

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - February 9, 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 7:31 pm.

Present: Dorothy Miele, John Ferguson, Debra Leporino, Jonathan Walezak and Brian Bythell (planning board liaison).

Alternate members present:

Associate members present: Lisa Roseo (secretary)

Others: Dr. A. Tempel (environmental specialist)

Absent: Tom Walsh (e), Adam Butrico (e), and Councilman Pete Smith

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the January 12 reorganization and regular meetings were reviewed and the following comments were made: Debra questioned why the minutes were posted on the Boro website before being approved by the commission. Lisa responded that it was her error. She usually does not post until SPEC approves at the following meeting. Debra said, with respect to the by-laws, our proposed amendments which were emailed to SPEC members for review, should be highlighted in 'red' for easier recognition. Debra emailed Dr. Tempel with that request. Debra explained that our proposed amendments should be sent to Amy Antonides, Boro Clerk, and the Boro Attorney for review and comments before our commission can formally adopt them. There should be a second reading before we approve. SPEC will be closely reviewing our current by-laws and procedures and then propose any necessary updates/corrections. Dr. Tempel said she will send the by-laws with our proposed amendments as adopted at our reorganization meeting, highlighted in 'red', to SPEC members and Amy Antonides. Moving forward, SPEC will review the by-laws each November, discuss and make proposals/changes in December (first reading approval), submit to Amy Antonides/Boro Attorney for review/approval and have our second reading and final approval at the January reorganization meeting.

After discussion, the January 12 meeting minutes were approved with Debra Leporino abstaining.

3. Invitation for Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

4. Budget - Dr. A. Tempel

- O&E (FY2022 = \$1,000 temporary budget) Since the last meeting we spent \$451.42 on: \$425 on ANJEC dues and \$26.42 for a legal notice in The Observer. YTD spent = \$451.42. Balance = \$548.58
- Clean Communities - 2020 grant of \$45,370 was expended in 2021. The 2021 grant = \$48,287.91. Spent since January \$xx. YTD spent = \$xx. Balance = \$xx. Dr. Tempel did not have the updated figures available. Dr. Tempel displayed one of the bags we purchased with the County Recycling Enhancement Grant which we will distribute to the public. The canvas bag has the State's "BagUp NJ" campaign logo printed. Brian asked if there is a distribution plan. Dr. Tempel said we will distribute at any Boro event we can participate in e.g. – health fairs, spring litter cleanup, Christmas in July etc.
- Signs Trust Fund – Spent \$0. The balance = \$595.12.

- Harris Steel Trust Fund – Since the last report we spent \$0. Deposits = \$0. Current balance is \$35,981.00.

5. Committee and Liaison Reports

A. Council Liaison - Mr. P. Smith

- Pete had sent an email to members stating that it was brought to his attention that the Chairperson for SPEC should be a Mayoral appointment each year. Also, the ordinance that governs this commission varies from others in the Boro. The Mayor & Council will get this in line, and in the meantime appoint Dorothy as interim chairperson.

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

- Brian said there was no meeting last month; nothing on the docket. The proposed house on Minford Avenue was approved in January by a split decision. The applicant obtained DEP approval. There will be a lot of work done in terms of drainage in the area which should alleviate the flooding issues. The applicant is being required to submit a two-year bond. So, if something goes wrong with backup of drainage to the street, they will be liable to fix. Dr. Tempel said she doesn't recall if they presented a tree removal/replacement plan. Brian is fairly certain they did but will confirm.

C. Site Plan Review - Mr. A. Butrico

- Robert Bengivenga (2531 Hamilton Blvd) – SPEC reviewed: applicant proposes outdoor storage/parking and sales of landscaping vehicles/trucks & equipment plus a 40 sq. ft. warehouse. Also, a possible future use for retail stores/shops. This cluster of lots is in an OPA-1 zone. There is currently two residential homes on site. The site plan provided only shows lot lines, no other context. However, they are asking for multiple waivers because they are not proposing any construction at this time. Jonathan and Dr. Tempel both said, at a minimum, they should specifically show what the interim use of the property will be – tree removal/replacement plan, parking area, impervious surface coverage, stormwater runoff, existing house demolition etc.

D. ERI - Ms. D. Leporino

- Debra said we are waiting to hear the status of the proposed digital data base program. Rich Wolff sent proposals to Glenn Cullen and the Mayor & Council.

E. Clean Communities - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel filed the Statistical Report for year 2020. We had spent \$0 of the 2020 grant since we started the year with a balance in the 2019 grant of \$33,497. There is \$20,000 left in the 2021 grant. The Clean Communities Council already gave towns an extension on their 2021 grant to be spent by June 30. If we don't spend the remaining \$20,000 by June, we can apply for an extension as long as we submit the 2021 Annual Statistical Report.
- Dr. Tempel said Kathleen Benton and her High School Environmental Science Club gave the BagUpNJ 'Evils of Plastic' presentation to the Mayor & Council at their public meeting. They gave a quality presentation. The councilmembers were engaged and Dr. Tempel received good feedback. As a result, Nancy Grennier, The Observer, asked Dr. Tempel and the students to attend the next BAG meeting on 3/24.
- The CCAB met on 1/26 and made decisions about what form our BagUpNJ campaign will take. Dorothy will pursue pricing and design for 50 lawn signs for posting along busy roadways. Kathleen Benton's students will earn community service hours by distributing the flyer to merchants door-to-door.

