

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, April 15, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, S. Jaracz, J. Johnson, E. Pires, M.Santiago, A.Schmidt, R. Suydam, T. Kenyon, Rutgers intern A. Vanderhoof, and Council liaison E. Potosnak (left at 7:30 PM). T. Chase arrived at 7:08 PM. Absent: P. Walitsky. In his absence, vice chair R. Suydam chaired the meeting. There was no Chair's Report.

The minutes of the April 1 meeting were approved as submitted.

The meeting was opened to the public. Ellen Vastola spoke about chemical safety sheets as a guide to what was stored in warehouses. The meeting was then closed to the public.

E. Potosnak spoke about township energy aggregation: there was a slight delay due to a misunderstanding with Gabel Associates, but it is moving forward. He later reported that Williams/Transco is not asking to extend its FERC permit for the Northeast Supply Enhancement project, therefore the pipeline project, with pumping station off Route 518 in Franklin, is dead.

Site plans: one, a resubmission for a warehouse on Cottontail Lane, on land to be subdivided from a lot with a recently constructed warehouse. It is proposed to be 54,923 sq. ft, a reduction in size from the initial plan. They claim to be removing only 126 trees (the lot is fully wooded), and replanting only 14. The EC stands by all of its prior comments, and questions whether it is permitted under the most recent ordinance which banned all warehouses. Presumably that is why they are going to the Zoning Board, for a use variance.

New business: we have been awarded a Sustainable Jersey/PSE&G grant to publicize energy conservation. This is mainly technical assistance, but with some funds for mailing to publicize our recommendations. There will be a kickoff meeting in May, where we will find out what the EC will be responsible for doing.

Micromobility: a kick-off meeting with the consultant was held on April 2. The consultant will focus on connections (for non-automotive travel) between the Hamilton St. business district and Middlebush (municipal building, etc.)

Recommendations for addition to the municipal sign ordinance, i.e. anti-idling signs: manager Bob Vornlocker reviewed our proposal and removed all references to recommendations, including directions to the Board of Education, stating that an ordinance should contain only what the township can mandate, using the word "shall". And it applies only to new construction. A. Schmidt recommended that nevertheless we publicize a recommendation that existing facilities install anti-idling signs, to protect themselves against liability if an idling vehicle is cited by county health inspectors on their property. It seems that we can only do this by publication in Franklin Times and on our web site.

S. Jaracz and R. Suydam spoke at the April 19 meeting of the Somerset County Commission, publicizing our No Mow until Earth Day initiative and asking that county lawns not be mowed until then. R. Suydam cited other things learned at the meeting: Somerset County has both a climate change policy and a sustainability policy, and got a grant to electrify their vehicle fleet. The mayor of Manville spoke, mentioning a movie The Asbestos City made by a Manville resident. We might consider this for our environmental film series.

R. Suydam also attended the ANJEC session for environmental commissions in Somerville, which was highlighted by Readington Township's digitized, interactive Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), on line at their web site. She suggested that we should do this when next revising our ERI, due in 2026. She also learned that Maplewood and several other towns have banned

artificial turf (for playing fields) because of toxic polyfluorinated fatty acyl sulfonate (PFAS) content. We have artificial turf fields at Middlebush Park.

She also attended the New Jersey Climate Gathering on the afternoon of April 13. She noted in particular discussion of three bills in the Legislature; the zero carbon emission by 2050 bill (which is in committee and not moving) and two bad bills concerning 'biofuels'.

Reports from subcommittees: J. Johnson needs a new password for our email. S. Jaracz brought up the July 8 date proposed for our next movie showing. The movie Common Ground, of which we have a DVD but would need a DVD player which would connect to the projection system at the Board of Education (ex Consolata) meeting room, is still being shown in theatres (at the Princeton Garden theatre on May 15). We should wait until fall to show it, and meanwhile seek the movie The Asbestos City, mentioned above by R. Suydam.

M. Santiago asked about preparation for the high school Green Fair on May 18. S. Jaracz said she could get materials from ANJEC. Our paper description of the EC is outdated and exhausted, we should prepare a new version.

'Hot topics': none.

Old business: S. Jaracz, in reporting on the clean-up of Seeley's Brook on April 13, noted a severe accumulation of waste where this brook enters a culvert under the D&R Canal, just north of Easton Avenue. Because access to this site is both dangerous (crossing Easton Ave.) and through private property, this is best left to state park and NJ Water Supply Authority workers.

Tree ordinance: R. Suydam recommends a complete rewriting of the tree ordinance, including better ways of counting trees in forested areas (different authorities recommend different scientifically validated methods). A. Schmidt looked at available trees at the Baumley nursery: the largest were 3 1/4" diameter breast height and would cost ≈\$1000 - \$1400 each. (2.5" diameter trees have cross-sectional area 39% of that of 4" diameter trees.) A number of 2.5" diameter trees could be bought for the cost of one 4" tree. He recommended that we include (in our memo to the mayor, township manager, commission Council liaisons and the Shade Tree Commission) a recommendation that the township hire an arborist/tree specialist, who could be part-time and/or shared with other towns. Recommendations concerning tree sizes (of existing trees and replacements) should await full rewriting of the ordinance, with recommendations for measurement of existing trees on forested plots, as these generally recommend measuring only trees ≥4" in diameter.

S. Jaracz noted that among the ca. 100 people registered for the April 13 stream clean-up were seven Amazon employees and students from a number of schools.

The letter to multiple-unit communities about BPU grants for installation of charging stations is at the final stage of preparation and will be going out shortly.

Green infrastructure at Naaman Williams Park: Chris Obropta's staff at Rutgers Water Resources Institute sent a list of materials needed. T. Kenyon will be meeting with Carl Hauck about this next week.

Community Energy Plan: there is still a little to be written, including several initiatives in section 4.

W. Andrews suggested we have a committee to plan our presence at Franklin Day (Sept. 20). This could include standing signs, for visibility. S. Jaracz suggested that a slide projector could be powered by an electric car.

R. Suydam suggested that as we are taking on a lot of tasks for one small group of people, it would be helpful to create a second, nongovernmental group, Sustainable Franklin (comparable to Sustainable Princeton) which could take on tasks beyond the responsibilities of environmental commissions described in the enabling legislation and township ordinance.

The meeting was opened to the public. Jenny Kafas suggested that LED street lights emit yellow light, as this seems to attract insects less than white light. She also suggested outlawing the planting of Callery pear trees in Franklin (at present we only positively recommend native tree species). Ellen Vastola commented on demise of replacement trees. A. Schmidt referred her to the Shade Tree Commission. He stated that while primary planted trees have a two year survival guarantee, their replacements, if they die, are not further guaranteed. When newly planted trees die it is generally due to poor maintenance. That is why we need a township arborist, to direct implementation of the tree maintenance plan currently being developed by CME (township engineering firm).

Ellen Vastola also asked whether township authorities know what warehouses contain, for instance are there hazardous substances. Truck manifests of items delivered are available.

The meeting was closed to the public, and then adjourned at 9:00 PM.