



Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

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2022 Annual Report

Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

The Commission met 24 times to review plans and conduct environmental business. Comments and recommendations were submitted on 29 applications to the Board of Adjustment or the Planning Board.

Environmental commissioners gave more than 675 hours of their time for meetings, work in the community, awards, grant proposal writing, producing such events as giving away 1,000 saplings, partnering on projects with other community groups, the schools, township committees, and supporting the Community Garden. These hours do not include the time other residents and employees gave in support of Sustainable Jersey certification, community clean ups and the tree survey.

In addition to affecting in-person meetings of the Commission, the pandemic continued to affect programs such as the collection of thin-film plastics, clean ups, Government Energy Aggregation, Passaic River Park trails, Climate Action Plan Survey.

In 2022 the Environmental Commission also:

1. Continued Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification. Maintaining Sustainable Jersey certification highlights best practices and enables the Township to apply for Sustainable Jersey grants. The Township earned certification for the following actions:
 - a) Create Green Team
 - b) Community Education and Outreach
 - c) Heat Island Assessment
 - d) Emergency Communications Planning
 - e) Energy Tracking and Management
 - f) Community Gardens
 - g) Create Green Development Checklist
 - h) Anti-idling Education and Enforcement
 - i) Building Healthier Communities (includes Mayor's Wellness Campaign)
 - j) Safe Routes to School
 - k) Innovative Project: Planting 1,000 Seedlings
 - l) Green Business Recognition
 - m) Buy Local Campaign
 - n) Environmental Commission
 - o) Environmental Commission Site Plan Review
 - p) Easement Inventory and Outreach
 - q) Easement Inspections and Evaluations
 - r) Tree Protection Ordinance
 - s) Community Forestry Management Plan

- t) Tree Hazard Inventory
- u) Tree Maintenance Programs
- v) Municipal Communications Strategy
- w) Improve Public Engagement in Municipal Government
- x) Improve Public Engagement in Planning and Zoning
- y) Digitizing Public Information
- z) Non-mandated Materials Recycling
- aa) Grass, Cut it and Leave it
- bb) Materials Reuse Program

Several of these actions expired so we need to renew them in 2023.

2. Supervised the Berkeley Heights Community Garden with Environmental Commissioners serving on the Garden Committee. Supported the expansion of the garden for children with special needs.
3. Developed a code of conduct for the Environmental Commission.
4. Continued the Adopt-a-Drain program. ANJEC gave Berkeley Heights a 2022 Environmental Achievement award for the Adopt-a-Drain program. Organized a contest for best drain names. Proposed a contest with Westfield, which also has an Adopt-a-Drain program. By the end of the year 82 participants adopted 157 drains and reported collecting nearly 670 pounds of debris.
5. Continued working with Mayor's Youth Council on various projects, including a workshop on sustainable clothing.
6. Guided an Eagle Scout candidate in the installation of an ADA path at the Community Garden.
7. Helped support maintenance of rain gardens at Columbia Middle School, Governor Livingston High School, and Hughes Elementary School.
8. Supported the stormwater management communication campaign required by the MS4 permit from the State of NJ.
9. Applied for a Sustainable Jersey grant to install rain gardens at homes. While Sustainable Jersey did not award a grant, it encouraged the Commission to resubmit next year.
10. Worked with township tree inspector to develop a new tree protection ordinance.
11. Participated again in the Winter Walk and the Summer Block party with a booth that offered free reusable bags, featured the community garden and encouraged visitors to sign up for rain barrels, rain gardens, and saplings. Gave away native flower seeds at the Winter Walk.
12. Contributed environmental articles to the monthly township newsletter and the EC Facebook page, including such topics as: spotted lanternfly, salt on sidewalks, tree planting, free saplings, rain barrels, fertilizing lawns, composting, leaf mulching, and motor vehicle idling.
13. Applied for LED light bulbs to donate to low income / elderly households.
14. Worked with Watershed Ambassador on promoting and building rain barrels with residents in March. Six residents built rain barrels.
15. Continued to maintain Community Forestry Management Program by attending relevant training.
16. Continued treating certain ash trees through the Tree Trust Fund as part of the long-term plan to treat them for emerald ash borer.
17. Organized clean up along a 2-mile stretch of Sky Top Drive through the Watchung Reservation in March, at which about 40 residents from BH and Scotch Plains participated.

