

WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION TELECONFERENCE MINUTES (FINAL)

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2020—7:30 PM

Present: Rachel Funcheon (Chairperson), Sondy Epstein, Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Jim and Andy Stout, Joan Tak, Council President Wendy Robinson, and resident Lynda Goldschein

1. Call to Order: The teleconference was called to order at 7:33 PM.

2. Opening Comments: Rachel welcomed the members and resident and said she hoped that everyone was doing well and staying safe.

3. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the regular meeting of February 24, 2020 were approved as were the minutes of the special teleconference meeting of March 12, 2020.

4. Reports:

a. Tree Report: General report submitted by Sondy Epstein, Commission Tree Inspector

There is not an itemized tree report this month due to limited staffing in the Engineering Dept. because of the virus. A few site inspections were done but no formal reports were generated. The Engineering office is getting many calls for tree permits. The Dept. is working diligently to answer questions and enforce our ordinances. Some property owners have received permits by mail.

Watchung's ash trees continue to die from the invasion of the Emerald Ash Borer Beetle. It takes 3 to 5 years for the circulation of the tree to be cut off. We will lose 20%-30% of our woods. Sondy has been told that the branches become weakened and fall off, and that it is more difficult for tree surgeons to work on these trees.

Also, the Spotted Lantern Fly is now in Somerset County. The Tree of Heaven is a favorite, but they feed on many species of trees. They defoliate branches and secrete honey dew and black sooty mold, to which wasps are attracted.

Discussion of 15 Glen Eagles Drive: Trees were cut down on this property without a permit (# of trees unknown). This was the homeowner's second violation of the Tree Ordinance since 2017. The Commission made a motion regarding this issue: "The Commission recommends the imposing of a financial penalty, per the Tree Ordinance, against the homeowner for his second violation, the amount to be determined by the Borough." A vote was taken. The vote was unanimous in support of the motion. The Commission also wants full compliance with the Ordinance's 1:1 tree replacement requirement. Rachel will write a letter to the Borough Engineer and Administrator to advise them of the Commission's recommendation that the offense be resolved with both a monetary penalty and replanting, as outlined in the "Violations and Penalties" section of the Tree Ordinance. She will request that the Commission be updated on any enforcement actions taken by the Borough regarding this matter.

b. Planning Board—no report, as they have not met

c. Recycling—special recycling programs have been suspended

1. Trex program—All bins have been collected and are being stored. The Trex bench has been received and will be assembled by DPW. It will be placed at the 9/11 Memorial, if the site is approved by the Council. Hopefully, residents are saving their plastic bags at home until the collection resumes.

2. Bottle caps—on hold

3. Styrofoam—Rachel attended a Sustainable Jersey webinar on Styrofoam—If a permanent town program is not possible, we should have special collection events each year.

d. Green Fair—cancelled

1. Vendors—Vendors reached out to Joan, and some vendors cancelled themselves. It made for fantastic contacts and free giveaways for the future. There were a variety of new vendors. Rescheduling the fair for the fall will be considered, but the WHRHS location at that time of year could be problematic. Even if no fair is held later this year, Bill Hance would still like to have the electronic waste recycling, document shredding, and Styrofoam collection when it's safe to do so.

2. Seedlings—on hold, per NJ Forest Service Tree Nursery

5. Unfinished Business:

a. Spring newsletter article—Joan, SONDY, and Rachel collaborated on the Commission's article, which will be given 3 pages in the newsletter.

b. Giant oak seedling—on hold—will not happen any time soon

c. Geese repellent—sprayed again for geese and eggs being added

d. 2020 initiatives on hold

6. New Business:

a. Webinars: ANJEC, Sustainable Jersey, NJ River Friendly—Rain gardens would benefit the town, and the Commission should encourage this concept. There is an Organic Lawn Care Webinar on May 6, 2020 from 12:00-1:00. ANJEC wants Environmental Commissions to support banning single use plastic on the local level. Storm water management is another area of concern.

b. Violations and Penalties: To increase residents' compliance with the Tree Ordinance, the Commission wants to work on a protocol for how to address trees being cut, weekend cutting issues, how to alert new homeowners, etc. Perhaps, the electronic sign at Borough Hall would help plus better enforcement, letter to new homeowners when they move into town, or letter possibly through tax official in the transfer from county to town.

7. Special Announcements, Correspondence: Board of Adjustment Recommendation to the Council—The Commission could write a letter that we disagree with their recommendation regarding the Tree Ordinance, with a carbon copy to the Council. Council President Robinson will follow up on this.

8. Review of Assignments for the Next Meeting: The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 PM with the next meeting being scheduled for May 18, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted, Andy Stout (Recording Secretary) and Jim Stout (Assistant to the Secretary)