

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - March 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, Adam Butrico, Pete Smith (council liaison) and Rich Houghton (planning board liaison).

Alternate members present:

Associate members present: Lisa Roseo (secretary)

Others: Dr. A. Tempel (environmental specialist)

Absent: Tom Walsh (e) and Jonathan Walezak (e)

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the February 9, 2022 meeting were reviewed and the following correction was made: Under Green Team, 1st line, second sentence, should read: Jonathan and *Debbie Boyle* will be After the name change was made, 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 = \$1,000 temporary budget) Since the last meeting we spent \$0. YTD spent = \$451.42. Balance = \$548.58
- Clean Communities - The 2021 grant = \$48,287.91. Spent since February 9 = \$6,457 on: \$475 for litter can maintenance; \$1,650 on wages for litter patrol & sign enforcement; \$452 for 50 'Bag UP NJ' lawn signs; \$888 for dog waste bags; \$2,000 on assembly programs (two programs each) for Franklin and Kennedy Schools; \$337 on safety vests and \$655 for a 'Spring Cleanup' display ad in the big issue of 'The Observer'. Total spent = \$37,640. Balance = \$13,869.
- 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 said he spoke with Paul Rizzo about the differences in by-laws between the Boro's commissions and committees. Paul is going to write up a draft which Pete will present to the Mayor & Council. This will get all by-laws in line. Pete explained there is slight confusion because there are differences in how each commission/committee either selects/votes on or has their chairpersons appointed for different terms. Pete said Mayor Anesh has appointed Dorothy as the interim SPEC Chairperson until this issue is formally resolved.
- Pete mentioned residents' dissatisfaction with the warehouses that are going up in town. Unfortunately, there isn't a lot that can be done to prevent it when site plan applications are conforming. The developer for the New Market Avenue site agreed to, at the Mayor & Council's request, to put a left-hand turn lane in, which ends up costing him \$750,000 + to move all the electrical

poles. The Harris Steel property was purchased by 'Link Logistics'. To the best of Pete's knowledge, the company will be constructing multiple warehouses which they will lease. They will consider widening the corner where trucks will make a right-hand turn from New Brunswick Avenue onto New Market Avenue. In order to try and alleviate some traffic, there is discussion to have trucks, at certain times of the day, make their right onto South Clinton Avenue instead of continuing on the New Market Avenue truck route. We are also considering asking them to put another entrance/exit further up on New Brunswick Avenue.

- Pete said the Boro just received word that the Cornell-Dublier property owners might propose changing the zoning use from retail to warehouse.
- Dorothy asked about the status of the empty site where SP Liquors/Dance Studio used to be on Hamilton Blvd. Pete is not sure but will inquire.
- Dr. Tempel expressed serious concern about the choice the Boro is making in not finding a way to avoid allowing all the warehouses to go in. Ultimately, South Plainfield won't be a 'livable town'; there won't be anywhere for residents to go in their own town to enjoy themselves. If warehouses are paying more for properties, as Pete Smith said, the town can make a coordinated effort to plan for local businesses to share space and cost for these sites. Pete said the only way to accomplish that would be to rezone properties. Dr. Tempel said that is exactly what we should be doing. Pete explained that the Boro has already been sued for doing that. He said Jack Morris bought a building and told the Planning Board that he tried to sell it, he couldn't, but he could answer South Plainfield's COAH issue if the Boro allowed him to convert and build condos/apartments. The State stepped in and mandated the Boro allow that. That is what is happening throughout the Boro. Pete added that South Plainfield does benefit from having the majority of industrial business in one area, along with retail, and housing in another.
- Pete acknowledged that he still intends to work on the 'Community Forestry Management Plan' and 'Spring Litter Cleanup'. Dr. Tempel gave Pete a 'NJ Division of Forestry' brochure which talks about the Community Forestry program and available grants. The grants are through the program, so in order to qualify, we need to be developing a formal plan. We also need to meet certain requirements, such as having two trained professionals in Forestry. Tree management is a technical field. The State may also require that a town has a 'Shade Tree' Commission. Accomplishing this would be a great environmental benefit to residents.

