

Minutes of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

January 24, 2022

Conference call meeting called to order at 7:33pm

ATTENDEES

Members: Alvaro Medeiros, Angus Chen, Kimberly Diamond, David Harris, Nirit Rotenberg, Renee Ciesla, Richard Leister

Guests: Steve Carrellas, Robert Cianciulli, Thomas Foregger

Welcome Eduardo Veyan

- Eduardo was not present for the meeting

Approval of Minutes

- Minutes from January 10 were not approved

Hearing on agenda items only - 3 minutes per resident

- Thomas Foregger noted that it is difficult to comment on plans during the citizens hearing on agenda items without knowing the findings, and would like them to be shared, just as resolutions from Township Council. Richard suggested attaching recommendations to the Environmental Commission agenda. The public can ask the Planning Board or Zoning Board for information about the plans. The commissioners agreed on attaching draft recommendations to the agenda.
- Steve asked if Alvaro replaced Kevin Hall and if the new member Eduardo Veyen is an alternate. Both were confirmed.

PLANS

40 Russo Place

- Richard reported the latest updates to the application. Angus made a motion to approve the recommendation as drafted, David seconded, and the motion was approved.

NEW BUSINESS

Cleanups

- David mentioned having a cleanup in Watchung Reservation along Skytop Drive. He reached out to Daniel Bernier from Union County, who is checking with County Police about closing the road for safety. The cleanup is aimed to occur late March or early April,

before vegetation comes in. He already reached out to the Environmental Commissions of Scotch Plains and Mountainside, who are on board. Cleanups for Passaic River Park and Green Acres sites were also suggested.

OLD BUSINESS

Bylaws

- Richard reported that he asked the mayor if the Township Council could develop bylaws for all commissions and committees, but has not received a direct answer. Kim suggested that it should be a code of conduct rather than bylaws.

Scout Projects - Eagle Scout Project at Community Garden

- Richard reported that the pathway to the Community Garden was approved by the Township Council. The scout is supposed to write a letter to Green Acres and Historical Society. He is also planning to meet with the Historical Society of Berkeley Heights, which manages the Littel-Lord Farmstead.

Community Garden

- Renee asked if the Community Garden needs permission for the Learning Garden, which would expand the size of the garden. Richard said expanding the garden size may require permission, and to revisit this when plans are further along. Angus asked if the unoccupied plots have been filled. One of them will be a donation garden, and one will go to the Silver Liming Foundation.

Stormwater Ordinance - Nothing to report

Adopt-a-Drain

- Kim thanked everyone who had submitted their rankings of the best drain names, and asked if anyone who hadn't submitted yet to do so by the next day. If she doesn't receive any more submissions, she will go with the rankings that she already has. Kim asked Angus to update the Adopt-a-Drain website with year-end statistics. She noted that there are problematic drains that haven't been adopted and perhaps images of them could be posted on the website in the hopes they could be adopted.

Sustainable Jersey Actions

● Expired Actions

- Richard went through the expired actions, some of which he would take on. Angus will take on Digitizing Public Information. Nirit can help with Green Team. Angus will take on Non-Mandated Materials Recycling. Grass - Cut It And Leave It Program could be revisited in the spring. Angus will look at Materials Reuse Program. Richard checked to see who has access to the Sustainable Jersey website. Alvaro needs to set up his account. David will take on the Natural Resources Inventory.

● **Sustainable Jersey Grant for Rain Gardens**

- Richard had distributed documents to the Commission. He met with someone from Halls Garden Center about cost ranges on building a garden and gave a breakdown of things to consider. Rutgers also provided numbers, but without delivery. He asked if it took \$2000 to build a rain garden, how much would someone be willing to pay. Angus suggested that the amount would be case by case based on need and educating residents would help. Richard suggested resident cost reimbursement, but with the grant amount at \$20,000, \$2000 per garden would limit the number of rain gardens funded. Richard went over a proposed implementation timeline. David suggested stretching funds further by having more volunteer effort. Angus asked if properties needed to be vetted for suitability, and Richard replied that a percolation test is needed. Deadline is February to submit the proposal.

Tree Ordinance

- Richard reported being in the final stages of proposing the tree ordinance to the Township Council. There was a meeting with Tom Bocko, Jeffrey Varnerin, Manuel Couto, and Alvaro Medeiros about the details.

Peppertown Park - Nothing to report

Recycling

- Kim requested a message on the township LED sign at the corner of Plainfield Avenue and Springfield Avenue that the Trex program is being suspended, and thin film plastics should now be brought to four locations: ShopRite in Stirling, Stop & Shop in Berkeley Heights, Acme in New Providence, and Home Depot in Watchung. The Recreation department has sent a message as well.
- Angus said he and Nirit met with Dr Patrick Smith recently, who lamented the suspension of the Trex program and suggested an official township collection site. Kim mentioned speaking to Stewart Newman, Bureau Chief of Union County's Bureau of Recycling and Planning about a Trex program at the county level. She suggested asking Dr Patrick Smith to reach out to Stewart Newman. Richard suggested having the Union County Hub reach out to Stewart as well. Rich will send Stewart's contact information to Angus.

Topics for the Township Newsletter

- Angus will look into the next newsletter deadline.
- **Stormwater Management Education Campaign** - Nothing to report

Passaic River Park and GLHS - Nothing to report

Trex Collection & Trex Benches

- Kim reported that she reached out to the engraver and the hope is to have the benches earned in 2021 engraved by the end of January 2022. No new benches will be earned in 2022 due to the suspension of the program.

Lower Columbia Park

- Richard reported that they were going to plant pollinators during the past week, and the heavy DPW equipment was brought in and sank into the ground. The ruts created from that incident need to be filled in, then the plants there will be solarized and seed will be spread in the fall.

“Forest Stewardship” Bill S3549 (Smith) / A4843 (Murphy) - Nothing to report

Green Amendment - Nothing to report

Project with Watershed Ambassador

- Richard reported that the people interested in rain barrels from Winter Walk have been contacted by the Watershed Ambassador for an event on March 27. There may not be enough barrels available.
- David was going to follow up with her about a purge on invasive plants. She said she is not available but told him to reach out to two of her colleagues. It may be good to do this in May before they seed and cut them instead of pulling them to not disturb the soil.

OTHER TOPICS

Tree Saplings

- Richard also got a notification about tree saplings in April, around Arbor Day. He asked if the Environmental Commission would like to participate again. All members present agreed.

Plastics Bags Ban

- Angus reported that he and Nirit met with Dr Patrick Smith on Friday, January 21 about presenting to the Berkeley Heights Business and Civic on February 11 to make sure the members are aware of the upcoming regulations. Nirit suggested giving away some of the remaining bags from Winter Walk to smaller businesses.

Citizens hearing on any environmental issues - 3 minutes per resident - Nothing to report

- Richard reported on behalf of Robert Cianciulli, who was unable to unmute and submitted over Zoom chat that the School Board met last Thursday, January 20 and the Board of Education Environmental Commission liaison is going to be on a rotating basis. Other BoE liaison positions are also going to operate the same way.

*Motion to adjourn - 9:02pm, motion made by Angus and seconded by David
Next meeting is scheduled for February 7 at 7:30pm*

Respectfully submitted by Angus Chen on February 20, 2022