

Watchung Environmental Commission
Monday, October 23, 2023 – 7:30 PM
Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order –The meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM.
Present: Rachel Funcheon, Karen Pennett, Andy Stout, Doug Speeney, Denise Soppas
Absent: Coraleine Kitt, Sonia Abi-Habib
2. Approval of Minutes – Minutes from the Sept. 18, 2023, Teleconference were approved with one change.
3. Reports
 - a. Trees
 - Inspections: There were 3 inspections, with 33 trees to be removed, 1 tree to be replaced. Many dead trees. Discussed topping trees.
 - Replanting letter to residents: Letter was approved by Jim Damato. Said he would start implementation. Karen will follow up with Engineering to see if that has started.
 - Beech Leaf Disease (BLD): Rachel read from an article in the NJ Shade Tree Federation Bulletin about a new disease, BLD, that is an emerging threat to beech trees in NJ and PA. EC tree inspectors have not observed it yet in Watchung.
 - b. Planning Board (PB): Special Meeting Oct.10. PB met to review revised plan for the Bonnie Burn (BB) development entrance/exit. One of the conditions for the BB application was for a traffic light to be installed at the exit onto BB Road. NJDOT denied the traffic light. Applicant submitted revised plan for the entrance/exit which places a stop sign at the exit onto BB Road and a no left turn sign. Because not all parties had received the revised documents, the meeting was adjourned. Application to be continued at next meeting, on Oct. 17th. All documentation to be redistributed.
 - c. Recycling: No report.
 - d. Green Team: Last day of Farmers Market is 10/31. Market will also be open on Tuesday before Thanksgiving, 11/21, with a different farmer. Shredding truck was there on 10/17. GT will be working on Sustainable Jersey this fall.
4. Unfinished Business
 - a. Best Lake update:
 - New plantings: Doug, Andy, and Karen met at Best Lake on Sunday, 10/1. They planted Joe Pye Weed, Red Osier Dogwood, Bottlebrush, Cardinal Flowers, and Black Willows near the stream project. Also planted 2 Redbud saplings near Valley Rd. All new plants were fenced; some older fencing was replaced with new larger fencing.

- Sign: Sign for riparian buffer project will be paid for with grant money from Clean Communities Council. Sign has 10-yr warranty against chipping, delaminating, and fading. Doug and Rachel have finalized content of sign, which will explain riparian zones, describe this specific project, have pics of plants and wildlife in the area, and more. Discussed using a QR code on sign. New EC logo for use on sign was designed and approved. Next step is to send content to sign company and wait for them to send back first draft.
 - b. Boy Scout project: Project was approved by the Boy Scout Council. The Scout is putting proposal together for Mayor and Council, which Sonia will submit.
 - c. River-friendly certification: Doug updated application to include info about recent plantings. River Friendly program brochures were put out for residents at Borough Hall. Can also be handed out at future EC events.
- 5. New Business
 - a. EC logo: Sign will include Borough, EC, and Clean Communities logos.
 - b. Storm drains: Commission revisited the idea of asking residents to clean off storm drains in front of their homes. Many towns are participating in the Adopt-a-Drain program. It was suggested that we don't formally participate in that program, which involves weighing and reporting, but rather just have the Borough ask residents to clean their drains periodically to help with stormwater management and debris in waterways. Suggestions were to get students involved and to put it in the next town bulletin.
 - c. Mayor's requests: At the BC meeting last week, the Mayor brought up 2 issues for committees and commissions. 1) ALL volunteers whose terms are up at the end of the year must fill out a Volunteer Form and submit it to the Clerk by Nov. 15th to be considered for reappointment. 2) All committees should do a year-end analysis of what worked and what didn't in their group. EC members are asked to send ideas for this to Rachel by Nov. 15th.
 - d. Other: A resident reached out to EC about a FreeCycle event she saw in New Providence. Tables were set up in large parking lot. People brought items to give away and others came and took items. Discussed if we should do this in Watchung, and what to do with the leftover items. Suggestions included Yellow Tag, Furniture Assist, and Green Drop, and possibly starting with a clothing FreeCycle event. Rachel will reach out to N.P. GT with questions.
- 6. Special Announcements, Correspondence: No meeting in Nov. because of Thanksgiving. December meeting will be first Monday in December, 12/4, due to holidays.
- 7. Public Comment: none
- 8. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 PM
The next meeting is scheduled for December 4, 2023

