

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, March 20, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 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, R. Suydam, and P. Walitsky; sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon, and Rutgers intern R. Dave; and Council liaison E. Potosnak. M. Santiago arrived at about 7:15.

Chair's report: P. Walitsky reported that the BPU has requested comments on a proposal by PSE&G to convert street lights to LED bulbs. Township manager Bob Vornlocker asked the EC for comments, and P. Walitsky sent him a copy of the letter he sent to the BPU in 2020. Vornlocker liked it, and asked that it be rewritten and sent as a joint letter of Franklin Township and the EC,

He also noted that the EC will be embarking on a campaign to develop a Climate Action Plan for Franklin Township, which would be a precursor to a Sustainability Element for the township Master Plan. Such an element would be the basis for ordinances mandating, for instance, green or solar cell-bearing roofs for major buildings.

Dini Chacko of ANJEC spoke briefly.

The minutes of March 6 were approved. The meeting was then opened to the public.

Anthony Riccio, of Hancock Place in Canal Walk, spoke and delivered a handout with his remarks. He credited the Council for passing an ordinance to increase the distance between warehouses and residential zones, and thanked the people of Franklin for influencing Council to take this action. He recognized that this will not restrain the B9 Schoolhouse warehouse proposal which had already been deemed complete before this ordinance was passed. "How to reverse this decision is government's challenge." He called for a comprehensive, independent traffic analysis.

Jan Brant, 22 Bryant Court, spoke about the potential effect of the B9 warehouse development on all of Canal Walk, and on the pond on lot 60 of the proposal. She stated that purchase of the property is not yet complete. She said that this would not be a warehouse in the usual sense, but a fulfilment center, with vastly more truck traffic involved.

Marlon Quan, 28 Jay's Corner, reiterated that this would be not a warehouse, but a fulfilment center. He spoke about 2.5 micron particulate pollution created by diesel-burning trucks, which is carcinogenic, and the proposed cutting of trees.

Debbie Stuart, 2 Farrington Place, characterized the EC as "our greatest allies." She read from the Master Plan's characterization of environmental protection and the scenic corridor.

Shawna Collings (sp.?), Jockey Hollow Trail, spoke about trucks using Mettlers Rd, which they are required not to use, and accumulating on Schoolhouse Rd with consequent idling. She particularly opposed 24/7 operation.

Another Canal Walk resident read the State Planning Commission statement on warehouses.

A resident of 9 Bayard Lane spoke about her asthma problem and trucks idling on Randolph Rd, waiting to go to the Amazon warehouse.

Joe Hoffman, Congress Court, spoke about wetlands and ponding on Mettlers Rd when there is moderate rainfall. He noted that there is no comprehensive study of the cumulative effect of all the existing and proposed warehouses, and called for a noise study, particularly concerning the backing signal of fork lifts.

Kiki Anagnostakis read from the environmental statement in the application, describing pollutants affecting air quality. Where were air samples cited as representing air quality in the area taken? She also expressed concern about dust during construction.

Toby Kramer, 55 Bryant Court, cited the State Planning Commission policy statement. What can we do, she said, to prevent this warehouse being built?

Fred Schrin (sp.?), 93 Saratoga, asked if there any attorneys on the EC (he is a retired judge). He reiterated that this is not a warehouse, but a fulfilment center, which is not included as a permitted use in the zoning ordinance or Master Plan.

Andrew Tian, 6 Nichol Drive, asked for support for passage of SCR15/AR17, the 'Green Amendment', which would put environmental rights on the same level as other rights in the state constitution. He is a member of the New Jersey Student Sustainability Coalition. He mentioned the pollution of the Passaic River.

Fay Tian, 6 Nichol Drive (Andrew's mother), spoke about environmental pollution in China, and the need to preserve the environment for those who are now young.

The meeting was then closed to the public.

Correspondence: P. Walitsky read a letter from Devon Berry supporting the Green Amendment and Andrew Tian.

R. Suydam replied to the public, suggesting that they fund an independent comprehensive traffic study and a local air quality study. She supported citizen reporting of idling vehicles, as in New York City.

Site Plans: E. Pires reported on the Royal Somerset Inc. application on Davidson Ave. They had gained approval of a site plan for a hotel some years ago, but have not built it. They request a subdivision of the rear portion of the property and a variance for construction of an access road to this rear lot, crossing a brook tributary to the Raritan River with a 'long arch' bridge. The purpose of the road is not mentioned, only "for financial reasons'.

T. Chase described the updated plan (the third) for the B9 Schoolhouse warehouses (see attached). R. Suydam spoke in support of limiting the hours of operation. S. Jaracz restated the request for charging capability for future electric trucks. A. Schmidt spoke about anti-idling signs, noise being 'funneled' out from between the two buildings towards the residential properties across Schoolhouse Road, and use of strobe lighting back-up warning for fork lifts. (www.osha.gov/laws-regs/standardinterpretations/2004-12-21-0)

R. Suydam proposed that the EC state that in its opinion this development would violate the very concept of the scenic corridor. The EC by vote supported this statement for inclusion in the report.

Other plans: one was for a small (15,625 sq. ft.) warehouse at 403 Elizabeth Ave., where there is an abandoned house. T. Kenyon commented that a building this size is not required to have a solar ready roof, but we suggest solar panels on the roof, or a green or reflective roof. R. Suydam suggested, as a general requirement for all site plans, that deciduous trees removed be replaced with deciduous trees, evergreen trees be replaced with evergreen.

P. Walitsky reported on the latest plan for augmenting the Wilf Residence on DeMott Lane, which proposes to remove seven acres of trees in order to install solar cells. We reiterate that they can plant replacement trees on other parts of the property, and suggest that they make as much use as possible of roofs on buildings and over parking lots for solar cells rather than cutting down trees.

P. Walitsky reported briefly on the 789 Hamilton St. plan, proposing no significant changes.

T. Kenyon reported on the 31 Voorhees plan, which would remove an existing industrial building and put up a four story mixed use building, with retail on the ground floor, apartments above. Full consideration was postponed until the next meeting.

New business: the Communications Committee is still waiting for a response from township IT to its previous suggestions for improvement of the web site. T. Kenyon will keep pressing them for a response. R. Suydam appealed for volunteers from the public to work on our social media output.

M. Santiago reported on the high school students' Green Fair on April 29, at which the EC could have a table. Andrew Tian could solicit support for the Green Amendment. R. Dave would be interested in staffing the table. EC members are asked to participate.

'Hot topics": stormwater utilities would be a hot topic for township consideration. R. Dave is researching the MS-4 permit requirements.

S. Jaracz reported on the clean-ups scheduled for Mile Run and Naaman Williams Park.

The meeting was opened to the public. Jan Brant spoke about the scenic corridor ordinance call for protection of nature and scenic character, with respect to the B9 Warehouse proposed at the corner of Schoolhouse Rd and Mettlers Rd (a scenic corridor road).

Terry Thorsen, Leupp Rd., spoke.

The meeting was closed to the public, and the meeting adjourned at 9:22 PM.