- Dr. Tempel said the recycling litter crew has been cleaning the parks and some roads. The crew cleaned Tyler Place on 2/10 with the police providing traffic control.
- Dr. Tempel published a 'Save the Date' press release on 2/9 for the Spring Litter Cleanup taking place on April 30.
- Dave Street did two virtual presentations to the High School Environmental Science Club.
- Adopt-a-Spot – Debra said she is sending out nine 1st quarter renewals.
- Debra said the CCA (Clean Communities Association), formerly CBA, membership letter and mailing labels are ready; she needs Avery 5160 labels.
- Tree Seedling Distribution – Dorothy said Adam will pick up the seedlings on 4/21 for possible distribution on 4/30; there is a 10-day window to distribute. Discussed whether it is possible to distribute the trees on the same day as the cleanup and who would be involved. South Plainfield students are on spring break the week leading up to 4/23. The seedlings need to be carefully separated, bundled and placed in paper bags shortly before distribution so they do not dry out. Debra suggested asking Tree Olano if the seniors at the center would like to be involved. Dr. Tempel will speak to Tree Olano.

F. Land Use - Dr. A. Tempel

- Green Brook Flood Control – John reported that the federal government appropriated \$496 million to help complete the project. There are still questions such as, will matching funds need to be provided, as is presently done. Our area will be getting consideration for work. Dr. Tempel said they've also added \$3.2 million to conduct the needed General Reevaluation Report study on the Upper Basin. Dr. Tempel added that what the GBFCC does these days, almost exclusively, is lobby the federal government for continued funds. They use the dues assessment they charge towns to pay a lobbyist; it has been effective. John said it is uncertain what plans might be proposed for our area. Dr. Tempel mentioned that the last time the GBFCC was in South Plainfield, there was a walking tour to see the land. The consulting engineer for the commission came here and made a presentation to the Mayor & Council. He was not well prepared and may have given an inaccurate impression of what the project would look like. The suggestion of levees through Spring Lake Park, behind Boro Hall and through HAW was not well received. Dr. Tempel said if the project does come to South Plainfield, we need to be very involved in the design phase. The environmental wisdom is that levees and flood walls are bad environmentally. Rivers should be left to take their course because it causes less damage in the end.
- John spoke about the 'Resilient NJ' virtual meeting that took place on 1/20. To summarize: three distinct proposals were presented to help mitigate flooding. 1. Protecting critical infrastructure – seawalls, levees – which inevitably leads flood waters elsewhere. 2. Natural protection method – planting the right vegetation, proper land management etc. 3. Changing development methods – elevating buildable areas. John said he prefers the natural method. Dr. Tempel suggested it would probably be more effective to use funds to buy out properties around the New Market Avenue area and let the water run its course.

G. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico

- Dr. Tempel reported that Hawkeye Development got their tree permit for the Whispering Hills Road subdivision. She deposited the \$17,600 in lieu of planting check into the Tree Trust Fund.

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

- Dorothy mentioned that we are in need of scheduling a trail maintenance day.

I. Historical Sites Preservation - Mr. L. Randolph

- There was nothing to report.

J. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- There was nothing new to report.

K. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Jonathan said members are moving along on their initiatives. Jonathan and Debbie Boyle will be collaborating on Culture & Arts actions. Dr. Tempel mentioned the GT did collaborate with the Cultural Arts Commission for an environmental art project 'Windows of Understanding'; there are two pictures hanging in the windows of Sports World downtown.

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

- Dr. Tempel reported in January SPEC's Facebook page carried 9 posts: reached 5,474 people with 398 engagements. The GT Facebook page had 4 posts. Idle Free SP had 1 post. Dr. Tempel suggested we boost an ad when important. Jonathan suggested boosting information on the plastic bag ban.

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

- John took the ANJEC webinar course from NJDEP. They are pushing towns to identify flood prone areas and plan accordingly; more severe flooding is expected in the future with rising sea levels. They encourage everyone to go on the website NJfloodmapper.org
- Dorothy reported that one of our focus points to keep the town's stormwater classification Tier A (permit to discharge stormwater) is public education and outreach. Dorothy is interested in painting a mural in a public space. She asked Jack Pedersen, owner of the building where her Art Studio is, if she can use the back wall facing the parking area. He was in favor. She wants to do a stormwater theme mural with writing. We need to find out if a large mural qualifies as a billboard which requires permission. Dr. Tempel suggested we can collaborate with the Cultural Arts Commission who are also planning billboards. Jonathan, as part of the GT, wants to establish a creative team also. He is looking for opportunities for public art and ways to engage the community. We can document the art for Sustainable NJ action points. Jonathan wants to inventory our current art installations in town. He will share his information and ideas with Dorothy.

6. Incoming / Outgoing Correspondence

- Dr. Tempel asked members if they have any new budget requests. She said we do need to request a new line item for 'Advertising' to pay for legal notices published in 'The Observer'.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 9, 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
SPBA	-South Plainfield Business Association
SPEC	-South Plainfield Environmental Commission
USACE	-United States Army Corp of Engineers