

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - October 13, 2021

1. Call to Order

Notice having been filed with the Courier News and S.P. Observer, Chairwoman Dorothy Miele called the Environmental Commission meeting to order in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act at 7:32 pm. This meeting took place at the Highland Avenue Woods Nature Center.

Present: John Ferguson, Tom Walsh, Debra Leporino, Adam Butrico, Pete Smith (council liaison) and Brian Bythell (planning board liaison).

Alternate members present: Jordan Mandel

Associate members present: Lisa Roseo (secretary)

Others: Dr. A. Tempel (environmental specialist)

Absent:

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the September 8, 2021 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 (FY2021 = \$2,225) Since the last meeting we spent \$0. YTD spent = \$875.82. Balance = \$1,349.18
- Clean Communities - (2020 grant \$45,370) We received the 2021 grant = \$48,287.91. Spent since September 8 = \$3,710.25 on: \$475 on litter can maintenance; \$1,235.25 on litter removal/sign enforcement salary & wages; and \$2,000 on school assembly programs for Grant & Holy Savior Schools. YTD spent = \$23,452.33 from the 2020 grant, plus \$5,865 from the 2019 grant = \$25,606.65. Balance = \$77,145.20 (2020 + 2021 grant) The 2020 grant is to be spent by the end of the year.
- Dr. Tempel reported that Glenn Cullen gave her invoices for street sweeping for 2020 and 2021 through October that haven't been charged. Therefore, we won't have the \$77,145 balance shown in the Clean Communities Grant. Debra asked how much street sweeping expenses are. Dr. Tempel said possibly \$16,000 @ over \$30/hr. for DPW salaries & wages to operate the sweeper. Debra asked if SPEC must approve that expense. Dr. Tempel explained that a few years ago SPEC agreed to pay the salaries out of the grant. The State approved the expense and there is no cap on salary expense.
- 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.
- Dr. Tempel reported that the developer who is building the self-storage facility on Park Avenue, had a large tree replacement requirement because the site had a mature woodland. Our engineer calculated the payment-in-lieu-of planting = \$73,000+. She explained the developer proactively made the payment before they started applying for building permits. The check was made payable to the tax office and so has not been posted to the Tree Fund. Ordinarily the developer comes in for their building permit and the tree permit is part of that process. Dr. Tempel is handed the check which is deposited into the Trust Fund. The tax office doesn't know about it and suggested the check may have been deposited with other checks. Glenn Cullen is looking into it. Pete Smith will also make a note to inquire. Dr. Tempel said if we do receive that check we could use the funds toward a 'Community Forestry Plan'.

5. Committee and Liaison Reports

A. Council Liaison - Mr. P. Smith

- Pete reported he had a conversation with Dr. Tempel about resurrecting the 'Community Forestry Plan' that has been sitting idle for approximately 10 years. Pete will be meeting with Dr. Tempel and Len Miller to discuss what can be done. There are trees in the ROW that are old or too tall and can be replaced with suitable species. We can also apply for grant money to help the Boro maintain their street trees.
- Pete said there was good participation for the Fall Cleanup. The Mayor & Council cleaned up on Durham Avenue/287 area. Pete mentioned that he will be contacting State Senator Diegnan and the DOT about the condition of the walkway under the 287 overpass.
- Solar – Pete mentioned that Governor Murphy recently signed clean energy/climate change bills that require municipalities to purchase a certain % of hybrid vehicles in their fleet within the next few years. Pete proposed to the Mayor & Council that the Boro install solar covered parking in the back lot behind Boro Hall. In addition, use the solar energy to power an EV charging station. After the Boro purchases the Clean Communities hybrid truck, hopefully, we can consider other hybrid vehicles for certain Boro employees when new cars are needed. This would be a way to save money on fuel and be State compliant. Pete will be reaching out to Len Miller, DPW, to possibly lay the groundwork. Tom reminded Pete that Glenn Cullen & Len Miller are aware of the truck purchase when funds are available. This was part of Tom's narrative to Sustainable NJ requiring the Boro to have at least one green vehicle. Dr. Tempel said the Clean Communities Grant allows use of up to 25% for a piece of equipment; you can combine 25% of year one & 25% of year two.
- Pete mentioned that Harris Steel sold their property at New Market & New Brunswick Ave. to a national company that plans on converting the property to warehouses. Discussion ensued about the impact of additional truck traffic on the already over-crowded roadways. Dr. Tempel asked why we should assume that the Boro is helpless in finding a way to reduce truck traffic. She suggested possibly amending our Zoning Ordinance to remove warehouses as a permitted use in certain areas of town. As we continue to discuss the need to address ways to reduce air pollution and combat climate change, we should take advantage of opportunities when presented.

