

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, Dec. 19, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM, in the Council chambers because of large attendance of the public, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, A. Schmidt, R. Suydam; and Sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon. Absent: J. Johnson, E. Pires, M. Santiago, and P. Walitsky (in Florida). Council liaison E. Potosnak arrived at 7:25 PM.

There was no chair's report. The minutes of the Dec. 5 meeting were approved. The meeting was then opened to the public.

Debbie Stuart, 2 Farrington Plaza, spoke in praise of the amendments to the Tree Ordinance. No one else coming forward, the meeting was then closed to the public.

There was no correspondence.

Site Plan Review of the proposed B9 Warehouse (96, 98, 104 Schoolhouse Rd, 15 Mettlers Rd). T. Chase read his comments. A. Schmidt recommended that 1) anti-idling signs should be more frequent along the loading area than every 7th dock, and should be installed in other places, such as by the office and at the entrance to the property, 2) there should be ample parking on site for trucks, to avoid idling on the street. R. Suydam recommended requiring either solar cells or green plants on the roofs. A. Schmidt discussed the beeping requirement for trucks. E. Potosnak said that he had heard that trailer trucks don't have to have beepers. [See comment by Joe Hoffman later.]

Committee reports: S. Jaracz reported that showing of environmental films is now scheduled for Feb. 1 at the library. He requested that EC members be present as a panel for discussion. R. Suydam suggested getting someone from the Rutgers Climate Institute for the panel. S. Jaracz will look into this. R. Suydam suggested that if the film American Rivers could be obtained for a showing, it be shown in the large meeting room at Consolata, for a larger crowd. But we are not sure how to get it.

R. Suydam, for the Communications Committee, asked about the e-mail list, and about getting details of an upcoming agenda posted on the township web site.

T. Kenyon reported on the first meeting of the EC/Shade Tree joint committee on updating the Tree Ordinance. A. Schmidt reported on the letter already sent to Council with the two urgently needed changes in the tree ordinances (increasing the fee for trees not planted, lowering the diameter at which a tree is for the purpose of the ordinance considered a tree). R. Suydam reported on the 25% limit on buy-out for required trees not planted, originally in the ordinance but removed in a 2015 revision. We ask that this be restored.

E. Potosnak asked about the anti-idling ordinance – T. Kenyon reported that a revised version is being considered by the township attorney – and the proposed immediate revisions to the Tree Ordinance, since he had not yet received the letter from the committee.

Internship for spring 2023: we did get a Rutgers student intern, a senior, for January to May.

Green roof ordinance: the subcommittee has a lot of material to review, many communities already having such ordinances in place. They will meet after Jan. 19, when P. Walitsky returns from Florida.

Old business: T. Kenyon reviewed where we stand on the annual report for 2022 and goals for 2023. At the first meeting in January we will work on goals.

Anti-idling ordinance: the township attorney wants it shortened further, with as much as possible covered by reference to state law., which is amended from time to time. Also, this might be introduced as an amendment to the sign ordinance; but the signs must be exactly as prescribed by the Dept. of Transportation. It would be easier to add details through the sign ordinance. A. Schmidt asked whether we will get feedback from the township attorney. T. Kenyon will provide a marked-up version, showing changes. We should check on whether state law would allow citizen enforcement.

Adopt-a-Drain program: still at around 92 adopters. T. Kenyon described the program to the audience.

Local health assessment: T. Kenyon reported that the township is still working on it, putting diverse data together. The theme is, how do planning and zoning decisions affect health?

Other business: S. Jaracz reported on the annual stream clean-up. The Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership recommended cleaning Mile Run again. He checked on Seeleys Run, feels it does not currently need clean-up. T. Chase suggested looking at either the middle section of Mile Run, with access from Hawthorne Ave., or the lower section, with access from Easton Ave.

R. Suydam proposed working on adoption of a stormwater utility. E. Potosnak described stormwater utilities. T. Chase commented on the desirability of watershed-based stormwater utilities, and that churches (who would pay a fee for their impervious surface, although they cannot be taxed) can benefit from utility-based projects as well as paying the fee.

The meeting was then opened to the public, with a five minute time limit on remarks.

Jan Brandt, 22 Bryant Court, asked whether the parking lots and detention basins are outside the 100 ft buffer along the scenic roadway, and supported keeping them out. Bryant Court residents do not support the Canal Walk homeowners' association negotiations with the developer involving berm augmentation on the Canal Walk side of Mettlers Rd. She called the non-emergency number of the Franklin Police Dept. to report noise from unloading on Jensen Drive at night.

Marlin Quon asked about parking and a 6' high solid fence within 100 ft of the Schoolhouse Rd frontage. The scenic corridors ordinance has been interpreted as requiring a 100 ft buffer along Schoolhouse Rd, even though it is not a scenic roadway. He also asked about the 'constructed wetland' as a 'structure' which would not be permitted in the 100 ft buffer along Mettlers Rd.

Joe Hoffman, 5 Congress Court, researched whether 18-wheel trailer trucks use beeps for warning of backing up. They do not; it is the forklifts which unload the trucks which make this noise, audible over long distances. There is 'white noise' technology for this warning which is much less piercing and has been approved by OSHA. He reported trucks waiting to enter a warehouse site on Cottontail Lane in the early morning, including one which pulled off the street only partially, creating a traffic hazard in the darkness.

Michael Bryan, 40 Bryant Court, asked whether fences can be put in the 100 ft buffer of the scenic roadway. He reported that the Canal Walk Homeowners' Association is proposing a 6 ft fence along the entire Canal Walk frontage of Mettlers Rd. A fence would be allowed, but must be no more than 50% opaque, and cannot be a chain link fence.

Janet Schafer asked about the noise ordinance, how it can be used to protect residents in Franklin. A. Schmidt and T. Chase responded that the noise ordinance controls are based on sound measurement at the edge of the property in question. Ms. Schafer reported that a site on Cottontail Lane where a warehouse is under construction becomes flooded when there is significant rainfall.

Shirley Tallman, 57 Tallman Lane, asked about the effects of berms on water runoff on streets between them; she fears that berms will funnel water onto the street. She described flooding of back yards in Canal Walk which took a long time to be corrected.

Kubid Shah asked a number of questions, including about tree cover loss, what green roofs are, about life expectancy which is greatest in the First Ward, and whether Franklin Township can be a leader toward carbon neutrality. T. Kenyon answered a number of his questions, in particular about life expectancy in the First Ward which is the highest in Somerset County; R. Suydam responded about green and solar cell-covered roofs. A. Schmidt responded about the Shade Tree Commission's study of tree canopy coverage in the township. R. Suydam and S. Jaracz responded about carbon neutrality and what it requires of us. A. Schmidt commented on sound level monitoring, what individuals can do.

Arlene Levinton spoke of hearing trucks at 3:30 – 3:45 AM and her report to the township police.

No one else coming forward, the meeting was then closed to the public.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.