

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, June 26, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, J. Johnson, E. Pires, M. Santiago and P. Walitsky. Absent: A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, T. Kenyon, and Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: nothing to report.

Minutes: M. Santiago made a correction: the Community Fair which she attended was held at the (Hamilton St.) Middle School, not the Youth Center. With this correction, the minutes were approved.

The meeting was opened to the public. No one spoke. The meeting was closed to the public.

Correspondence: there were two letters concerning Letters of Interpretation, one on Rte. 27 in Kingston just east of Shaw Drive, where there is a small brook. No emails.

There was one site plan for review, a resubmission of the 31 Voorhees plan for a mixed-use building with retail stores fronting on Rte. 27, three floors of apartments above, with a garage behind the stores on the first floor. Notably, the apartments form a U shape around a courtyard above the garage, whose roof bears 12" of soil and plants (the identity of the plants was not evident in the plan), which contributes to water management, as water passing through the soil drains down to ground-level drains and ultimately to a storm sewer in Rte. 27.

Twenty-six existing trees will be removed in site demolition (the site now holds a fork lift repair business) and twenty-six new trees planted. R. Suydam, in an e-mail, questioned the tree status of the serviceberry 'trees' to be planted, but the site plan states that they will be eight feet tall when planted and will grow to twenty-five feet high.

The plan shows 6 charging stations for electric vehicles, and 11 more charging station-ready parking places, all along one wall of the garage. S. Jaracz commented that more parking spaces could be made available for charging if the stations were dispersed, since one cord could reach three parking spaces, but this is less important for an apartment building, where charging will occur overnight, than for workplace stations where the charging cord could be moved from one car to another during the day. The plan also shows No Idling signs.

New business: the agenda shows an item Walk with Shade Tree Commission, but this was presumably submitted by A. Schmidt, who was not present.

J. Johnson suggested that we ask the township to study the cost of undergrounding utility lines, and public interest in doing this (to protect against loss of power during storms). She also suggested that EC meetings set a time limit for public comments, with each speaker only allowed to speak once. She also suggested eliminating the second public session, but this met with disagreement during discussion. She eventually moved: a time limit of three minutes; each person to speak only once in a public session; the first session being to put ideas before the Commission, the second to comment on Commission actions taken during the meeting. This passed unanimously. Commission members should refrain from getting into discussions with the public, which stretches out the public session.

M. Santiago had nothing to report from the Education Committee, but reminded S. Jaracz that he had agreed to set up a public talk at the library by Heather Fenyk, on the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership. He reported that Ms. Fenyk is eager to do this, but will be traveling some during August. He will set up a date with the library and Ms. Fenyk, not conflicting with Council, Planning Board or Zoning Board meetings; members of these boards should be specifically invited. EC meetings in July will be on the 10th and 24th, because of the July 4 holiday.

No Mow till Earth Day: S. Jaracz wishes to discuss a better title for this when R. Suydam is present. He asked about the proposal for solar cells above parking areas at Canal Walk. P. Walitsky replied that the proposal did not receive enough positive votes to be approved. But the Enclave, the apartment/town-house complex within Canal Walk, is looking into installing charging stations.

The meeting was opened to the public. Eleanor Ogun asked whether roofs could be green and solar ready at the same time. T. Chase replied that this would have different parts of the roof solar-ready or green. Bill Bowman commented that if the EC does not spend public money, it does not need to have a public session. But the EC does have a budget, for ANJEC membership and plaques. In any case, educating the public is part of our mission.

The meeting was then closed to the public. It was adjourned at 8:20 PM.