

## Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, September 19, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: S. Jaracz, J. Johnson, E. Pires, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt and P. Walitsky; and Rutgers intern Santiago Varela. T. Chase arrived at 7:15 PM. Absent: W. Andrews, R. Suydam, and T. Kenyon and Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: the B9 Schoolhouse (corner of Mettlers Rd) application has been returned to the applicant, with instructions to revise it in light of the scenic corridor status of Mettlers Rd. The tree removal and replacement ordinance will be discussed (seeking information as to how it came to its present form and specifications). With fall beginning, it is time to begin considering the Environmental Stewardship awards.

The minutes of the Sept. 12 meeting were approved unanimously.

J. Johnson moved to open the meeting to the public. This was passed. Comments from the public: Jane Stewart stated that more of the senior community would like to attend EC meetings, but can't; can the meetings be virtual? P. Walitsky responded that the township has ceased having on line meetings, as the COVID-19 epidemic has diminished. Eileen W. noted that parents with kids would also like to attend, but can't due to school etc. Terry Thorson noted that high school kids might like to participate beyond their Environmental Club. J. Johnson then moved to close the meeting to the public, S. Jaracz seconding. This was passed.

P. Walitsky reported that there was no new correspondence (since 9/12).

P. Walitsky reported on a site plan for two proposed warehouses (204,000, 134,000 sq. ft) at 400 – 600 Atrium Drive; one would replace an existing vacant office building. Both would be subject to the state requirement for a solar-ready roof. They propose four EV charging stations for each building – sufficient for the smaller building, a little under the requirement (4% of parking spaces) for the larger building. The impervious surface would decrease slightly – from 72% to 69.6% - but still exceed the ordinance limit (60%). Pervious pavement in car parking areas was suggested. Standard EC requests for anti-idling signs and bicycle racks and repair stations should be requested in our report. Concern was expressed for the hedgerow between this site and the rear of buildings off Worlds Fair Drive – the applicant should try to save what is on their property.

Committee reports: the Education Committee has prepared flyers advertising the Sept. 29 presentation on energy aggregation, as well as notices on social media and a piece in the Franklin Reporter. S. Jaracz asked for an interpretation of the ballot question, specifically about the provision for using 100% renewable energy. T. Chase explained that this was an opt-in higher level of resiliency, at higher cost. This and other provisions passed by Council are essentially bid specifications, to be embodied in the actual bid specifications to be prepared by Gabel Associates if the referendum passes. The intent is to undertake aggregation only if there are actual savings to residents and the environment. Those already having rooftop solar cells can opt out of the program.

J. Johnson reported for the Communications committee. She asked Tara about setting up a (e)mailing list for residents interested in the activities of the EC. She will prepare a sign-up sheet for the next EC meeting. She has seen a list of 10 environmental tips for fall, would like to post a link to this on the EC web page. A. Schmidt wanted to see what is proposed. Since fall is about to begin, the EC voted to approve this proposal, A. Schmidt abstaining.

S. Jaracz is preparing an article on his experience with No Mow May, for submission to the Franklin Reporter as an op-ed piece. He is asking Tara whether this can be submitted as from the entire EC. He wants to know what height of grass is permitted under property maintenance regulations; he would let the grass grow to 6" high, then mow.

A. Schmidt spoke on the Tree Removal ordinance, wanting to know how and why the present specifications were set. He has prepared a letter to township manager Bob Vornlocker asking this. S. Jaracz proposed exempting *Ailanthus* (Tree of Heaven) trees from the count of trees to be removed (since they are a preferred egg host for the Spotted Lantern-fly). But at this time we are just researching. A. Schmidt moved approval of the letter to Bob Vornlocker asking questions. This was approved unanimously.

T. Chase asked whether committees should be called that or subcommittees. It was agreed that they should be called committees, subordinate to the full Environmental Commission. They should avoid meeting with more than three EC members present, since four is a quorum of the full Commission.

Sustainable Jersey: T. Chase relayed a report from T. Kenyon that the township application was submitted Aug. 23, five days before the deadline for applications with all details of proposed actions included. It should get us 450 points, well above the lower limit for Silver certification (350 points).

P. Walitsky reported on the Adopt-a-Drain program: he has submitted to Public Works a list of all drains in Canal Walk, so that Canal Walk residents can adopt them all.

The anti-idling ordinance is apparently still under review. A. Schmidt and E. Potosnak will ask whether citizen enforcement can be included, as in New York City. Normally enforcement is carried out by the county Health Dept. in response to citizen reports.

Local Health Assessment: P. Walitsky reported that focus groups are being formed.

J. Johnson moved to open the meeting to the public. S. Tallman asked about the financial break-even point for roof-mounted solar cells. A. Schmidt replied that he would do it to save CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, not to save money. If one leases one's roof to a solar cell company, one saves on the cost of electricity ( $\approx$  one-third of PSE&G cost) without having to put out the cost of the system or be responsible for maintaining it; the solar company keeps the SRECs. The condition of one's roof is also a consideration; a roof >13 years old probably should be replaced to bear the cells. One can probably get this done smoothly and at reduced cost by the solar cell company if you are leasing.

S. Tallman also reported on drainage problems on Tallman Rd in Canal Walk, reduced but not eliminated by replacement of a grassy swale with a drainage pipe.

Another member of the public asked who to call about truck idling. A. Schmidt replied that one should probably call both local police and the county Health Dept. (who are responsible for enforcement). J. Brandt asked about trucks idling along roads, not in traffic. A. Schmidt replied that if they are idling off the road, even within the right of way, it is a violation. When they are in traffic it is not. S. Tallman reported that truck idling along Randolph Rd has improved, perhaps due to flashing signs.

T. Thorson asked about fines for idling violations. A. Schmidt explained the fines, first a notice of violation, then a \$250 fine, escalating with further violations. When he worked in enforcement for Union County the aim was to get the companies to tell their drivers that they will be responsible for them, a significant expense for a driver, if not for a company. Warehouses which post No Idling signs are thus relieved of the liability to fines they would otherwise incur.

T. Thorson also asked whether the EC requires trees to be planted be native species. The site plans generally list the species to be planted, and they are generally native species; the Shade Tree Commission has a list of non-native species *not* to be planted.

J. Brandt asked whether EC recommendations on site plans are generally followed. T. Chase explained that if the applicant agrees before the Planning Board to follow a recommend-

ation, this is then incorporated into the resolution eventually passed by the Board, and has the force of a requirement. She also asked about height of warehouses, and their appearance (colors would be desirable rather than just all white or gray). One applicant had responded to such a question from a member of the Board that their plans were too advanced, they could not change the color now, perhaps in a future application.

There were other comments from the public, not all environmental. The prevalence of 'spec' warehouses, proposed without a tenant signed up, was discussed.

Eventually J. Johnson moved to close the meeting to the public. This was passed, followed by adjournment at 9:10 PM.