

Minutes of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

April 20, 2020

Conference call meeting called to order at 7:38pm

Attendees

Members: Richard Leister, Angus Chen, Renee Ciesla, Kim Diamond, David Harris, John Leo, Chris Scalera

Guests: Alvaro Medeiros, Liza Viana, Tom Foregger

Approval of Minutes

- Minutes from April 7, 2020 approval postponed until next meeting
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Hearing on agenda items only - 3 minutes per resident - None

Old Business

Scout Projects - Nothing to report

Stormwater Ordinance

- Liza mentioned waiting on John Leo's input. She said it might be better to roll them out in phases.

Sustainable Jersey

- Rich sent around a Sustainable Jersey actions spreadsheet and will send it to Liza, asking her to see what actions the township can do. He explained about how Sustainable Jersey's point system works.
- **Mayor's Wellness Campaign** can be considered completed, so Rich needs to upload it to Sustainable Jersey with the forms Alvaro filled out.
- Chris Scalera wants to lead a backyard composting program and stated that recycling coordinator needs to be involved. Liza stated that person is Joe Graziano, but he can reach out to Joanne Gemenden for assistance if needed. **ACTION ITEM** - Chris needs to email Liza Viana, who will make the connection with Joe. Alvaro stated that Joe has all of the leaf composting from Union County, which is stored near I-78 and Shunpike Rd in Springfield.

Tree Ordinance

- Tom Bocko drafted the tree ordinance. Rich made edits and is waiting on his reply.

Peppertown Park

- Kim had Zoom meeting on April 14th. Connell committed \$200K to the project, with four phases at \$50K per phase. Meeting held on March 13th. For the budget, the township will do engineering study and the town council will vote at the next meeting.
- The new Christmas tree costs \$18,000. There was discussion about sponsorship of the tree by multiple parties and Bruce Mustacci is going to follow up with Angie.
- An engraved sponsored brick program was suggested as a fundraiser with multiple pricing levels. The number of bricks will be determined by the length of the walkway.
- Rich asked for the species of tree, where it is coming from, and where it will be planted. Kim stated there were no details yet, but will follow up.

Recycling

● Mayor's Recycling Task Force

- Last meeting was postponed
- Alvaro mentioned moving forward with standard bid. DCA just released guidelines on submitting a bid electronically. Once submitted, the township will wait 60 days for response and perhaps have a second bid to explore options

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

- Rich mentioned there were news articles about delaying these ordinances. Alvaro said there is growing pushback against this ordinance due to concerns about COVID-19 contamination. The ordinance is perceived as onerous and may be amended, but the town council will wait for now. Kim has not heard about anything regarding the similar ordinances from Millburn and Summit that are due to go into effect in May, which could be instructive and help inform our plans.
- Alvaro suggested the EC should educate residents about keeping reusable bags clean to protect others. Kim mentioned the T-shirt derived cloth bags from the Girl Scouts about cloth bags, which can be put in the wash.
- Liza mentioned there may be an update soon about the ordinance.
- There was discussion about best practices and how there may be changes in the way supermarkets operate.
- Kim stated that the ordinance doesn't cover produce bags or plastic wrap for meat, so modifying ordinance won't eliminate the possibility of infection.
- David asked about metrics on the ordinance. Kim stated she, Kevin Hall, and Chris Scalera had planned on visiting business in other towns with ordinances and well as our own prior to and after the ordinances go into effect, to gauge how effective it is. Alvaro stated that Manny wanted to measure how effective the ordinance was going to be. Guidelines are cost savings for businesses and changes in the amount of plastic bags used. These plans are held due to the COVID-19 restrictions. David proposed keeping this ordinance on the EC agenda.

Topics for the Township Newsletter

- **ACTION ITEM** - Angus will reach out to Pam Yoss about EC publishing again, especially in the spring with people sheltered at home. Republish story on volcanoes on trees.

