

South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Official Minutes - April 12, 2023

1. Call to Order

Notice having been filed with the S.P. Observer and TapInto SP, Chairwoman Dorothy Miele called the Environmental Commission meeting to order in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act at 7:37 pm.

Present: Dorothy Miele (chairwoman) Debra Leporino, John Ferguson, Adam Butrico, Genevieve Helbo, Melanie Mott (council liaison) and Brian Bythell (planning board liaison).

Alternate members present:

Others: Dr. Alice Tempel (Environmental Specialist)

Absent: Tom Walsh (e) and Lisa Roseo

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the March 8, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed and all were in favor of approval.

3. Invitation for Public Comment

Walter Kalman was in attendance.

Concerning the Volunteer Litter Cleanup, Walter offered his help in the morning if needed. Walter asked for clarification of an 'Observer' post concerning SPEC. Melanie explained it was a post about amending the Boro ordinance to conform with a State Statute of the membership portion of SPEC's revised By-laws. Walter asked about the status of our 'BagUp NJ' proposal we discussed at our February meeting. SPEC wants to provide drop-off locations for people who want to donate their excess reusable shopping bags which we can then turn over to food banks. Dr. Tempel said we also have cartons of reusable bags which we will give out at several upcoming Boro events. Walter said he works with area food banks and would offer them collected bags. Dr. Tempel recently posted information on Facebook for residents who can drop off shopping bags at the Senior Center food pantry and FISH in Dunellen. Dr. Tempel told Walter she can add another location when he provides the information.

4. Budget - Dr. A. Tempel

- O&E (FY2023 temporary budget = \$1,500) Since the last meeting we spent \$0. YTD spent = \$567.71. Balance = \$932.29.
- Clean Communities – 2022 grant (\$49,621.17) – Spent since the 3/8 meeting = \$1,645 on: \$1,075 on salaries for litter removal/enforcement and \$570 on litter can maintenance. Total spent = \$43,807 from the 2022 grant. Balance = \$5,843.
- Signs Trust Fund – Spent \$0. The balance = \$640.12.
- Harris Steel Trust Fund – Since the last report we spent \$995 for the resident's replacement tree at 117 Fairmount Avenue. Deposits = \$0. Current balance is \$35,283.

5. Committee and Liaison Reports

A. Council Liaison - Ms. M. Mott

- Melanie Mott said she is working on the flyer to promote the 'Mental Health & Addiction' seminar. The flier will be included in the Green Team's documentation of the Boro's Health and Wellness program for Sustainable NJ action points. The seminar is on May 17 from 6 – 8 pm at the SP Public Library.
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B. Planning Board Liaison - Mr. R. Houghton / Mr. B. Bythell

- Brian said the Planning Board met last night, but there was nothing relevant to report.

C. Site Plan Review / Land Use- Mr. A. Butrico / Dr. A. Tempel

- M & L Borruso – Meineke Car Care (4527 Stelton Rd.) – applicant proposes construction of an additional repair structure. Adam reported they plan on removing two large trees and planting three: Queen Elizabeth Maples (non-native). Adam asked for suggestions for smaller native species. He suggested requesting a more specific recycling plan for their operations. The applicant claims there is no change to the impervious surface.

D. ERI - Ms. D. Leporino

- Debra said there was nothing new to report.

