

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, December 18, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, E. Pires, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam, P. Walitsky. E. Potosnak (Council liaison) arrived at 7:08. Absent: J. Johnson, T. Kenyon (unable to leave Manville [where she lives] due to flooding).

Chair's report: P. Walitsky read the report of his daughter (national communications director for Senator Ben Cardin [D-MD]) on the COP-28 meeting on global climate change.

The minutes of the Dec. 4 meeting were accepted as presented.

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

Correspondence: A. Schmidt presented his Dec. 6 letter (by email) to the Mayor, Council liaisons to the Environmental and Shade Tree Commissions, the chairs of those commissions, and Tara Kenyon. He recommended that trees be defined in the township ordinance for the purpose of counting trees to be changed to, as 2.5" or greater in diameter, vs. 4" as presently defined. The tree ordinance requires replacement trees to be at least 2.5" in diameter, but trees that size could be removed without counting toward replacement or payment into the Shade Tree Trust Fund. This was recommended a year ago, but no action has been taken. R. Suydam moved that the Commission endorse A. Schmidt's email to Council, also recommending restoration of the provision, originally in the ordinance but removed \approx 10 years ago, requiring that at least 75% of the replacement requirement be met by actually planting trees (i.e. no more than 25% of the requirement could be met by paying money into the Shade Tree Fund). The motion was seconded by A. Schmidt and approved unanimously by the Commission. Schmidt commented further that he had spoken with the past two chairs of the Shade Tree Commission, who would have been involved when the 25% sentence was removed, and neither recalled why it was removed.

R. Suydam reported on a statement in a DEP webinar that Franklin and Piscataway have a large presence of old (30-40 years old) refrigeration equipment, potentially emitting CFC refrigerant gases not used by new equipment and contributing to ozone depletion and global warming if released to the atmosphere. By next summer the DEP will have more precise (localized) data on CFC emissions.

A. Schmidt mentioned the reported resubmission of plans for replacing the Kmart building at Rutgers Plaza with an apartment building. The plans are largely unchanged from the previous submission.

There were no site plans to be reviewed.

New business: T. Kenyon being absent, no new actions for the Community Energy Plan could be reviewed. P. Walitsky noted that Vince Dominach, township business coordinator, opposed attracting energy businesses to an 'energy hub', but suggested holding an 'energy fair'. Similarly, green infrastructure for Naaman Williams Park could not be discussed.

M. Santiago reported that youths from the Youth Center will attend the next EC meeting.

R. Suydam asked that Commission members suggest items for posting on the EC web page. However, the EC apparently cannot even post links to web sites which lists products by environmental qualities.

R. Suydam suggested getting Middlesex and Somerset Counties to jointly develop a rail trail along the East Millstone Branch rail line from Veronica Ave. to the Jersey Ave. station. This would

help commuters commute to the station by bicycle. (She has since written to Walter Lane, Somerset County Planning Director, suggesting this.)

A. Schmidt commented on the lack of progress on the anti-idling ordinance – we do not even know where it is in review. S. Jaracz complained that anti-idling signs are generally ignored. A. Schmidt replied that enforcement (by the county Health Dept.) focuses on heavy trucks, which emit the most pollutants. Education is needed, which is what the required signs, proposed for inclusion in a township ordinance, at specifically listed sites will hopefully accomplish.

The Local Health Assessment was presented to Council, with many slides over some 45 minutes. The Commission presented the Environmental Stewardship award to the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership, Heather Fenyk accepting it for the Partnership. Sara Malone was not able to be present to receive her award, which will be presented at a later date.

Old business: nothing new.

The meeting was again opened to the public. No comments were made, and the meeting was closed to the public. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.