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

- Rich said there was nothing new to report.

C. Site Plan Review - Mr. A. Butrico

- Ames Goldsmith Advanced Materials (3900 S. Clinton Ave.)(former Metz Metalurgical) – proposing to install 5 – 6 solar arrays for their use. Adam reported that GeoWeb lists both lots, five and ten acres, as a KCS with groundwater contamination. There is also a leaking underground tank. There are wetlands throughout; no LOI provided. They state the impervious surface will not be increasing. There are approximately a dozen trees on site; mostly open field. SPEC will ask for a formal tree removal/replacement plan and a LOI.

D. ERI - Ms. D. Leporino

- Debra said there is nothing new to report.

E. Clean Communities - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel said our recycling program litter crew has been cleaning the parks and some roads two days a week.
- Dr. Tempel submitted an ad copy to 'The Observer' which was formatted into a ½ page full-color ad for 'Save the Date' Spring Cleanup. It will appear in their big issue. Dr. Tempel also sent out an email blast. Received some responses from past participants. If we don't receive enough response, we may want to make some phone calls asking if people are planning to participate.
- Dr. Tempel received a resident complaint about litter and trash in the stream that crosses Baker Avenue and runs into the culvert behind Franklin School. The resident reported that it is blocked and needs to be cleaned out. She has been complaining for years and no action. Dr. Tempel said the Boro could do a stream cleaning. Per State regulations, if we are not using heavy equipment, we can get in the stream and de-snap by hand or bring hand equipment up to the bank. Dr. Tempel is not sure why the Boro has not addressed the problem. Dorothy suggested there may be overgrowth that needs to be cleaned out and possibly replaced with swamp grass, which might help. There are ANJEC stream restoration grants available from time to time. Adam volunteered to go there on cleanup day. Dr. Tempel will try and assign some intrepid volunteers. Pete said DPW is looking to hire more people as they are short staffed. He will put a call in to Len Miller to ask if there are plans to tackle the problem.
- Dr. Tempel also received a complaint about litter on Woodland Avenue along the Oak Park Commons shopping center. We haven't been able to address the issue because of dangerous traffic conditions. We will need traffic safety to set up traffic control.
- Dr. Tempel ordered the 'Bag UP NJ' lawn signs. We need a plan to distribute to the most effective areas. Pete suggested placing on the main road arteries in and out of town, major intersections and heavily traveled roads. Dr. Tempel might ask Kevin Kober to place the signs.
- Dr. Tempel reported that Middlesex County will sponsor a webinar on the plastic bag ban directed at the business community on 3/31. She forwarded the announcement to the SPBA and Councilman White for BAG. Debra said the information will be posted on the Economic Development website, per Councilman White. Debra suggested we ask Darlene Pinto, TAPInto, to post the link, as well as Nancy Grennier at 'The Observer'.

F. Land Use - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel reported PSE&G is looking to install a new substation in a vacant wooded lot on South Clinton Avenue. They are preparing to sample for possible contamination before deciding, and the sampling requires tree removal from an area about 1/3 of an acre; about 50 trees. The trees are all early successional species. They want to know if replacement trees will be required. Dr. Tempel's reading of the ordinance is that it is not unless SPEC recommends it. She explained this situation doesn't fall under the 'Development Review Ordinance'; it falls under the original 'Tree Protection Ordinance'. That ordinance does not require replacements, only that the removal must not cause erosion, interfere with growth of remaining trees or affect drainage patterns. They are planning on leaving the stumps, so Dr. Tempel is inclined to leave it alone because the area will be recolonized by the same species; they should very quickly get regrowth. After discussion, SPEC will suggest asking them to replant the trees fronting South Clinton Avenue if needed to hide bare area.

G. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico

- Dr. Tempel said NJDEP Forestry emailed that the Salem Oak seedlings are now available. Adam said he will pick up the seedling when he picks up the other tree seedlings for distribution. We need to find a sheltered location for planting. Pete suggested planting near the proposed 'Covid-19 Memorial Walkway' when installed. He believes that will be placed in Veteran's Park. SPEC favored the idea.
- 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.
- Dorothy announced the passing of our former SPEC member Jim Schmidt. He was dedicated to the OTOSP and Arbor Day Foundation Hazelnut Project.

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

- Dorothy reported hosting a Riley School cub scout group with their parents & siblings. They enjoyed the walk and museum; very spirited group.

I. Historical Sites Preservation - Mr. L. Randolph

- There was nothing to report.

J. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- Adam mentioned an article he read stating automobile based ozone is the #1 air pollution killer in New Jersey. He said he will forward the piece to Dr. Tempel to post on our 'Idle-Free' Facebook page.

K. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Dr. Tempel spoke about information she and Bob Longo obtained from 'SolarLandscape', a solar energy developer under contract to the BPU to install solar farms and sell the energy to subscribers at a discount. Dr. Tempel explained the company rents spaces on commercial buildings to erect solar arrays. The program is aimed at low to moderate incomes, those who would like to use solar but cannot afford to erect or do not own their own home. A portion of their power would come from the solar company, which is billed separately, at a 15% discount that the State has set up. They still continue to receive a bill from PSE&G after deducting solar usage. If we promote their energy to residents, we can get points with Sustainable NJ. The Boro's role would be to promote the developers energy; specifically the underserved community.
- Dorothy said Jonathan has already put together a creative team for the 'Cultural Creative Arts' action group. They will set a date to meet at Dorothy's Art Studio. Their first project will be an art display in a window on Jack Pederson's building downtown. Dorothy plans on having ongoing displays, including a cross-section of people's art who are/were students of hers.

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

- Dr. Tempel reported in February SPEC's Facebook page carried 4 posts: reached 4,217 people, 96 engagements, 12 comments and 10 shares. . The GT Facebook page had no posts but reached 18 people. Idle Free SP reached 5 people.

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

- John reported that MCOEM has been assigned to run the section of the Green Brook Flood Control systems. They are responsible for mowing the grass, five pump station checks, monthly flood wall operations & testing. The NJDEP pays back 75% of the cost of their operations.

- The Hazard Mitigation plan was accepted by FEMA. Working on getting all 25 municipalities to agree to follow the plan. 24 of 25 have passed resolutions so far.
- Multiple counties got together for the last CRS/MS4 meeting. A NJDEP representative spoke about counties understanding their flooded areas and how they contribute to at-risk populations. The latest updated hazard mitigation plan should be available on the county website, middlesexcountynj.gov, in the next couple weeks.
- MCOEM is concentrating, in terms of flood prevention, on watersheds; our county is tied into 7 different watersheds. Therefore, each municipality has an effect on others. They are encouraging towns to take all situations into account, prioritize critical areas and use funding in the most effective way.
- John said hopefully South Plainfield will see some money for 'Ida' damage which was a federally declared disaster. Most likely funds will go for elevations and buy-outs for affected towns. Dr. Tempel asked if some of our residents on New Market Avenue might see some mitigation on their property. John said yes, once Chief Parker, OEM Coordinator, submits a project write-up.

6. Incoming / Outgoing Correspondence

- Dr. Tempel said the tree seedling distribution will take place on 4/23 at the Senior Center. If anyone is available to help, we'll start separating the trees about 8:30 am. and distributing @11.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

- Dorothy mentioned Grant School students have been working on a 'Walk for Trees' environmental project. They are raising awareness about the endangered Golden Lion Tamarin. The virtual program explains that when trees disappear, diversity disappears. Dorothy said their website program can be 'shared' on SPEC's Facebook page.

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 13, 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