

**Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission virtual meeting  
Feb. 1, 2021**

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, S. Jaracz, D. Pydeski, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, and P. Walitsky; and Council liaison T. Chase. Absent: C. MacIvor; J. Johnson (excused, work conflict).

Chair's report: ANJEC is offering training courses, free to EC members whose membership has been paid by the township. M. Santiago is trying to register.

Minutes of Jan. 11, 2021: acceptance was moved by P. Walitsky; approved unanimously.

S. Jaracz introduced the evening's speaker, Eunice Wong, whom he met through the Dec. 16 meeting of the Princeton Environmental Commission, at which she spoke on gas-powered leaf blowers.

A. Schmidt moved to open the meeting to the public, before Ms. Wong spoke. No member of the public wished to speak at this time; but at closing Anthony Ganim spoke that he wants to offer comment after Ms. Wong's presentation. The meeting was then closed to the public.

Ms. Eunice Wong then spoke. Professionally she is an actress, at present narrates audio books. The sound of gas-powered leaf blowers prevented her doing this at her home studio. These blowers commonly are powered by two-stroke engines, which have been banned from all other uses. Thirty minutes of operation generates as much hydrocarbon pollution as driving a Ford pickup from New Jersey to Alaska. Their air pollution causes a number of ailments, but most notably the noise causes hearing loss. Workers are exposed to 110 or more decibels next to their ears. They also are breathing volatile organic hydrocarbon emissions 4 to 6 hours per day. A comparable noise, airplane flight paths close to the ground, was shown to raise levels of stress hormones and blood pressure.

Gas-powered blowers emit low frequency noise which is very penetrating, unlike electric blowers; the noise travels for blocks. She sponsored a petition to the Princeton Environmental Commission and Council, calling for restrictions on the use of gas-powered blowers. People are starting to realize the effects; but more education is needed. Why use them?

S. Jaracz pointed out the Maplewood banned gas-powered leaf blowers from May 15 to Sept. 30. Ms. Wong explained that the ordinance actually saved landscapers money. Originally violators were fined \$50 for the first offense, \$100 for subsequent offenses; at this level some property owners told landscapers to use them anyway, the property owner would pay the fine. The Maplewood Council then raised the fines to \$500 for the first offense, \$1000 for the second, \$1500 for the third and subsequent offenses. At this level no property owner wished to subsidize them. Enforcement is best carried out not by police, but by citizen affidavits, cell phone videos sent to the zoning office, including pictures showing the business name on the truck. Some 200 communities across the USA now have ordinances against gas-powered blowers. Electric (battery-operated) blowers make less noise, have no emissions. Landscapers do use electric blowers, but an ordinance is needed to get them to change to electric. Electric blowers are more expensive to buy, but require less maintenance, no gas purchase. Or, property owners can just leave the leaves on the lawn or mulch them with a mower.

She created a petition on change.org, but there are many sites for creating a petition. Her petition drew people to the Princeton EC meeting. See also Quiet Communities, Inc. (quietcommunities.org). She told of workers paid to use leaf blowers even at times when there were no leaves to blow.

S. Jaracz moved to open the meeting to the public. A. Schmidt asked whether EC members could interact with the public during the open period.

Anthony Ganim stated that today's gas-powered blowers polluted much less than those of some years ago. He stated that in his experience batteries gave only 8 minutes of operation. [For commercial use] they would require a generator to recharge them, which also would create noise and air pollution. There are many other sources of noise, such as fire engines and ambulances. He uses gas-powered blowers, with ear protection.

Ms. Wong responded that fire engines etc. are a necessity. She reiterated that gas-powered blowers emit low frequency noise which carries. Many landscapers are able to run their businesses with electric blowers. Go to [agza.net](http://agza.net) for more information.

A. Schmidt reported that he bought a battery-powered blower with batteries which last 20-30 minutes and recharge in less than an hour. Fire engines and ambulances are exempt from noise codes. The Maplewood ordinance at present applies only to commercial users; it may be amended to apply to all, including residents. Ms. Wong explained that they were sued for discrimination against commercial users, might have to change their ordinance to apply to all.

A. Schmidt asked what is the best way to get an ordinance, via the Environmental Commission or via a petition. Ms. Wong reported that the Princeton EC developed an ordinance as a goal for Council. A petition circulated, and many people wrote letters to the editor of the Princeton Packet. Community support is needed.

The Princeton Council has not yet adopted its goals for 2021. It is expected to take public opinion seriously. Sustainable Princeton is meeting with landscapers to get their opinions.

Another member of the public, David Desrochers, spoke. He had worked against gas-powered leaf blowers in Cranford, before moving the Canal Walk in Franklin. He said that most blower use in Canal Walk blows only dust. Strong community support is needed – he got a lot of resistance in Cranford.

