

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, May 20, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, E. Pires, M. Santiago, P. Walitsky, and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon. Absent: J. Johnson, A. Schmidt (attending another meeting), R. Suydam (traveling), Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: he commended M. Santiago and S. Jaracz for their representation of the EC at the high school Green Fair May 18. He also at the fair met S. Gillooly, chair of the Shade Tree Commission, who emphasized that they and the EC should work together on updating the Tree Ordinance.

The minutes of the May 6 meeting were approved without amendment.

The meeting was opened to the public. Ellen Vastola asked about Levin Properties returning with a new version of their application (to the Board of Zoning Adjustment) to replace the K-Mart building at Rutgers Plaza with a 200-unit apartment building. She reported seeing white-tailed deer around her condo. T. Kenyon then reported a large snapping turtle, protected by Franklin police, on Schoolhouse Rd.

There was no correspondence.

Site plan: E. Pires reported on the revised site plan submitted by M. Gouda (original submission in 2020!) for a five-house subdivision between Viking Ave. and Belmar St., with frontage on neither; a new street (extension of Rogers Ave.) would be extended from Belmar. No variances are indicated to be needed. The site (2.72 acres) is heavily wooded, and development would require removal of 282 trees (as estimated from two 100 ft square sampled squares). The plan proposes planting of only 21 trees (17 street trees and 4 in a bioretention basin); the remainder of the tree obligation would be satisfied by payment into the Shade Tree Fund. Because of the dense forest in an otherwise developed neighborhood, the EC recommends that the plot be considered for township acquisition as open space; failing that, more trees must be planted.

New business: the Community Energy Plan. T. Kenyon has received comments from many EC members, and has been implementing recommended changes. She went over specific comments where consultation with the EC was desired. Several initiatives were removed as either unnecessary (because already completed) or beyond municipal capabilities. At least one outreach session for the public is required; she suggested two, one in person, one virtual.

T. Kenyon reported on the possibility of having We Love U, a nonprofit association, plant trees at Naaman Williams Park. The trees would be purchased with Shade Tree Fund money. We Love U is making a presentation to the Shade Tree Commission about this on May 23.

Residential Energy Conservation Outreach grant from Sustainable Jersey and PSE&G: T. Kenyon and several EC members joined in a kickoff meeting, which described what the grant would provide and what information is needed from Franklin Township.

The EC now has provision in its budget for acquisition of promotional and educational printed materials, for events where the EC will have a table. S. Jaracz suggested acquiring for such meetings a tablecloth with a skirt to hang down to the ground, attachable to the table legs to prevent blowing around and bearing the EC logo.

Subcommittee reports: S. Jaracz received an email from Kathy Lynch of Montgomery Twp, apologizing for not having followed through on suggested environmental film showings. We have a date for a showing at the Board of Education (former Consolata) building, but have not decided on which of two films to show. This will be settled at the next meeting.

Micromobility study: the consultant wants to meet in person with EC members during the week of June 3. T. Kenyon will look at dates.

T. Kenyon commented, in response to a query from R. Suydam, that Rails to Trails, the suggestion of a trail along the railroad line from Rte 27 to Commerce Drive, is currently off the agenda because we are busy with three grant-funded programs, and prospects for Conrail relinquishing the right of way are not good. It will return to the agenda later in the year.

The meeting was again opened to the public. Ellen Vastola asked for no more warehouses, keep the trees. T. Chase explained that current ordinances ban further warehouse applications, the proposals recently before township bodies were filed before these ordinances took effect.

S. Jaracz remembered wanting to look at the EC email account, recently blocked by password change, for pictures of No Mow till Earth Day lawns. He wishes to review these to pick someone not on the EC as having the best flowered lawn.

The meeting was closed to the public, and adjourned at 8:32 PM.