

# WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MINUTES (FINAL)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2020 – 7:30 PM

**Present:** Rachel Funcheon(Chairperson), Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Jim and Andy Stout, Council President Wendy Robinson

**Absent:** Sody Epstein, Joan Tak

**1. Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

**2. Opening Comments:** Rachel welcomed everyone to the meeting and expressed her appreciation for Jim and Andy Stout on their return to the Commission and thanked Karen for the years in which she chaired the Commission. Rachel plans to increase email communications between meetings in the hopes of getting a lot accomplished this year.

**3. Approval of January 27, 2020 Minutes:** The minutes were approved.

**4. Appointment of the Secretary:** Karen nominated Andy as Secretary. The nomination was seconded and approved. Jim was named Assistant Secretary.

## **5. Reports:**

a. Tree Report: Sody was away, so there was no tree report this month. With regards to modifying the tree ordinance, it was recommended that instead of addressing each proposed change separately, it would be more prudent to organize a list of suggestions and present them to the Council as a group for their consideration. Doug feels that we should reconsider the suggestion to require a double tree replacement for the removal of very large trees as was discussed at our Jan meeting. This will be discussed further.

b. Planning Board: Bonnie Burn—Karen will present a list of recommendations created by the Commission to the Planning Board at their next meeting, along with a cover letter of our outstanding concerns, when BNE's environmental expert is expected to attend and can address our concerns. In particular, we are strongly in favor of organic products being used in landscape maintenance and especially because of the possibility of threatened or endangered species being in the area(bog and wood turtles, bats, pollinators, specific birds such as the wood thrush, etc.). The wetland, as it is, should be protected. Additionally, children will be playing in the grassy areas, and residents and pets will be using the outdoor spaces and should be able to do so in a pesticide/herbicide free environment. Doug will check with an expert from Rutgers, Michelle Backus, about coming to speak to the Planning Board members on the benefits of using organic materials. If this is possible, the details will be worked out for her appearance. Karen will call ANJEC regarding the same subject of organics.

Recycling was another major concern and especially where and how it will be done and the need to have an area large enough to accommodate a proper recycling program. Set up for garbage disposal and recycling bins should be together for recycling compliance. Rachel will check with the county to determine if this complex comes under commercial regulations for recycling. The DEP hotline (877-WARN-DEP) can be called for rules regarding apartment buildings.

### c. Recycling:

--Trex plastic bags: Being as that we have met our goal of 500 pounds within the 6 month time frame and will receive a free bench(dark green), we will give our additional poundage(until the beginning of April) to Valley View School to assist their collection. The students are in competition with other schools for the amount

of poundage of collected plastic bags. The Commission's program will continue for another 6 month period starting in April through September where we hope to receive enough poundage for another free bench. Suggestions were made for placement of the forthcoming bench, and it was the Commission's choice to have the 911 Memorial for its location upon consideration and approval of the Council. Council President Robinson will take this information to the Board. It was also suggested that future benches be considered for placement where the plastic bag collections are occurring now as acknowledgements of appreciation for support with our project.

--Styrofoam: A shed is needed for the recycling of Styrofoam once the DPW facility opens. It was suggested that Home Depot be approached and asked if they would be willing to donate a shed. The existing pad at the new DPW site would need to be measured. The facility would be open one Saturday a month and supervised by a DPW employee. Council President Robinson stated that Charlie Gunther started as the acting head of our DPW and is working in conjunction with Bob Burns until Bob retires at the end of Feb.

d. Green Team: Green Fair(May 16, 2020)

--Vendors—The Raptor Trust will be in attendance. Karen will check with Friends of the Great Swamp and the Great Swamp Watershed as possibilities for the fair. Other potential vendors are being contacted.

--Seedlings—After we voted via email as a Commission, Rachel ordered 25 Arrowhead Viburnum, 25 Chestnut Oak, and 25 Red Maple seedlings to be distributed at the Green Fair. Milkweed seeds will also be available to the public on that date.

