

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, August 1, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, E. Pires, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam and P. Walitsky; and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon. Absent: S. Jaracz (out of the country), J. Johnson, M. Santiago (also out of the country); and Council liaison E. Potosnak.

Chair's report: controversy over warehouses continues. Warehouse opponents support the ordinance passed by Council, developers oppose it. The Local Health Assessment questionnaire is being circulated, particularly in the adult communities.

The minutes of the meeting of July 18 were approved (with changes made during review).

The meeting was opened to the public. Dr. Charles (Chuck) Martin, of the Trails and Open Space committees, spoke to request Environmental Commission approval of biological control of the invasive plant Spotted Knapweed at Negri-Nepote open space. The species has infested as much as 30% of Negri-Nepote and is very persistent. Control would be begun by introducing a weevil, *Cyphocleonus achates*, whose larvæ bore into the roots of the Spotted Knapweed (its only host), preventing transport of water and nutrients and killing the plant in 2 or 3 years. This insect is widely used for biological control in western states where Spotted Knapweed interferes with agriculture. Also used are flower weevils (*Larinus minutus* and *L. obtusus*), but these would have to have been introduced in June or early July. He would like to introduce *Cyphocleonus achates* in the area of the pollinator garden in late August or early September. Open Space Committee approval would be desirable, but that committee is not scheduled to meet until the third week in September.

E. Pires asked what predators control the insects. Martin replied that the insect is host-specific, will decrease when the host plants decrease. They can become established and provide control for some years. He commented further that the NJ State Dept. of Agriculture raises insects at its Philip Alampi Biological Control Laboratory for control of agriculturally significant pests such as the Mexican Soybean Beetle, but not these insects.

A. Schmidt requested that Martin prepare a draft resolution and a FAQ sheet. R. Suydam proposed instead that the EC send a letter of approval to Bob Vornlocker, asking his approval for distribution of the weevil. C. Martin would purchase the insects (\$160 for 100 insects) and apply them in the area of the pollinator garden at Negri-Nepote (1.2 acres). He would set up a monitoring program to establish its effectiveness. The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture has protocols for monitoring programs. The EC approved this action unanimously.

The Commission then came out of public session.

Correspondence: one letter was received, a plan for a flag lot subdivision on Treptow Rd. No e-mails were received.

Site plans: T. Chase reported on a proposal to replace an office building at 200 Cottontail Lane with two warehouses, 116,530 and 113,358 sq. ft. Suggested comments were: banking 28 parking spaces at the rear; charging stations (5 or 6, depending on whether 28 spaces are banked); anti-idling signs; a solar-ready roof, if possible painted white or other light color to reflect more radiation and absorb less, cooling the building; and plantings in the existing and to be retained detention basins to better filter out pollution from the parking areas.

P. Walitsky reported on a proposed 70,000 sq. ft. addition to the 70,000 sq. ft. building at 50 Atrium Drive (the former Garden State Exhibition Center). This is a revised application, the EC already commented on the original in April. This would slightly decrease the impervious surface,

since construction would be on what is now a parking area. (The 200 Cottontail Lane proposal would also slightly decrease impervious surface, from 71.2% to 70.6%, still over the ordinance limit, 65%. Banking parking would further decrease impervious surface.)

New business: T. Kenyon sent out a draft of the annual report for 2020, and showed it on screen. It includes a section on EC response to the COVID epidemic, listing canceled and virtual meetings. Projects completed and undertaken are listed. We did not make Environmental Stewardship awards that year. The report for 2019 still needs to be prepared. The 2020 report was approved for posting on the EC web page.

Sustainable Jersey recertification: only two items remain to be completed (the deadline is August 28). Without these we will have 405 points, with them 445 points, both well above the requirement of 350 points for Silver status.

Subcommittee reports: R. Suydam reported for the Communications subcommittee. The 2021 Annual Report and the water conservation suggestions have been posted on the EC web page; she would like to post the Tree Equity interactive graphic, shown at the 7/18 meeting. Our web page has a section for resolutions, but none have been posted since 2013. At least five past resolutions were remembered and suggested for posting; we hope Ann Marie McCarthy, township clerk, has them on file. A piece on the Adopt-a-Drain program was published in the Somerset Run newsletter. The scheduled presentation on Energy Aggregation, Sept. 29 at the township library, was noted. She suggests that the township should develop and adopt a policy on social media accounts; at present the township has no policy, except that all postings must be on the township's accounts. The EC would like to have separate social media accounts. Red Bank allows this, with strict regulations adopted by the municipality.

E. Pires reported for the Education subcommittee: Maria provided an in depth report from the Education subcommittee via email to all the commissioners. She wanted the EC to be updated on- 1) Rutgers Prep is ready to work with us in the fall at our event. This was relayed via email by Meredith Santowasso from Rutgers Prep. 2) The subcommittee will follow up with ANJEC and Sustainable Jersey for speakers for the scheduled events. 3) The Franklin Township Recreation Dept. will share the list with their youth members at their huddle meeting and get back to the Education subcommittee regarding which 3 topics are of the most interest.

T. Kenyon reported receiving an e-mail from Prof. Dan Van Abs of Rutgers, calling for requests for interns for the 2022-2023 school year. We should apply, if possible for two to assist her. W. Andrews reported that Rutgers Prep has a policy requiring volunteer activities by its students; however, township policies regarding minors would make formal internships difficult.

Old business: so far 56 drains have been adopted. More publicity for this program is to go out. P. Walitsky received from Canal Walk management a complete list of all drains in Canal Walk (the township list lacked many of these).

The anti-idling ordinance is still in legal review.

The Steering Committee for the Local Health Assessment will meet on August 9; they will discuss setting up focus groups. R. Suydam suggested providing punch and cookies to increase attendance at focus groups. A digital version of the questionnaire will be available soon.

The meeting was opened to the public – only the press was present – and closed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 PM.