Javier Ferro agreed with what has been said about the annoyance of leaf blowers. They make being outside unpleasant, one has to go inside.

Ms. Wong pointed out that blowers blow away soil and insect habitat. S. Jaracz noted that this is an environmental justice issue, most workers being Latino. M. Santiago reported seeing a notice of this meeting on Facebook, receiving some comments. S. Jaracz stated that he made the post, and most of the comments were negative, ridiculing the effort.

Anthony Ganim spoke about senior citizens who use the blowers to clean their properties. He puts up with the noise for cleanliness.

S. Jaracz moved to close the meeting to the public. This was approved (at 8:12 PM).

R. Suydam suggested that watchers of this meeting could start a petition, submit it to the Environmental Commission. Ms. Wong is sending her petition to all attendees. A. Schmidt noted that a petition must decide what it will ask for. Ms. Wong suggested that an ordinance could proceed in steps, first restricting the months of use, then requiring use of electric blowers rather than gas-powered. They do pay for themselves over time. In 2018 electric blowers were in top demand in the landscaping industry.

P. Walitsky pointed out that all four senior communities employ landscapers, and are concerned about cost. A life cycle cost analysis is needed. Ms. Wong noted that it might be obtainable through [agza.net](http://agza.net).

At this point Ms. Wong was thanked and left the meeting. W. Andrews asked what the EC wants to do now. A. Schmidt suggested that readers of the Franklin Reporter might wish to start a petition.

A. Schmidt reported on a successful meeting of the subcommittee on the web page with Bob McQueen and Krista Hegedus of the Information Technology department. The webpage now has minutes back to 2014; Ms. Hegedus has found minutes back to 2010; earlier minutes are solicited. T. Chase reported that he has minutes, not necessarily complete, back to 2000. Materials should be sent to [helpdesk@franklinnj.gov](mailto:helpdesk@franklinnj.gov). A further meeting is scheduled for Feb. 12. Two matters remain for the web site: the mission statement, and a banner for the top of the web page. A. Schmidt has three options for the mission statement, with or without the final words “rural, suburban [and urban]”. After some discussion, it was moved and seconded to use “Working to preserve and protect our precious natural resources and quality of life in all parts of the township”, without rural, suburban, urban. R. Suydam said she would prefer to include “rural, suburban, urban”, as taking specific note of the more urban, low income parts of the township. S. Jaracz suggested that “for all people” is already inclusive. All but R. Suydam voted for the version ending “all parts of the township”.

J. Johnson sent a proposed banner for the mission statement. A. Schmidt noted that “Township of Franklin appears in the general township web page, does not need to be repeated on the EC web page; but “Environmental Commission” should be written out. The vote at this time should be for color and font. A. Schmidt would like to see how it looks on the web page. It was agreed to use the banner as sent, tentatively.

Site plans: R. Suydam brought up that the tree removal page of the Elizabeth Real Estate Partners application noted many trees as being in poor condition, do not need to be replaced. The engineer preparing the list of trees is acting as sole judge of tree condition, saving his employer the applicant money by paying for fewer trees. He cites the township ordinance, 222.5.1(D); does it allow making such a judgment? On consulting the ordinance, it was found that it makes no reference to the condition of the tree, only to the size of the trees (bigger trees require more replacement). A. Schmidt noted that nothing of the sort has ever been brought up to the Shade Tree Committee. The EC report on this application should be supplemented (the application is to be heard Feb. 3).

Another application to be heard this week by the Board of Zoning Adjustment is for a “pole barn” on Hamilton St – essentially a four-car garage, replacing a number of small sheds. The EC should ask for pervious pavement. The application does not state the amount of impervious surface involved.

Old business updates: W. Andrews reported that he learned from an ANJEC webinar that they expect to have educational materials on the plastic bag ban available in about three months. S. Jaracz showed the Princeton EC flyers on this subject. Information should be made available through the supermarkets (and Ocean State Job Lots, which is of comparable size). Discussion ensued about how to communicate, and what.

Notice of the spring stream clean-up should be prepared for the web site. S. Jaracz reported on his visit to the site, the woods next to Naaman Williams Park. He stressed the desirability of a general oral statement to participants at the beginning of the clean-up. He showed the position of the stream on an aerial photo of the site. A pipe which should carry the stream is clogged, resulting in flooding of the children’s play area.

The status of the request to the BPU for a study of the long term economics of undergrounding existing utilities was reviewed – R. Suydam wrote to Sen. Bob Smith, asking him to ask

the BPU for such a study. He has not responded. It was suggested that he might be more responsive to a request from Councilman Chase.

It was moved to open the meeting to the public for any further comments. No public remained present. The meeting was adjourned at 9:44 PM.