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

- Brian said the last couple of meetings have discussed the 'Colonial Oaks' plan on New Brunswick Avenue. The plans have changed a couple times because of the wetlands in the middle of the property. Now the developer proposes to break up the site into two separate areas with a big empty plot in the middle. The Planning Board is trying to get them to widen and repair Tyler Avenue with a traffic light as part of their approved plan. Also, the board will request a sidewalk the entire length of the development. There are still issues under discussion, including COAH requirements. Brian said the Board has an issue with their plan to refuse to build a walkway from the larger housing section near Tyler Place, where the amenities are, to the smaller section beyond the wetlands further down New Brunswick Avenue. Those tenants would need to drive to use the clubhouse, pool etc. In SPEC's comment letter to the Board, Dr. Tempel pointed out that if they do put a nature trail through the wetlands, they need to install railings to keep people from wandering off the trail. Without railings, you are encouraging people to go into the woods which is impact/disturbance, littering etc. That activity will quickly degrade the wetlands. Sidewalks would be optimal. Brian said the developer wanted to put

a trail around the larger housing portion that would connect to the sidewalks, but that would open concerns for anyone to access the complex.

C. Site Plan Review - Mr. A. Butrico / Mr. J. Mandel

- Bridge Acquisition (1 Cragwood Rd.) – Adam said this plan is prior to submission of preliminary plans; minimal information-no EIS. The applicant proposes to demolish the current office building which has low occupancy and construct a modern 185,000 sq. ft. warehouse. It will have 28 loading docks, 59 trailer storage spaces and 216 parking spaces. They need a use variance for the M-3 zone. Adam said there is a stormwater basin on the east end of the property. The plan states 63.22% post-construction impervious surface. There are no groundwater issues per Geoweb. Dr. Tempel suggested we can comment on the proposed new use prior to seeing detailed plans. This is another use with more truck traffic. Dr. Tempel conveyed Dr. DeVito's thoughts he shared with her: Consider the upcoming multi-housing units being built in town which will be occupied by young children and impacted by many more diesel trucks associated with the current and future warehouses in town. Adam suggested asking for their landscaping, tree removal/replacement and recycling plans.

D. ERI - Ms. D. Leporino

- Debra will be meeting with Dr. Tempel to continue work on the updated Open Space list/map.

E. Clean Communities - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel said Debra and Jordan helped out at the Fall Cleanup. Dr. Tempel said based on the cleanup reports she has so far, we had 151 people who cleaned 25 sites on 111 acres & 2.5 road miles. Volunteers collected 100 bags and 1000 lbs. of unbagged junk. We are still awaiting three reports. We were able to get some abandoned Adopt-a-Spots cleaned. Debra noted that Kathleen Benton recruited a lot of her students to help at the cleanup.
- Adopt-a-Spot – Debra said a cleanup participant signed up to join the program. The Jones Family will clean up Putnam Park. We will order their sign and publicize.
- Dr. Tempel spoke about the issue discussed last month concerning Kevin Kober and the sign ordinance. She sent the pictures to Pete Smith, as requested, who agreed that the signs did not belong in the ROW. Pete said we do need to replace the 'violation' stickers with the correct summons/ordinance #. Dr. Tempel spoke with Rich Wolff who said those signs (temporary wire signs) are not legal in any zone on anybody's property. This doesn't include contractor signs currently performing work on residents' properties. Dr. Tempel questioned whether we should get revised stickers or eliminate the violation sticker procedure. Pete will speak with Rich Wolff about this. Dr. Tempel said she will get the incorrect stickers from Kevin. Pete will also speak with Mayor Anesh and Councilman White to discuss signage criteria/regulations and include the information in the next tax bill mailing. Pete said he doesn't have a problem with signs advertising community events if the signs are removed in a timely manner after the event date.