E. Clean Communities - Dr. A. Tempel / Ms. D. Leporino

- Dr. Tempel reported she submitted the annual Statistical Report to the NJCCC (NJ Clean Communities Council) on 3/16. She accounted for the 2022 grant up to 12/3/2022. Dr. Tempel said we will definitely expend the 2022 grant by June 30; hopefully the 2023 grant will be available by then.
- Spring Litter Cleanup – Dr. Tempel said she has heard from 13 groups/families – total of 90 people promised so far. Waiting for Kathleen Benton’s students to check in with their sites. Today, Dr. Tempel emailed the copy of the list of assigned and available sites to her volunteer database.
- Dr. Tempel asked who would be available to hand out equipment the morning of the cleanup. Debra and Genevieve will be there. Dr. Tempel asked Debra if she has distributed the ‘Save the Date’ flyer she sent to her. Debra said she didn’t want to hand them out too early. She planned on waiting till it was closer to the date. She will be giving the flyer to SPBA members, BAG Committee, Elks Lodge, Churches etc.
- Dr. Tempel explained the litter cleanup is the kind of event that can qualify for Sustainable NJ points under ‘Public Outreach & Education’. In order to qualify, in addition to publicizing and holding the event, we need a qualified speaker to explain the significance of the event. Dr. Tempel suggested to Kathleen that she ask the students who gave the PowerPoint presentation to the Mayor & Council on ‘BagUp NJ’, to present at the pickup picnic. Kathleen was receptive to the idea; waiting for confirmation.
- In discussing the Sustainable NJ point system, Dr. Tempel mentioned we are realizing that many activities we are already doing might qualify for points e.g. – Site Plan Review and Recycling Non-mandated materials.
- Adopt-a-Spot – Debra said there were three renewals for the 2nd quarter. Keystone still has not re-sent their renewal for the last quarter of 2022, as reported at last month’s meeting. Melanie offered to send, via email, a completed duplicate of Keystone’s last agreement using DocuSign software. Debra will send the form to Melanie and inform Keystone. Melanie said she will also call the contact. Debra also said we need to find out how long to keep hard copies of the agreements. Newer agreements are being scanned in.
- SPEC will have a table at the ‘Christmas in July’ event on 7/23. Dr. Tempel will submit the application. We will also participate in ‘National Night Out’.
- Dr. Tempel received permission from the State to recycle old Clean Communities grant records from the very beginning up to 2015. The grant retention period is six years.

F. Forestry - Mr. A. Butrico

- Adam asked members if they had thoughts on the 'Champion Tree' program SPEC is considering. Dorothy said her biggest concern is the expertise required in confirming identification, measurements etc. Adam said there are resources available to learn those techniques – e.g., website links, YouTube etc. He suggested we could make the program manageable by eliminating subspecies, limiting submissions to particular thresholds, asking for specific pictures of the tree etc. Dorothy said this could be a very educational program. SPEC exchanged ideas to make it more manageable – e.g., concentrating on specific tree species each week. Adam said he will put together ideas and come back with a proposal next month.
- Discussed whether and where we might plant the extra Oaks that are available to purchase from the State Tree Seedling Program. SPEC agreed to purchase an extra 25 for \$25 of Chestnut Oak for planting in HAW. Adam will pot them.

G. Highland Avenue Woods / Public Education - Mrs. D. Miele

- Dorothy reported the two front doors of the Nature Center are blistered again. They need attention. Soon the back deck will need to be powerwashed. Dr. Tempel will ask DPW if they have a powerwasher. If not, Adam offered.
- Dorothy said the deer fencing has been delayed a couple weeks because the fence company cannot get the material. We are still looking for volunteers. Adam said he will be available.
- Dorothy mentioned ANJEC was offering \$1,500 grants to commissions for improvements within communities. Dorothy talked with Dr. Tempel about applying for money to help remove the bamboo at the HAW parcel on New Market Avenue between the brook and the bamboo owner's house. Would \$1,500 put a dent? However, the grant is due on 4/17. Rich Wolff had told Dr. Tempel that our Bamboo ordinance does not apply to public property. We cannot go after the homeowner for that. Melanie said maybe the homeowner is 'grandfathered' from having to contain his bamboo? Dr. Tempel feels we need to address this problem because it is likely the bamboo will continue to migrate further into HAW and neighboring properties. We had been maintaining it for years with volunteers until the poison ivy became a big problem and the help dried up. Adam said he will walk the property and then research what our next step could be for re-control.

H. Historical Sites Preservation - Mrs. D. Miele / Mr. L. Randolph

- Dorothy received a letter through the Historical Society from our friends at Richard Grubb & Associates, archaeologists, concerning the Harris Steel property proposed warehouses at New Market & New Brunswick Avenues. They are doing an intensive archaeological survey like they did before the Cornell-Dubilier buildings were demolished. Dorothy said Dr. Richard Veit, Professor of Anthropology, was on site with a photographer taking photos of the buildings and grounds.

