

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, January 23, 2023

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, J. Johnson, E. Pires, A. Schmidt, P. Walitsky; and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon and Rutgers intern R. Dave. M. Santiago arrived at 7:08. Absent: R. Suydam, Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: the applicant for the B9 Schoolhouse warehouse (corner of Mettlers Rd) announced at the Jan. 18 Planning Board meeting that they will submit a new site plan with no variances. He and T. Chase watched a NJLCV webinar on warehouse sprawl, with a speaker from the state Office of Planning Advocacy, who spoke of sustainable design, regional approaches, and community engagement, and described different classes of warehouses.

W. Andrews expressed concern about rats in warehouses; A. Schmidt noted that rat traps are put around in warehouses with edible stock.

The minutes of the meeting of Jan. 9 were approved, with addition of the last name of one member of the public who spoke.

The meeting was opened to the public. There were no comments, and the meeting was closed to the public.

Correspondence: one letter was received, from the Dept. of Environmental Protection concerning permit renewal for a waste transfer station in North Brunswick. No e-mails were received.

Site plans: a plan just received was a revised plan for a warehouse at 400-600 Atrium Drive, which the EC had already reviewed once. Little change was noted, but they do propose to plant more trees, 223 vs. 178 previously proposed. [Subsequent conversation with Mark Healey indicated that the proposed buildings are slightly smaller.]

Another plan was found on the table in the room, a use variance for a banquet room for Bhog Restaurant, 2 JFK Blvd. No environmental concerns were noted – this only involves renovation of an existing structure – but the EC suggests that the Zoning Board inquire as to the sufficiency of parking for the new use, given that they have been forced by the court to allow parking of 16 buses on the property.

New business: the Communications Committee sent to T. Kenyon a list of suggested changes to the EC web page, and she has passed these on to IT. The committee has sent out its first e-mail to the EC list, about the Feb. 1 film showing, with discussion to be led by R. Suydam. M. Santiago, for the Education committee, reported on the high school Environment Club's green fair, scheduled for April 29. The EC has been offered a table, and needs to confirm acceptance of this offer. The club is interested in participating in a clean-up; S. Jaracz suggests this for the woods at Naaman Williams Park.

S. Jaracz reported on the four short films on the environment to be shown at the library on Feb. 1 at 6 PM, with panel discussion between them.

P. Walitsky reported on a meeting of the Large Buildings committee. They have ordinance material from Denver, CO and Hoboken, and an action plan from Princeton. They expect to review even more material prior to preparing a recommendation to send to Council.

S. Jaracz reported being invited to a Sustainable Jersey Hub meeting in Hunterdon County.

Planning projects for 2023 is deferred until the next meeting, when R. Suydam can attend. W. Andrews pointed out that the EC did not give Environmental Stewardship awards in 2022.

W. Andrews reported that he is converting a portion of his lawn to a pollinator garden. This brought on a discussion of other non-actions (such as not raking leaves) which benefit the environment.

T. Kenyon and A. Schmidt reported on the latest version of the anti-idling ordinance, which makes maximum use of references to the state law, and a resolution accompanying it. It was moved and passed to send this to the township attorney for further review. A. Schmidt reported that the county Health Dept. spends 6 to 10 hours per week enforcing the state law, mostly early morning observation at sites reported as likely to have violations.

Old business: the revision of the Tree ordinance. The joint (with Shade Tree Commission) committee will meet Feb. 2. They will discuss a 'wish list' of items they would like to see included in the ordinance.

R. Dave is working on the data for the Local Health Assessment report.

The meeting was opened to the public. Debbie Stuart asked about where the anti-idling ordinance applies. Not on public streets, where vehicles are assumed to be in traffic. Jan Brant reported trucks parked and idling on Jensen Drive (off Schoolhouse Rd). A. Schmidt said that it is not idling if they are on a township street, but if there are No Parking signs there they can be cited for illegal parking. J. Brant reported that there are such signs in place. D. Stuart reported on cars creeping along the road to the Amazon warehouse at shift change time. She commended the township for naturalized detention basins, and expressed concern about trash at exits from major highways.

J. Brant asked how township standards for impervious surface coverage were derived. She was told to ask Mark Healey. [Subsequent conversation with Mark indicated that he didn't know, the standards were adopted long before his time with the township.]

There being no further comment from the public, it was moved to close the meeting to the public.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37 PM.