SPEC.

K. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Jonathan had emailed his report – he uploaded to the Sustainable NJ website, updated narratives and documentation for the 'Anti-Idling' campaign and established the 'Creative Team' actions for a potential 20 points. He is still working to rally the team to begin the 'Creative Assets Inventory'. Dorothy and Dr. Tempel said creating the 'team' is worth 5 points. They will speak with Jonathan about having the team meet in Dorothy's Art Studio while also setting up for those who'd rather Zoom. Dr. Tempel will be uploading documentation for 'Animals in the Community' actions which is coming from Kathleen's High School student's presentations/flyer distribution. Dorothy mentioned the Middle School students, through Mason Gross School of the Arts, painted school sidewalks as a community arts awareness project. She sent the information to Jonathan. Dr. Tempel said Jonathan and Bob Longo will see if it qualifies for a current or future action. She mentioned the GT will be meeting with a representative from 'Solar Landscape' in September. The company rents space for solar farms and sends the energy to the grid. They also recruit energy users to subscribe to their service. The Mayor & Council did adopt a resolution of support for which we will get action points. We do need to publicize and help the company sign up subscribers.
- Dorothy mentioned Bob Longo's email that was sent to Boro Chairs to forward to their respective members asking them to complete a diversity survey. It was not well received so returns were minimal. Please fill out the survey if you haven't already. Pete said the survey is designed to investigate whether the makeup of town's boards, committees and commissions matches the town's demographics.

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

- Dr. Tempel reported that in July, SPEC's Facebook page carried 3 posts: reached 2,191 people, 114 engagements, 20 reactions, 26 comments and 5 shares.

M. Stormwater Advisory Committee - Mr. J. Ferguson / Mr. T. Walsh

- John reported that Middlesex County did not receive any of the \$15 million federal grant money. The NJDEP was required to disperse the money to underserved communities.
- The next CRS/MS4 meeting is in September.
- John said hopefully residents will get better help from FEMA because they now state they are not totally dependent on the flood maps. But they are pushing everyone to purchase flood insurance, suggesting that town's stormwater management systems are not sufficient anymore.

N. Environmental Specialist - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel said Bob Ackerman has added Dave Street to the list of new street names; could be named Street Drive, Court or Place etc.

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

- There was nothing new to report.

6. Incoming / Outgoing Correspondence

- A list of correspondence is attached.
- Received notice of application to the NJDEP for 800 Montrose Avenue to extend the sewer to their proposed warehouse.
- Received a notice from NJDEP for an application to transfer ownership of the Sakoutis Brothers transfer station to Republic Services. NJDEP deemed their application complete; we can comment on it.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2022 @ 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
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
MCUFAC	-Middlesex County Urban Forestry Advisory Committee
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
SPCCA	-South Plainfield Clean Communities Association
SPEC	-South Plainfield Environmental Commission
USACE	-United States Army Corp of Engineers