18. Organized a clean up in Passaic River Park and other public areas around town, and an invasive species educational session with Patricia Shanley.
19. Supported Woods and Wayside International's proposal to lease 151 Grant Street house and property, which is in the Passaic River County Park, to carry out environmental activities.
20. Ended the thin-film plastics program as part of Trex®'s Thin-Film Plastics Challenge. Coordinated the engraving of six Trex benches for Lower Columbia Park. Transitioned Thin-Film Plastic collection to the DPW; collection occurs on the first Saturday of the month.
21. Recommended the Board of Public Utilities limit where solar panels can be installed, so that forests are not cut down for this purpose.
22. With the help of student volunteers, prepared a planting bed and sowed seeds for a pollinator garden in Lower Columbia Park. The seeds should germinate in the spring of 2023.
23. Met with the township administrator, township engineer and treasurer to coordinate environmental issues.
24. With the help of Columbia Middle School and GL students prepared and seeded a bed with native perennials at the end of Columbia Ave. in Lower Columbia Park.
25. Distributed more than 200 saplings to all fourth graders in the township in connection with Arbor Day.
26. Organized, promoted and distributed nearly 700 saplings to township residents as part of the NJ Tree Recovery Campaign and as part of the Arbor Day celebration.
27. Planted a sapling at Governor Livingston from an historic oak in Princeton.
28. Received requests for 76 trees from residents. Contractor could only supply about 30 in the spring.
29. Worked with the tree inspector to evaluate township trees.
30. Coordinated with L'Oreal volunteers to clean up Passaic River Park in June.
31. Updated the EC pages on the township website.
32. Continued support of Green Infrastructure in applications before the Zoning and Planning Boards.
33. Continued membership in the Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub, which consists of green teams and environmental commissions from various Union County towns. This group looks for and discusses Sustainable Jersey opportunities.
34. Contacted spraying company to recommend against spraying lawns and shrubs as the spray may affect beneficial insects. Members also attended the webinars, including Rutgers Water Resources Conferences on green infrastructure and the annual ANJEC Congress.
35. Worked with the township administrator to apply for a NJ DEP grant (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative) to plant trees in the rights of way and at County Park west of Governor Livingston High School campus. NJ awarded a grant of more than \$721,000 to Berkeley Heights to carry out the project.
36. Applied for Solid Waste Infrastructure For Recycling grant to obtain recycling bins for all township residents.

In addition: Having completed Rutgers Green Infrastructure course, Richard Leister is now a Green Infrastructure Champion.

Concerns:

The Environmental Commission continues to be concerned about the flooding issues of the township. The Commission notes that many applications to the Zoning and Planning Boards include variances that increase the impervious coverage beyond the maximum allowed. Many homes continue to direct stormwater and sump pump runoff into the street. Furthermore, homeowners are removing trees, which take up stormwater, protect the soil, control air pollution and provide habitat for wildlife, reducing the overall tree canopy and exacerbating heat island effects.

Major Goals for 2023:

- Continue our mission to review applications for the Planning and Zoning Boards.
- Maintain Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification.
- Conditions permitting, organize a combination Green and Vegan Fest in September.
- Distribute saplings to the schools and possibly also the residents for Arbor Day.
- Plant trees along township streets and on township property.
- Work with Watershed Ambassador to analyze streams.
- Promote rain barrels and cisterns.
- Continue the campaign to collect thin-film plastics and inform residents of how to reduce their use of plastics.
- Revise the tree ordinance in cooperation with the tree inspector.
- Revise the stormwater ordinance, especially for minor site development, to include impervious surface mitigation.
- Improve the stormwater management education content and availability to residents
- Increase awareness of green infrastructure and green solutions to mitigate stormwater issues
- Improve communications with community and gain input from residents.
- Try to increase number of grants obtained.
- Continue to drive the development & improvement of the Passaic River Park trail system, leveraging where possible the redevelopment of the Berkeley Plaza property.
- Continue to organize trash cleanups in and around the Township to remove trash from the environment and raise community awareness of the impact of littering.

Commission members were :

Richard Leister, Chair

Angus Chen

Renee Ciesla

Kim Diamond

Alvaro Medeiros

David Harris

John Leo

Eduardo Veyan, alternate

Nirit Rotenberg, alternate

Submitted by Richard Leister, April 2023