

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, October 6, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM, and the Sunshine Law Notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Chase, S. Jaracz, M. Santiago, A. Schmidt, E. Vastola, P. Walitsky; sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon, Council liaison E. Potosnak; and Jahvan Walker, who has applied to join the Energy subcommittee. Absent: E. Pires, R. Suydam.

Chair's report: the denial of the B9 warehouse site plan is now at the Court of Appeals. There was a hearing this week. The Onyx warehouse application is stalled while the Somerset Woods nursing home questions whether Onyx's proposed expansion of the intersection of Old New Brunswick Rd and New Brunswick Rd. would use land owned by Somerset Woods. The NPH application for stores & an office at Davidson Ave. and New Brunswick Rd was sent back to their architect for redesign.

Minutes of the meeting of Sept. 29: S. Jaracz supplied additional information about the agrisolar installation at the Rutgers farm on Ryders Lane and a Sun Day-sponsored event in Bridgewater. With these additions the minutes were approved.

The meeting was opened to the public. With no public present, the meeting was closed.

Correspondence: we received copies of requests to DEP for wetlands determination for the NJ Chinese Community Center proposed for Adams St. (off Elizabeth Ave. north of I-287) and 100 Suydam Rd (vacant land at the kink in Suydam Rd beyond all development).

Site plans: 630 S. Middlebush Rd (previously approved for a Hindu temple): now a mosque is proposed, a slightly smaller building (19,350 sq. ft., vs. 21,000 for the temple). A conservation easement to Franklin Township is proposed for the wetlands at the rear. They propose 158 parking spaces; S. Jaracz noted that if they could reduce this to 150, they would need only 6 charging stations for electric vehicles rather than 7. They propose removing 88 trees, some sizable, which would require planting 430 new trees; they propose planting 238, the difference to be met by payment to the Shade Tree Fund.

Hound Town whose application for a variance to allow a cannabis dispensary at 695 Amwell Rd (corner of DeMott Lane) was denied, is asking for a rehearing.

NPH Realty (see chair's report) resubmitted, with the new plan showing substantial tree buffering along New Brunswick Rd and placement of an 'amenity' (outdoor tables & chairs) on the Davidson Ave. frontage rather than two smaller 'amenities' more internal to the plot – but not the realignment (90° rotation) of the one story building requested by members of the Planning Board.

New business: T. Kenyon was contacted by the new head of the Astronomy Club, who is very interested in dark skies. She will meet with him on Oct. 15; P. Walitsky will also attend, and perhaps R. Suydam if she is in town.

T. Kenyon handed out self-assessment sheets from ANJEC, and explained them. Since these were not sent out in advance response was not expected immediately, but by the next meeting.

S. Jaracz and T. Chase attended the Sierra Club webinar on PJM (the electricity grid) and electricity prices. They reported on this: there is a queue for approval of new generation projects to connect to the grid, which at times has had a five year backlog of applications, though this is now much decreased. Approval is needed before a project can start construction. The PJM board is comprised of people from existing generating organizations, mostly powered by coal or natural gas, and votes in secret. They have favored fossil fuel-powered generation over solar, though solar can now deliver electricity at a lower cost. New demand for electricity is largely driven by data

centers, particularly located in Virginia, but driving up the cost of electricity across the grid (which stretches as far west as Chicago). There are murmurs of dissatisfaction from state governments, particularly Pennsylvania, which is a net producer of electricity (New Jersey consumes more than it produces).

T. Kenyon reported on a meeting with Schneider Electric, which is giving the town a free energy saving assessment, which could lead to projects which could save the township money. This is sponsored by the Board of Public Utilities.

Old business: T. Kenyon showed the video created by Jenny Kafas and Martina Jaraczova on leaving the leaves (recorded and produced by Su Kafas, Jenny's mother). They make the point that leaving the leaves retains rainfall, allowing greater aquifer recharge. Leaves are a habitat for overwintering invertebrates, which are food for birds. The video will be posted on our web site.

E. Vastola and M. Santiago will work on preparing a presentation on composting.

Environmental Stewardship awards: the Board of Education continues to press for an award to Franklin High School as well as to Pine Grove School, which accrued the highest SJ point total. We have voted to give the award only to Pine Grove School, with honorable mention to the high school and Elizabeth Avenue School. A plaque has been prepared only for Pine Grove School.

No public was present for a second opening to the public. The meeting was then adjourned at 8:35 PM.