November 2023 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 8

Tree Removal permits approved: 7

Trees to be removed 104 may be less

Trees to be replaced 0

D.Soppas & K.Pennett

***861 Johnston Dr : 19 Dead trees – not approved**

- Inspection done 11/1/23
- New Construction – no tree service listed
- *No trees marked – permit not approved – Maria called resident and informed them they need to mark the trees

945 Valley Rd: 13 dead trees – no replacements

- Inspection done 11/1/23
- 13 dead trees - 11 ash, 1 Japanese Maple, 1 Cherry
- Sage Tree Service

49 Bayberry: 12 dead or hazardous trees – no replacements

- Inspection done 11/1/23
- Monkey Tree Service
- 1 Live Pine too close to the house- Hazardous
- 10 dead ash, 1 dead cherry tree

90 Gallowae: 8 trees no replacements

- Trees marked with small round pink ribbon, less than 1 inch diameter.
- *Tree in front basically large stump, no branches/leaves.
- *5 of 6 trees in back small: 3 dead conifers, 1 stem of tree marked dead, 1 unknown.
- *1 tree within 5' of house, poor condition due to lack of sun
- Found 7 of 8 trees.

30 High Oaks: 11 trees no replacements

- Permit calls for 10 trees, 11 marked. Mostly ash, one oak.
- Returned to Borough Hall, spoke to Jim Damato. He was at the house previously for another reason said there were more than 11 trees marked when he was there, many on side/back. I did not see any trees on side/back, not on map. Went back with Jim, trees on side no longer marked.

147 East Drive: 31 trees no replacements

- Most were ash not sure about a few.
- Trees were not healthy so did not question. Saw 2 additional ash trees in back. Ok to take down if home own wants to and if on their property.

20 Stanie Glen: 29 trees no replacements: 27 on permit Found 2 additional trees not marked 1 dead ash and 1 dangerous.

- *27 trees on permit found 2
- *2 of trees Maple in right of way, looked ok. These to be trimmed.
- *Remaining 23 ashes or hazardous
- *Found marked trees with numbers 27, 28, 29 ,30,36. Questioning number of trees to be removed
- Mentioned concerns to Maria when she spoke to homeowner, homeowner asked if I could come back when someone was home. Went back next day. Homeowner also had trouble finding the trees. All trees were identified. Some of the trees marked are to be trimmed not removed. Which explains the number difference. As we walked around, I found additional trees that may need to come down: one ash and one dangerous. Told the homeowner it would be ok to take these down, I would adjust the permit. Several of the trees were in an overgrown area on the property. I questioned why they wanted to take trees down. If they fall, they will fall in the overgrown area and cause minimal damage. Several natural fallen trees/brushes were already down. The homeowner agreed and she would speak to her husband. 29 trees to be removed may be lessened.

340 Mountain Blvd

- Inspection done 12/4/23
- Giron Tree Service, LLC
- 8 dead Ash Trees – no replacement

Update from Prior Tree Inspections/Violation

27 Stanie Glen

- Inspection done and permit had been approved in October 2023 (16 dead 1 live Oak, replace 1 tree)
- The Homeowner topped the live Oak listed above. 4 other live oaks were also topped in the front yard. Maria F had called and requested they submit a new permit. This was never done.
- 12/4 we conferred with Jim D regarding this situation. Jim will have Jason review, issue a summons and fine the homeowner. The Homeowner should also replace the 5 trees.