

Minutes of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

February 17, 2020

Conference call meeting called to order at 7:32pm

Attendees

Members: Richard Leister, Kim Diamond, Renee Ciesla, David Harris, John Leo, Angus Chen, Kinan Tadmori, Kevin Hall

Guests: Mayor Angie Devanney, Alvaro Medeiros

Approval of Minutes

- Minutes from February 3, 2020 approval postponed until next meeting
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Mayor Angie Devanney on Passaic River Trail

- Kim makes a motion to bring the meeting to executive session, seconded by John Leo, then approved
 - Angus makes a motion to exit executive session, seconded by Kevin Hall, then approved
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Hearing on agenda items only - 3 minutes per resident - None

Old Business

Scout Projects - Nothing to report

Stormwater Ordinance

- There is a plan to meet with Liza Viana, but the date hasn't been set

Sustainable Jersey

- **Green Team** - needs to be reviewed. Rich will make a proposal on it.
- **Mayor's Wellness Campaign**
 - Alvaro stated High School is moving forward with sending teens to the senior citizens' meeting. There will be an entertainment week, then a technology training a few weeks later, then take them to a matinee of Mamma Mia on March 28
 - Kim stated the \$10K Sustainable Jersey grant to support Vegan Fest was submitted. She worked with Angie, Liza, and members of the township council on allocating part of it for a water bottle refilling station at Lower Columbia Park.

Master Plan

- On March 9, the town planner and his team will be meeting with EC and presenting survey results, showing the framework of what they've done already, and asking EC input

Tree Ordinance - Nothing to report

Peppertown Park

- Kim is waiting to hear back from Midge and Bruce on getting the new plan and what types of trees are proposed

Recycling

- **Mayor's Recycling Task Force**
 - Met with Middlesex County Improvement Authority to see what recycling contract they offer. The hauler for Middlesex does not require carts and prefers homeowner provided containers. Berkeley Heights Township will be preparing for a bid.
- **Trex Bins**

- Kim stated 11,600 lbs collected so far. She is looking to work with Tom Barton, Mayor Angie Devanney, and any other key persons to get a plan to install the benches already acquired before Tom retires.
- Rich asked if we are going to continue the program if we have enough benches. Kim will discuss with Carolyn George regarding how many more Trex benches the Recreation Department can use in Lower Columbia Park. Rich asked if Trex can do collections in our town. It was asked if we could get something besides benches, such as Trex decking lumber? Or could the Township move to a Commercial Recycling Project. Kim will ask Trex, but it would be helpful to have plans that detail what we need.

Ordinance on Restrictions on Plastic Bags, Plastic Straws, and Polystyrene Containers

- The ordinance passed at the last township council meeting
- There is an initiative to repeal the ordinance. Kevin mentioned Councilman Manuel Couto voted for the ordinance with the proviso that its impact is measured, so the EC needs to discuss how to at a future meeting. Kim said Sustainable Berkeley Heights is meeting with businesses to survey their actions and viewpoints. She met with one business who discussed the financial benefits of not purchasing plastic bags and plastic straws. She wants to contact Union County Recycling and Planning Bureau Chief JoAnn Gemenden to make sure that container alternatives are recyclable.
- Kim asked Alvaro to write a letter to TAP supporting and explaining the provisions of the ordinance in order to alleviate confusion as to what it actually requires.
- EC should continue to monitor if the state of NJ passes a similar ban.
- Kinan asked if ANJEC is doing measurements. Kim stated that to her knowledge, Berkeley Heights is the first among neighboring towns such as the Chathams, Madison, Summit, and Millburn to do quantitative analysis.
- Kim asked about visiting businesses in Summit. Their ordinance will be in effect on May 1st and we can learn from their businesses.

Joint Meeting on Environmental Commissions

- The next meeting is on March 25 in Rahway. The topic is food waste.

Topics for the Township Newsletter

- Rich stated that the link to the article about rock salt was not posted to the EC website.