## **6. Unfinished Business:**

a. Spring newsletter article: due March 27, 2020—Articles will include those on bees (Joan), trees (Sondy), and Trex (Rachel).

b. Watchung EC reusable bag: plan for distribution—The bags were delivered, and one was given to each member. Suggestions for distribution to residents included downstairs in Borough Hall, at the Borough Council meetings, and the spring picnic. Information will be put in the Spring newsletter and on Facebook regarding the availability of these free bags at Borough Hall.

c. Rain Garden—new meeting date: Weds., Feb. 26, 2020 at 7:00 PM in Borough Hall

d. Recycling Rates—how rates are calculated: Rachel talked to Melissa Harvey at the Somerset County Recycling Center. It was explained that each town's recycling is collected and weighed separately, and that the breakdown amount of each type of recycled item (aluminum, cardboard) is a universal percentage, not an actual weight. The Council wants to be sure that all our special recycling programs are included in our total tonnage each year.

## **7. New Business:**

a. Tree bank balance: \$5050 as of Oct. 2019 and \$30,050 as of Jan. 10, 2020—The increase was a result of a \$25,000 fine imposed by the court for violations by a Borough resident. The funds could be used to plant trees in various town locations such as: Mobus Field between the playground area and the tennis courts, Texier House on the lawn area, the east side of Best Lake, and the replacement of cherry trees around Watchung Lake once the dredging is completed and the lake bank reinforced. The town will buy the trees with a resolution being required if the purchase is over \$200.00. Council President Robinson stated with us that the dredging will most likely be an open dredge; therefore, the wildlife will not have to be moved.

b. Seedling from the giant oak in Salem: With the DEP and Earth Day sharing a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, acorns were harvested from a 500 year old Salem oak tree with one seedling being made available this year to each of the 565 communities in the state. The seedling will arrive in April, and it has been suggested that each community plan an event to commemorate this occasion. A certificate of progeny of the Salem oak will accompany the seedling. A suggestion was made to have the Historical Committee, Traffic and Beautification Committee, and the Environmental Commission plan the event for Memorial Day with the seedling to be planted at Texier House. Council President Robinson will reach out to the Resource Interpretive Specialist at the State Park Service.

c. Geese repellent: Both lakes will cost \$6,000 total for spraying with the service being done by a professional company and using a non-toxic spray of rosemary oil, putrefied egg solids, mint oil, and inert ingredients. The spray will encourage the geese via smell, taste, and feel to seek other places to reside. The schedule will be two months of spray (March and April) and one month off (May), spray again for June and July, off for August, spray again for September and October, and off for November. Ron Jubin spoke to us as to the benefits of this program with particular emphasis on safety for the geese and the residents alike. It was pointed out that the geese leavings can be unhealthy for a myriad of reasons. We were reassured that no harm would come to the geese with the program being closely monitored as to success.

d. ANJEC: Single-use plastic reduction ordinance—The organization is asking every municipality in the state to pass a plastics reduction ordinance. They provided a model ordinance for us to consider, and offer help in bringing this to our Borough Council for passage. We will review the ANJEC model ordinance in March.

e. ANJEC: Grants for Open Space Projects—ANJEC is offering \$1,500 grants to EC's in the state for open space stewardship projects. Council President Robinson mentioned the possibility of having a community garden at Camp Endeavor. However, it was decided that there is not enough time this year to achieve that goal. We will still consider applying for a grant in 2021 and especially if it is decided to create a community garden or some other worthwhile project to benefit the residents and town.

f. Ideas for EC initiatives/goals for 2020: Suggestions included dirty dirt ordinance, planting trees on town property, speaker (Dr. Douglas Simon on Climate Change and National Security) for a program available to the public, bat houses, deer whistles, and incentivizing residents to avoid using Round Up. It was suggested that Round Up be banned from our town.

**8. Special Announcements and Correspondence:** None

**9. Review of Assignments for the Next Meeting:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 PM with the next meeting being scheduled for March 23, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,

Andy Stout (Recording Secretary) and Jim Stout (Assistant to the Recording Secretary)