Municipal Complex and Stormwater - Nothing to report

Climate Action Plan Survey - Nothing to report. Initiative held for now.

Passaic River Park

- John discussed areas that need to be built up.

1000 Trees

- Rich stated that trees aren't going to be distributed, but is awaiting feedback from the state.

Composting

- This was supposed to be the topic at the Union County Environmental Commissions Hub March meeting, but it was postponed due to COVID-19.

NEW BUSINESS

Emerald Ash Borer Treatment

- Tom Bocko is supposed to get bids from two companies that have the required pesticide licenses. Rich will check with Tom tomorrow.
- Treatment will be applied to the tree trunk of previously treated trees on township property or right of way. Half the trees will be treated now and then the other half next year.

Litter Pickup

- David Harris asked about encouraging people to safely pick up litter as they walk around, which would be a good EC topic for the newsletter. Kim mentioned Sustainable Berkeley Heights was doing Random Acts of Cleanup and could be interested in partnering.
- We have to be careful about what is advocated and what precautions to take due to safety concerns, especially with limited availability of plastic gloves. Kim suggested making a list of best practices if anyone wants to pick up litter. If children, there needs to be adult supervision. Alvaro said we may be able to get mayoral support in one of her updates.
ACTION ITEM - David will draft guidelines.

Soil at municipal complex and trail behind 9/11 Memorial

- John is leading this project to use the removed soil from the new municipal complex in the most effective manner possible and save the township money on disposal. He was looking into using it behind the 9/11 Memorial, but had concerns about tree root structure and restricting water flow. The trail would be about 2/10 to 3/10 of a mile.
- The state provides a general permit to allow trails in wetlands and its checklist could be useful in building other trails. John is in contact with them about starting this process.
- John, Liza, Rich, and Kevin are looking into moving soil to other locations, such as the community garden, the trail along the PSEG power line, and the Passaic River project. There is a wooden bridge above the deeper part of the creek that leads to the Passaic. Other

parts are still flooded and elevated wood planking would be required to prevent water flow blockage, but there are materials costs. Liza said truck access needs to be determined.

- Liz stated it is about \$250,000 for developer disposal or \$7,000 by a local business, and there is still a cost to load the dirt in the trucks. It would be better to reuse the dirt, but a plan must be in place to move it once so rather than twice, which would double the cost. The DEP permit process and emergency permits are being investigated, as there are two to three weeks to put this together.
- Liza stated there is about 1600 cubic yards of dirt, which David stated is much more than can be used on the trails. Rich said we can't bury the roots of trees.
- Rich said another issue is possible vernal pools (seasonal bodies of water without outlets that are habitats to plants and amphibians). State regulations on them would place further restrictions. He reached out to a Rutgers biologist about a map of vernal pools.
- If areas are freshwater wetlands, permits are required. Rich suggested spots for the dirt, but they may not be able to accept all of it. Liza stated the dirt could be split, as long as it is moved all at once.
- **ACTION ITEM** - Liza will open conversation with PSEG.
- Chris asked if a material supply company is interested in this. Liza is looking into this.

Vegan Fest

- Kim suggested postponing Vegan Fest until 2021 unless there is a way to do this over Zoom. She had already started planning, but time is needed for advertising. Event is usually mid-September.
- Sponsor Brown & Brown made a financial commitment for this year, which hopefully can be banked until next year. Kim will reach out to Angie and update us on Brown & Brown.
- Kim makes a motion to postpone Vegan Fest from 2020 to 2021, seconded by Angus. The motion is passed.

Earth Day

- School system will inform Angus if there are any plans.
- Rich stated that the school may do something in May. He also received information from Sierra Club and ANJEC with Earth Day activities suggestions, which he sent to the schools.

Citizens hearing on any environmental issues - 3 minutes per resident - None

PLANS - None

Motion to adjourn - 8:47pm

Next meeting scheduled for May 4

Respectfully submitted by Angus Chen on May 4, 2020