- Chris has drafted articles on native and invasive species that are ready to go.
- David Harris is preparing the next article on riparian zones.

Municipal Complex and Stormwater - Nothing to report

Government Energy Aggregation

- The introduction was tabled at last township council meeting. Alvaro will be asking Gabel Associates to present on Renewable Government Energy Aggregation on March 24.

Climate Action Plan Survey

- Nothing to report
- Rich mentioned an upcoming event titled Fossil Fuels and Climate, and it is hosted by Fanwood Mayor Mahr on February 23rd from 4pm to 5:30pm in Fanwood. The information has been posted to the Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub in Basecamp.

Passaic River Park

- Discussed with Mayor Angie Devanney during the executive session.
- David suggested discussing this prior to the next EC meeting, perhaps meeting to walk the park. He will speak with John.
- Rich suggested reaching out to Betty Ann Kelly of Union County

Chemtrade - Nothing to report

Budget

- The budget was presented on Monday, February 10.
- Alvaro stated that there is a capital budget meeting on February 24.
- Kim sent the “wish list” budget for Vegan Fest to Mayor Angie Devanney. This proposed budget was the one submitted as part of the Sustainable Jersey grant application discussed above.

Partnering with Rec Commission for DEP Grant Application Re: Lower Columbia Park Trails

- The grant will not be out until March

NJ Clean Communities Grant

- Betty Ann Kelly and Kim walked around town to see if there were county-owned places in need of clean-up. There were no sites in need of clean up that were county-owned, so Betty Ann will not be involved if we do a clean-up.
- Kim has spoken with Tom Barton about doing clean ups similar to Slam Dunk The Junk. Per the suggestion of Debbie Varnarin from the Recreation Commission, Kim spoke with Tom to discuss using Community Pass for residents to sign-up and register for the clean ups because many residents are already using it. The EC does not have a software program, and per Kim's discussion with CFO Eugenia Poulos, it would be an "administrative nightmare" if the Township administration was tasked with tracking everyone who signed up to participate. Community Pass is already in place, and is an online way for people to sign up.
- Kim reached out to CFO Eugenia Poulos, who will look into whether grant money can be donated to third party non-profits. Renee asked if perhaps the money could be used for a single cause.
- Saturday, March 29 has been proposed as the next clean-up date. There are multiple sites that can be done on the same day, so Kim is asking for volunteers from EC to lead each site. EC leaders at each site need to make sure everyone who signed up actually attended the clean-up.

NEW BUSINESS

Earth Day

- Councilwoman Susan Poage had applied for a grant from the state to obtain trees in honor of Earth Day. She was granted a thousand seedlings, and they will be received April 24th. She proposed having an event on April 25th to give away seedlings and asked if the EC is interested in participating to discuss environmental initiatives, such as recycling. She reached out to Tom Barton to secure Lower Columbia Park from 9 AM to 1 PM.
- Kinan said it is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.
- Susan would like EC assistance with creating posters and flyers advertising this event.
- Kim asked about who is covering the budget to market this event. Alvaro will ask Susan. Kim also asked about whether Susan had a sign-up plan or other plan of distribution to ensure that people will be coming to pick up a number of these seedlings.

- Kevin Hall asked what to do with leftover seedlings not taken by residents. Could the seedlings be planted in places around town?
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Citizens hearing on any environmental issues - 3 minutes per resident - None

PLANS

428-432 Springfield Ave

Findings of Fact

- Renovate facade of the building; replace four-sided plaza sign with two-sided sign; resurface retaining wall

Recommendation

- No environmental concerns, so no objections from EC

Connell Park

Findings of Fact

- Taking down 231 trees in total
- 148 of these trees are claimed to be already dead or diseased
- Rich said the fine to take down a tree without authorization can be up to \$1000 and some have already been taken down

Recommendation

- Discussion with Connell and the school District to help the township to offset large scale tree removal

Motion to adjourn - 9:22pm

Next meeting scheduled for March 9

Respectfully submitted by Angus Chen on March 9, 2020