

## **Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission virtual meeting January 11, 2021**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, S. Jaracz, J. Johnson, C. MacIvor, D. Pydeski, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, and P. Walitsky; and Council liaison T. Chase.

Chair's report: he submitted the attendance report for the last quarter of 2020 to the township clerk.

The minutes of the meeting of Dec. 21 were approved unanimously without change.

Web site/e-mail/social media: no updates. J. Johnson noted that the Commission should keep in mind preparing something to post on social media.

Plan review: a new site plan was submitted for the Executive Drive warehouse on Elizabeth Ave., significantly reducing the size of the building because the D&R Canal Commission required a 100 ft buffer from the stream just to the north of most of the plot. They expressed willingness to look at a green roof in the future, though they think they now have sufficient infrastructure for stormwater management. The number of parking spaces was also reduced. The EC will resend its prior comments calling for a green roof.

A. Schmidt commented that the township Council's 2017 Resolution to Support Climate Control as Directed by the Paris Climate Agreement and the Council's 2016 Proclamation to increase the township's tree canopy should be transmitted with comments on all site plans proposing significant tree removal. The members agreed with this. T. Chase commented that the Shade Tree Commission should be pressed to plant more trees (with appropriate protection against deer) on township property to create more tree canopy. A. Schmidt suggested that anyone who had sites they wanted to recommend for tree planting should let him know and he would pass on the information to the Shade Tree Commission.

R. Suydam requested a map of township open space to suggest where trees could be planted. P. Walitsky reported that new applications, to be heard at later board meetings, included approval of an existing house at 156 Victor St.; a proposal for a soccer field and running track at Cedar Hill Prep School; and a pole barn for parking cars at Hamilton Ave. & Clyde Rd. R. Suydam commented that the Watershed Institute's suggested modification of the DEP template for the new stormwater management ordinance would trigger a need for green infrastructure at the Cedar Hill site (0.14 acre).

New Business: what can we learn from the Princeton Environmental Commission meeting Stan attended (virtually)? Its attendance (46 people) exceeded all previous EC meetings. They met on Zoom, it was more flexible than Webex, and had one link for all attendees, with no distinction between EC members and attendees from the public. S. Jaracz commented that they were all well-behaved, no need for control over who was speaking. Thus the public could show themselves and share their slides. Princeton supplies a staff member to take notes and prepare minutes.

R. Suydam commented that the public should be able to see who else is present. She suggested that the public should be invited to state on the Chat function that they would like to speak on a particular issue. The EC could then open the meeting to the public at that point to allow them to speak. A. Schmidt suggested that meetings should be opened to the public early in the agenda, after plans review. They would be asked whether they wished to speak on any specific agenda item. They could also speak during the first opening to the public about any items. The meeting would again be opened to the public after the Commission addressed the specified issue men-

tioned and the Commission would listen to and address the public's concerns if we hadn't previously fully addressed their concerns. In accordance with this suggestion, C. MacIvor moved to open to the public at this time. This was passed. Amy Spear, 24 Old Georgetown Rd, spoke of her interest in the EC and supported making use of ways to use Webex to facilitate public input. S. Jaracz noted that on Webex the host has to unmute anyone from the public. A. Schmidt then moved to close the public portion. This passed.

S. Jaracz continued reporting on the Princeton EC meeting. Gas-powered leaf blowers were discussed at length, following a report by Eunice Wong. (The suggestion at the 12/21 meeting that this should be publicized as an agenda item at the 1/11 meeting was not carried out.) R. Suydam formally moved that it should be possible for the public to be seen as well as heard by the Commission and the rest of the public during our virtual meetings.. A. Schmidt stated that a proposal to this effect should be prepared to be voted on at the next meeting. R. Suydam's motion was seconded by S. Jaracz. A. Schmidt asked whether this included the public being able to speak at any time. During discussion, it was made clear that the public will only be able to be heard when we open the meeting to the public and open the microphone. The microphone will not be open to the public throughout the meeting. T. Chase noted that the Commission determines its procedure, may open the meeting to the public at any time. R. Suydam's motion was passed. T. Chase will convey this to Bob Vornlocker.

R. Suydam moved that at the next meeting gas-powered leaf blowers should be on the agenda, and that Eunice Wong, who reported to the Princeton EC on this topic, be invited to speak. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. S. Jaracz will contact her and make her a panelist.

R. Suydam pointed out that the stormwater management ordinance was on the agenda under both old and new business. She moved that the document on the model stormwater ordinance, prepared by the subcommittee and pointing out the changes recommended by the Watershed Institute and supported by the EC, be sent to Mark Healey and Carl Hauck, who are preparing the township's new stormwater management ordinance. It includes a statement on extensive green roofs, requiring them on warehouse roofs with a slope less than 30%. How much of the roof must be green is not stated, so this does not necessarily rule out using some of the roof for solar panels. Payments to the Shade Tree fund for trees not replaced could be diverted to paying for the green roof. Another future ordinance could require solar cells over parking lots.

The document, as amended, was discussed and passed unanimously.

Planning for meeting with township IT on revising the EC web site: A. Schmidt shared the subcommittee draft request for revisions. He suggested having the IT Department contact City Connections, former contractor managing the township web site, asking whether they might still have missing pre-2012 materials. He moved to send the subcommittee draft to IT (Bob McQueen) as preparation for a meeting. This was passed unanimously.

Community Solar Planning: R. Suydam and T. Chase reported on the proposal from Dimension Renewable Energy for a community solar project, including updates: at least 51% of their subscribers are required to be low/moderate income, after that BPU requirement is satisfied the general public may subscribe. "Subscription" = payment for electricity received is always less than the credit on the utility bill from the BPU.

S, Jaracz reported on energy dispensed from township charging stations, obtained from them. The public charging station charges per minute of charging; this makes the electricity twice as expensive as charging at home, particularly for plug-in hybrids which charge more slowly.

[Subsequently he sent information indicating the Franklin's charges are the highest per minute of any municipality reported on. John Loos (former township Open Space consultant) commented to T. Chase that driving on electricity from that charging station is more expensive than driving on gasoline.]

S. Jaracz moved to ask the township what electric vehicle usage was before Covid-19; R. Suydam suggested instead to ask what expected usage will be after Covid-19. S. Jaracz pointed out that Chevrolet Bolts (the township EVs) should **not** be charged to 100% of capacity, because of potential for fire and more rapid battery degradation. There is a program (Hilltop Reserve) which limits battery charging to 88% of capacity. Also, the EC asks the township whether its personnel are trained in usage and battery charging to prevent fire and battery degradation. This was passed unanimously.

R. Suydam sent an e-mail to Sen. Bob Smith, requesting that he ask the BPU for a study of long-term economics of undergrounding utility cables. No response has been received.

R. Suydam reported on meeting with Carla Beverly of Central Jersey Development Corp. about needs of the low-income community. A particular need is east-west transportation, e.g. to the Franklin Food Bank and Middlebush. Suburban Transit buses idle at their terminal on Rte 27, producing air pollution. A. Schmidt commented that she should contact the Middlesex County Health Dept. to monitor idling.

A. Schmidt noted that the Old Business agenda item L should refer to Sustainability Officer/ Grants Coordinator. R. Suydam noted that Sen. Smith is also pushing a bill for solar 'farms' on agricultural land; this should not be on prime soils.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 PM.