

Green Team Year End Report

2023

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.

The primary focus of the team's efforts in 2023 was to maintain the food security work done in prior years, as well as preparing for Sustainable Jersey Recertification in 2024.

Farmers Market

The Watchung Farmers Market continued this year, building on past success. The market was relocated from the Police/Court complex on Somerset Street to the parking lot at Best Lake. The only other notable change was to extend operations by an hour, opening at 3:00 PM, rather than 4:00 PM. While there were several returning vendors, most were new this year, and there were more vendors than in prior years. Attendance was significantly higher in 2023 than last year. As with 2022, attendance was highest during July and August. Throughout the season various activities were added to enhance the market and attract more customers. These included musical performances, child-oriented activities provided by the Watchung Library, visits from the offices of state and federal representatives, and culminating with a day honoring the Watchung Volunteer Fire Department, complete with a fire truck and letters to firefighters written by children.

At the end of the season a survey was constructed to determine what should be continued, what should be improved, and what should be dropped. The survey results will be examined as we begin planning for the 2024 season in February and March.

The move of the market to the new location and the attraction of new vendors were significant improvements that were reflected in the increased attendance.

We have observed that non-food vendors do not do well at the Watchung Market. While we won't turn potential vendors away, we will not seek out such vendors and we will share our observation with any who do apply.

Perhaps most importantly, the market is dependent upon volunteer support and, in order to prevent volunteer burn out, we must be more intentional about scheduling coverage and we will probably scale back on the number of people present at one time.

Sustainable Jersey Certification

Watchung earned bronze certification from Sustainable Jersey in 2020. Certification is good for three years. The goal for 2024 will be to earn recertification at the Bronze level. To this end the Green Team began planning this past summer

To earn Bronze 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 Green Team has identified a set of actions for the council to take at the outset of 2024. These are primarily the reauthorization of various resolutions that supported action items that were included in past submissions.

The Green Team has also developed a recommendation for the council to establish a “creative team”. A written proposal and a draft resolution will be provided to the council.

2024 Focus

The primary focus of the team will be recertification at the bronze level. As we have done in the past, the action items selected will be based on those that will be of benefit to the community; simply earning points is not enough justification to dedicate scarce resources.

The popularity of the Farmers Market ensures that it will return in the spring. As previously mentioned, the team has proposed the establishment of a creative team. It is our hope that the council will act quickly on this. A number of members of the Green Team are invested in this proposal and hope to be involved.

While the goal is to earn Bronze certification, the planned actions would result in more than the necessary 150 points. It is the team’s intention to pursue all actions that will be of benefit to the borough and not stop at an arbitrary number. Achieving Silver certification would be difficult because many of the available actions do not apply to Watchung, for example we are not coastal, not an inner city, and do not have a significant amount of farmland. However, if that level of certification appears to be within reach, the team will pursue it.

Membership

The main challenge for the Green Team continues to be 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.

The one area in which the Green Team fell significantly short this year was in working to attract new members. A more active approach is required, and we will look for ways to address this early in 2024.