

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, May 2, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, and P. Walitsky; and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon and intern J. Cairns. E. Pires arrived at 7:08 PM. Absent: J. Johnson, Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: he thanked the Franklin Women's Club for joining with the EC in passing out reusable shopping bags. He noted the original (2015) Impervious Surface Reduction Plan for Franklin Township from Rutgers Water Resources. The current version is from 2021.

Minutes of the meeting of April 18: J. Johnson should be added to the list of those present. S. Jaracz added numbers for the stream clean-up. A. Schmidt asked several questions about the content. With the above corrections the minutes were approved.

The meeting was opened to the public. Mrs. Peterson, 7 Lake Ave., spoke about trucks idling at and in the vicinity (including Lake Ave.) of the 7-11 on Hamilton St. The 7-11 had agreed, as a condition of its approval, to have no trucks present between 10 PM and 6 AM (at which time they open). According to Mrs. Peterson, many trucks arrive before 6 AM and have their trucks idling while waiting for the 7-11 to open. She listed and spoke about a number of other environmental problems in the neighborhood. The EC informed her that many of her complaints, including the idling trucks, could be addressed by the Somerset County Health Dept. (while trucks on the streets should be addressed by the Franklin police). The meeting was then closed to the public.

Correspondence: one letter was received, concerning NJ American Water's desire to add more solar cells at its Randolph Rd facility. No response has been received from the Dept. of Public Works concerning the request for clean-up by the lady on Cedar Ave.

Site plans: there were no plans for EC action at this time; several more plans, including for two more warehouses, were just received this morning. We will review these for the May 16 meeting.

Chris Williams, chair of the Shade Tree Commission, spoke about plans for use of the Shade Tree Fund (to which developers contribute in lieu of replacing trees they have cut down). They plan to plant 150 trees on Hamilton St., which will consume a large part of the ca. \$280,000 currently in the Shade Tree Fund. Trees of the size they plan to plant, ≈6 ft tall, cost \$250-\$300. Other possible sites need to be investigated, including where they might lower the ambient temperature in summer. R. Suydam noted that around 2015 the Shade Tree ordinance was revised, eliminating a limit that developers could meet no more than 25% of their obligation for tree replacement by contributing to the Shade Tree Fund.

Chris Williams suggested that the Shade Tree Commission might further tree planting by selling trees below cost to private parties; by ordinance they can plant trees only on public property. A. Schmidt suggested that possible planting locations on township property, including open space, need to be investigated first. Another comment was that the Shade Tree Commission needs to determine what species to plant. Can planting be carried out by volunteers, to spare the Dept. of Public Works? Board of Education properties could also be involved; but newly planted trees must be watered regularly. High school students with public service obligations could be involved in this.

A small working group from the EC and the Shade Tree Commission is needed to revise the Shade Tree ordinance. Also, a list of trees *not* to plant (such as Bradford pear) should be prepared

and published in the Franklin Times. Delays in publication of the Times, past the occurrence of events announced in it, were noted.

Annual reports of the EC are needed for 2019, 2020 and 2021; W. Andrews, T. Chase and T. Kenyon will work on this. It was suggested to start with the 2021 report, to make the absence of other reports less obvious.

R. Suydam asked whether we have an ordinance protecting the darkness of the night sky. We do have an ordinance on light pollution, based on the Eatontown ordinance which is the state model.

The anti-idling ordinance is still being worked on. A. Schmidt commented that there are more actions to take than what an ordinance can cover. We can inform the county Health Dept. about sites to be surveilled. Anti-idling signs are educational, not just warning of prosecution.

T. Kenyon informed the Commission about state legislation (A4554, S3484) concerning solar cells on preserved farmland. Currently solar cells are permitted on preserved farmland only up to 110% of the farm's own use of electricity. Grid scale projects are forbidden on preserved farmland, except by waiver granted by the BPU after consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture. Soil quality, as described in the state soil map, is an important consideration. There is also a bill in the Legislature to support pilot projects on dual use (e.g. sheep grazing around solar cells), with a one-time incentive from the BPU.

Subcommittee reports: the Communication Committee discussed whether they could post photos from the stream clean-up, concluding that they can, the waiver which Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership required participants to sign allows this. The Commission should carry through on inviting Yvette Viasus of Solar Landscape to address us.

S. Jaracz reported concerning pole-mounted charging stations: the township does own, or lease, poles in township parks, so we could place charging stations on such poles. We need to identify exactly where we could do this.

The Education Committee met with Kerry Sullivan of the township library. The library will post information from the EC, and the EC could reserve the community room for programs. We could show public service films there (films can easily be shown in libraries) and collect email addresses of interested people. M. Santiago is also contacting the high school.

T. Kenyon reported briefly on old business (see the meeting agenda). The Adopt-a-Drain program is still awaiting the mayor's signature. J. Cairns reported on the Sustainable Jersey recertification effort. He has prepared a spreadsheet to track what we have done and what we could do, and has written narratives for many actions we will submit (due date May 22). T. Kenyon described our current effort. Supporting documents are not needed for the May submission, must be submitted by August. The Green Team will meet next week. J. Cairns has obtained a paid summer internship largely because of his experience in his internship with the township.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:47 PM.