

Minutes of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission meeting, March 2, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 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, P. Walitsky, and T. Kenyon. M. Santiago arrived at 7:52 PM.

Chair's report: both the township and Canal Walk residents have filed appeals from the court's decision on the B9 warehouse. The application to the Zoning Board of Adjustment for a mosque on S. Middlebush Rd (next to Snyder's farm) stated that it would be only open on Fridays, but their website suggested that they would be open many times during the week. The Board is trying to ascertain the truth of the matter.

The minutes of the meeting of Feb. 2 were approved without corrections.

The meeting was opened to the public. There were no comments. The meeting was closed to the public. There was no correspondence.

At this point the landscapers (invited by A. Schmidt) arrived, having been in another meeting by mistake.

A. Schmidt described the proposed ordinance limiting the use of leaf blowers powered by fossil fuels. Landscaper Will Dupree expressed their concerns: electric blowers would be an added expense; because they are less powerful, jobs would take longer to complete, therefore more workers would be needed to get jobs done in the same amount of time. Battery charges would not last all day, therefore they would have to have a generator on their truck or use the truck's generator to recharge them. Art Wilmot suggested that they could use (fossil fuel powered) blowers only until an earlier evening hour. Will Dupree noted that weed whackers and lawn mowers, also generating noise, could be operating at the same time. A. Schmidt noted that the township noise ordinance is now not based on decibel levels. Bruce Yager feels that batteries and gasoline don't mix, there would be an increased fire hazard. Will Dupree noted that much of their work was in non-residential areas such as Davidson Ave. T. Chase suggested the ordinance might apply only in residential zones. S. Jaracz noted that stricter ordinances have been passed in other municipalities, and that Princeton has worked with their landscapers in developing their ordinance. A. Schmidt thanked Mr. Dupree for his suggestion and stated that his first draft of the ordinance included wording that would allow leaf-blowers to be used on commercial and industrial properties that were at least 500 feet from any residentially zoned property line. He stated that he would like the EC to consider this suggestion. Will Dupree expressed concern about the cost of new electric equipment. S. Jaracz described improved longevity and power of newer electric motors and batteries. Further discussion between the landscapers and the commission continued until 7:45 PM.

At this point, after the landscapers left, S. Jaracz took pictures of the Commission.

Site plans: E. Pires described the application of Islamic Circle of North America. They have an office on Hamilton St., wish to use one room for prayer. No environmental concerns. Dream On Me Industries, 45 Veronica, wants signs, including three large wall mounted signs. Odin Dhun: tree cutting and planting has reverted to their original plan. (Not exactly: rather than clustering with decreased lot sizes, they proposed increasing the uncut buffer zone along the edges of the property from 15 ft wide to 40 ft, which will considerably reduce tree removal compared to the original plan. At its March 4 meeting the Planning Board accepted this revision.)

P. Walitsky described the application of PSE&G for a new power substation at Bennetts and Dahmer Lanes, with a new building the same size as the present small building, on the same site,

which is largely covered with crushed stone. A new monopole, 168 ft tall, will replace a present lattice tower.

T. Kenyon described the application of Iglesia Cristiana, 680 Easton Ave., to use an existing building (a residence) as a church; there are 23 parking spaces. There would be no new construction, only internal modifications. We recommend planting buffering, especially along the Girard Ave. frontage; solar cells on the roof, pervious pavement in the parking lot; a bike repair station and an electric vehicle charging station. Solar cells over the parking lot would however be shaded by the neighboring building.

T. Chase described the application of Somerset County for subdivision of an existing lot, ≈ 38 acres, between Canal Rd and Old Georgetown Rd, in order to acquire 29 acres to add to county-owned open space next to it. No construction is contemplated, indeed this would prevent construction.

New business: ANJEC is offering small (≈\$1500) grants; do we have any ideas? Discussion eventually focused on the wet corner of Naaman Williams Park. We could drain it toward the brook in the woods, or install a rain garden.

We should close out the Residential Energy Efficiency grant – is there any money left in it?

Update of the Open Space and Recreation element of the Master Plan: Tara, Saffie Kallon and Stephen Dahl (Director of Recreation) are working on this, will submit a proposal to the EC.

Vacancy of the Commission: a CV was received from Kiki Anastasikos. We send this to the Council with a recommendation that she be appointed.

Maria Santiago reported that STEAM Night at the Elizabeth Ave. school will be April 25, 5:30 to 7:00. They would welcome the Commission to return to this.

Fire department people attended a meeting on electric vehicles for first responders, but not as formal township representatives, so we get no credit from Sustainable Jersey for participation.

S. Jaracz reported that Franklin High School's Green Fair will be April 25, 10 to 2. The stream clean-up, of Seeley's Run at Easton Avenue, will be April 11, and is being publicized; Franklin High School students will attend.

The co-president of the Astronomy Club, who is also an International Dark Sky Ambassador, will attend the next EC meeting (postponed from this meeting because of the landscapers coming). Sustainable Jersey approved our buying amber light bulbs for outdoor use, to be given away at the Green Fair etc., if we have any grant money left.

There was no news on a youth member position, nor on a Commissioner Emeritus advisory group.

The meeting was opened to the public for comment. There were no comments, and the meeting was closed to the public. The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.