F. Land Use - Dr. A. Tempel

- Green Brook Flood Control – Dr. Tempel said the 10/6 meeting was long as there were several area residents asking questions after the Ida flooding. The ACOE said their flood control measures worked in Bound Brook, and the flooding they experienced was caused by other factors.

G. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico / Mr. J. Schmidt

- Dr. Tempel asked Adam if he has heard any mention of Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) control methods. Adam heard it is best to approach the fly from the front so they cannot hop away. Apparently, they tire after three or so hops. Dr. Tempel said the Middlesex County Parks Division is taking down Tree of Heaven and working with Boy Scouts to set up sticky traps. Residents are asking for advice, but the State is not providing much. In addition, the pesticide companies don't want to treat the SLF on properties for some unknown reason. Dr. Tempel publicized the fact that we are in a quarantine area; items must be checked for the SLF before moving to a different location.
- Pete asked Adam if he would like to be in the meeting to discuss the 'Community Forestry Management Plan' when it is scheduled. Adam said yes.
- Dr. Tempel consulted on the tree species for donation by a group of Dog Park users who wanted to plant it as a memorial to a resident who loved the park. The planting was done on 10/2.

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

- There was nothing new to report.

I. Historical Sites Preservation - Mr. L. Randolph

- There was nothing to report.

J. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- Adam asked if the Boro could implement an annual tax/fee to businesses with truck loading docks. The fee could be used to mitigate air pollution, repair road damage, traffic controls etc. Pete would be in favor if the funds are used exclusively for those purposes.

K. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Tom said we submitted our information to Sustainable NJ. We are awaiting results for re-certification.
- Tom is helping Kathleen Benton with having irrigation installed in the High School greenhouse.
- The National Drug Take-back Initiative is on 10/23. Tom will get the weight information from the DEA via Chief Parker.

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

- Dr. Tempel reported in September, SPEC's Facebook page carried 3 posts: reached 7,953 people, 491 engagements, 20 shares and 16 comments. The GT Facebook page had 1 post, reaching 7 people.
- -Dr. Tempel mentioned Facebook provides statistics and insights into our audience. 67% of our audience is female in the 35-54 age group; same pattern in men. 66% live in South Plainfield.

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

- The NJDEP is still encouraging municipalities to have better stormwater management practices in place because of the push from the National Flood Insurance Program.

N. Environmental Specialist - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel asked members if they have ideas to inform residents about the upcoming plastic bag ban. Tom suggested asking stores to inform their customers. Dr. Tempel said the NJCCC has a website Bagupnj.com with useful information/resources to use for an outreach campaign. How do we reach our business community to provide them the information? We will reach out to Councilman White and the SPBA. Debra said Darlene Pinto (TapInto) and Nancy Grennier (Observer) said they will help us with press releases. Debra said also there is a list of groups that will help spread the word when we come up

with a flyer. Dr. Tempel suggested that if we had a physical flyer, volunteers could go from store-to-store. She will come up with an informational handout. Dorothy suggested putting out a PSA on the Boro's local video channel. Pete said we should concentrate on informing residents that they won't be getting plastic bags, because the businesses should already know. The businesses probably won't be able to purchase the bags and will be fined if they offer them. Pete will ask some small business owners if they've been informed of the ban by the State.

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

- There was nothing to report.

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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 9:38 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 10, 2021 @ 7:30 p.m. in the Highland Avenue Woods Nature Center – 115 Sylvania Place.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lisa Roseo
Environmental Commission Secretary

Acronyms

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| ANJEC | -Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions |
| BOA | -Board of Adjustment |
| CBA | -Clean Business 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 |

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| 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 |