

## **Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, February 2, 2026**

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, S. Jaracz, E. Pires, A. Schmidt, E. Vastola, and P. Walitsky; and sustainability coordinator T. Kenyon. Absent: M. Santiago.

P. Walitsky reported that the Planning Board has approved new standards for warehouses in the B-I zone, limiting size as determined by location, i.e. medium-sized warehouses are allowed only within one mile (on roads) of the I-287 exits, smaller warehouses being allowed throughout the zone, while very large warehouses are not allowed at all.

The Commission has lost its liaison to Council with Ed Potosnak's appointment as commissioner of the state Dept. of Environmental Protection. Our loss is a major gain for the state.

He thanked E. Vastola for a nice presentation on composting of food waste, well attended despite the low temperature outside.

The minutes of the meeting of Jan. 5 were approved.

The meeting was opened to the public. R. Suydam (no longer a member of the Commission, asked about the update of the Shade Tree ordinance. A. Schmidt replied that the Shade Tree Committee has submitted its second draft of the ordinance. She is also concerned with the Sustainability and Open Space portions of the Master plan; the latter in particular needs updating. T. Kenyon reported on where these stand. The meeting was then closed to the public.

There was no correspondence, and no site plans.

New Business: leaf blower ordinance; A. Schmidt reported that he had talked with Council members, who suggested that the EC invite representatives of several landscaping businesses to a meeting to get their views on such an ordinance. He will send his draft to several landscapers and invite them to comment. P. Walitsky suggested sending it to the landscaper who services Canal Walk. A. Schmidt has another name, and W. Andrews a third. S. Jaracz has contact with landscapers who use electric equipment.

International Dark Sky Week is April 13-20. The co-president of our Astronomy Club is a dark sky advocate, and will appear before the EC on Feb. 23.

Balcony solar: S. Jaracz reported on European use of small solar panels which can feed directly into a household circuit (as opposed to traditional systems which feed into the electricity grid between the meter and electric panel). These supply up to 1.2 kilowatts of power, which does not affect the grid. Utah has approved these, and New York and California are considering approval. (Shortly after the meeting there was a front page NY Times story on them!) P. Walitsky reported on a Summerfield resident who has a window solar cell which runs several appliances. These systems are small – that's why they are exempted from regulation – but can support a significant fraction of a household's use and charge a battery.

Skip the Stuff, now adopted as a state law: ecofriendly utensils are exempted, especially if compostable. Full service restaurants have to provide customers with reusable utensils. On line orders by default do not include utensils, customers have to order them if they want them. The DEP has to develop an educational program within 180 days. Schools, jails, etc. are exempt. Restaurants have a year to come into compliance.

T. Kenyon reported that the state has adopted a statewide development and redevelopment plan, after twenty years of development since the last such plan. We commented on an early draft, which was never very specific; the adopted plan is not much different from the early draft.

The legislature also passed an invasive species management law, with a short list of invasive species. After 49 months (from Jan. 8, 2026) invasive species of plant can no longer be sold. A supervising council is described in detail; it can add more invasive species to the list of forbidden species. The DEP has a year to write regulations.

Old business: S. Jaracz reported on the food waste composting workshop. Getting the doors of the municipal building open was a problem – only P. Walitsky and T. Kenyon have keys, and neither was present. The presenter or someone should bring a laptop, from which slides can be shown. Handouts would be useful, with an abstract of the presentation. A sign-up sheet should be available.

T. Kenyon reported that the annual report is finished. Should we request a presentation before Council? Councilman Vassanella, present, said yes, 10 minutes or so.

We would like a youth member, but have been waiting for a general ordinance providing for youth members for all commissions (except the Board of Adjustment). Councilman Vassanella will pursue this.

E. Pires brought up planning for Save the Mow in the spring. We may be able to get a story in Franklin Times.

The meeting was opened to the public. Barbara Martalis complained about having received an e-mail which indicated that the meeting would begin at 7:30 (vs. the actual time. 7:00). Councilman Vassanella will push for a leaf blower ordinance.

The meeting was closed to the public. The next meeting will be Feb. 23, because Feb. 16 is Presidents' Day. At it a photo of the entire Commission will be taken.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.