

Green Team Year End Report

2021

Overview

The purpose of the Green Team is to promote efforts to make Watchung a sustainable community. Sustainable policies and practices ensure the long-term viability of the borough by saving tax dollars, conserving energy, reducing the community's carbon footprint and natural resource consumption, and providing for the health and safety of residents.

2021 was a year of change and achievement for the Watchung Green Team. The year began with a significant turnover in team members as a result of term expirations and resignations. Consequently, the first meeting of the year did not take place until March.

Sustainable Jersey Certification

The goal for the year was to restore Watchung's Bronze certification, which was initially earned in 2013, but was not renewed when it expired after three years. This was the primary activity in 2020, as well. The team was able to achieve this goal through sustained, focused efforts over a course of several months.

To earn certification a municipality must earn 150 points by executing a set of actions provided by Sustainable Jersey. There are a total of 158 actions, spanning 18 categories, with a maximum possible score of 2280 points.

The year began with a restart of the recertification effort, taking a new approach. Rather than starting from the ground up, the team identified actions that were either already achieved by the borough and just needed to be documented and actions that could both be easily accomplished and provide a concrete benefit to the borough. Many of the actions undertaken were included in the prior certification.

Bronze certification requires a minimum of 150 points and the actions must span at least 6 categories. The Watchung bronze submission included 20 actions, spanning 10 categories, for a total of 200 points. Two of these actions, the farmers market, and the annual green fair, are discussed below. A full certification report can be found on the [Sustainable Jersey website](#). Certification was achieved in the fall with the award being presented at the annual luncheon at the New Jersey League of Municipalities annual meeting. Mayor Balla and Council President Robinson accepted the award.

While the team did identify and begin work on additional actions leading to silver certification, there was insufficient time to complete the additional 150 points before the November 21st deadline.

Farmers Market

The Watchung Farmers Market was re-launched at the beginning of June and ran on Tuesday afternoons until October. The market was located in the upper parking lot of the Police/Municipal Court building on Somerset Street, providing residents and people commuting through the borough with an opportunity to purchase fresh local goods.

Plans to resume the market in the spring are already underway. The team is discussing a survey intended to identify opportunities to improve the market.

Green Fair

Watchung and Warren have been holding joint Green Fairs for many years, with the only break being 2020 because of the pandemic. The Green Teams from the two towns put on a highly successful Green Fair this year, with modifications necessitated by continuing health concerns.

2022 Focus

The team has discussed how to approach 2022 and determined that, while achieving silver certification is desirable, it would be better to focus on actions that provide clear benefit to the town. It is anticipated that this approach may well end up earning the town silver through the completion of additional actions, but that would be an added benefit rather than the primary goal. There are three specific areas of focus that the team is recommending for next year:

- Food Security - A local resident is an expert in this area and has been working with the team on improving the Farmers Market
- Solar Power "Friendliness" - New state law will drive the changes to ordinances that are the core of making solar power more easily installable in residential and commercial settings in the borough.
- Electric Vehicle Readiness - As with solar, the borough must adopt ordinances that will encourage and facilitate the inclusion of charging stations in new construction. The Green Team has been engaged with county and state EV proponents this year and plans to continue into next year.

In addition to the above items, the annual Green Fair will be held and the Farmers Market will return. In addition, the work on the Ness property will fall under the brown-fields actions towards silver. In addition, the "Diversity in Boards and Commissions" action item should be reviewed by the WIDE committee.

Membership

The main challenge for the Green Team is low membership. More volunteers will allow the workload to be distributed more broadly. While all that is needed is interest, volunteers having knowledge of the areas of focus would greatly benefit the borough.

Grants

One of the main benefits of Sustainable Jersey certification is the availability of grants to help execute against the action items, providing financial benefit to the borough. The challenge the borough faces is that writing grant applications is time-consuming and is a specialized skill. Engaging either a paid grant writer or a volunteer with the right skill set would result in an immediate gain for the borough. While the Green Team would welcome a volunteer in this area, a grant writer is a role that would be applicable across the town government.