I. Pollution - Mr. A. Butrico

- John mentioned the EPA is making a push to further address PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances). John came to learn that PFAS is even in our toilet paper. Therefore, there is concern with its effect on clean water. The EPA is finally working on guidance.

J. Green Team - Mr. T. Walsh

- Dr. Tempel reported the GT has identified the actions they are going to work on this year to document. As always, our main constraint is not enough people working on the actions; more volunteers are needed. We are in a good position to document a fair number of activities.
- Dr. Tempel commented that Jonathan's 'Bunny Hop' project came off very well. Dr. Tempel had a prior commitment and couldn't attend. Looking at the event photos, the decorated area looked really nice. The GT will document that as an art event.
- Dorothy said we need to officially vote on the members of the Green Team in order for the list to go to the Mayor & Council who will officially appoint them. John made a motion, seconded by Debra, and all were in favor.

K. Public Information & Technology - Dr. A. Tempel / Mr. C. Cioffi

- Dr. Tempel's report: in March, SPEC's Facebook page carried 7 posts – reached 1,830 people with 167 engagements.

L. Stormwater Advisory Committee - Mr. J. Ferguson

- John reported a grant from the Federal government, via FEMA, of \$1.3 million was received for the 'Hazard Mitigation Plan' for the southern portion of Middlesex County. We will be able to perform a major study to see how we can stop the southern part of our county from flooding.
- The EPA released more money for the 'Clean Water' program which will be concentrated on disadvantaged communities.
- John said he was looking to acquire clean barrels to fit as rain barrels. New barrels are about \$140 each; how do you convince folks to spend that much money. He said we can pick up barrels for approximately \$35 - \$40 each, but still need to buy components. Adam mentioned being able to buy used barrels at car washes cheaper. However, they need extensive cleaning. John will continue to work on this; maybe there are grants available.

M. Environmental Specialist - Dr. A. Tempel

- Dr. Tempel said she is continuing to gather information for the Tonnage Grant.

N. Chairwoman's Report - Mrs. D. Miele

- Dorothy asked members if they had any questions about the amended By-laws that were emailed to them. No one did. Adam made a motion to adopt the amended By-laws, seconded by Debra, and all were in favor of approval.

6. Incoming / Outgoing Correspondence

- A list of correspondence was provided.
- Dr. Tempel noted receiving a notice of application for a NJDEP Flood Hazard Area Verification and Individual Permit-Net Fill for 1213 New Market Avenue. The owner wants to develop. This is a piece of vacant land that fronts New Market next to HAW. It is ecologically part of the reserve.

7. Old Business

8. New Business

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made, all were in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 10, 2023 @ 7:30 p.m. in the Borough Hall Conference Room.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lisa Roseo
Environmental Commission Secretary

Acronyms

ANJEC	-Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions
BOA	-Board of Adjustment
CBA	-Clean Business Association
CCAB	-Clean Communities Advisory Board
DOT	-Department of Transportation
DPW	-Department of Public Works
EIS	-Environmental Impact Study
EPA	-Environmental Protection Agency
EWA	-Edison Wetlands Association
FEMA	-Federal Emergency Management Agency
FOW	-Friends of the Woods
GBFCP	-Green Brook Flood Control Project
HAW	-Highland Avenue Woods
KCS	-Known Contaminated Sites
LEEDS	-Lead in Energy and Environmental Design
LOI	-Letter of Interpretation
MCDSWM	-Middlesex County Division of Solid Waste Management
MCOEM	-Middlesex County Office of Emergency Management
MCUFAC	-Middlesex County Urban Forestry Advisory Committee
NJCF	-New Jersey Conservation Foundation
NJDEP	-New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
NOV	-Notice of Violation
OTOSP	-Oak Tree Open Space Parcel
PRP'S	-Potentially Responsible Parties
ROSI	-Recreation and Open Space Inventory
ROW	-Right of Way
SPBA	-South Plainfield Business Association
SPEC	-South Plainfield Environmental Commission
USACE	-United States Army Corp of Engineers