

WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION TELECONFERENCE MINUTES

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2020—7:30 PM

Present: Rachel Funcheon (Chairperson), Sony Epstein, Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Jim and Andy Stout, Joan Tak, and Council President Wendy Robinson. Also, resident Angelica Pasquali

1. Call to Order: The teleconference meeting was called to order at 7:31 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the teleconference meeting of April 27, 2020 were approved.

3. Reports:

a. Tree Report—General report submitted by Sony Epstein, Commission Tree Inspector—(tree report copy with statistics sent to Clerk Michelle DeRocco by Rachel). Sony reported every submission done by permit except for one location for which information was incomplete. The list compiled since 2/28/2020 included 148 dead trees and 45 live trees removed by permit. It is a violation of the town ordinance to remove trees without a permit, and permits are free at Borough Hall or can be obtained online. Disregard of the tree ordinance, and cutting without a permit, can result in a fine. There have been more dead ash trees observed in May, and these dead trees are a safety hazard for the way that they can suddenly drop limbs.

15 Glen Eagles—Resident has 30 days to rectify tree violations. Rachel wrote a letter, (a copy of which was sent to Michelle DeRocco by Rachel) to the town engineer on behalf of the Commission with recommendations about the situation and requested that the Commission be informed as to what happens.

It was suggested that tree bank funds could be used to have residents plant trees on their property. It could be set up as a rebate program where a resident could plant an approved native species and receive a certain amount of money in return. DPW could possibly plant the trees. Council President Robinson will speak to Charlie Gunther about the viability of such a program. Rachel will contact the head of Long Hill's DPW to ask about their nearly 20-year-old grant program for local tree planting. Council President Robinson will bring up the idea at the next Council meeting.

b. Planning Board—There was no report since the Board has not met since February. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 19, 2020.

c. Recycling—The county hazardous waste collection will be held in Hillsborough On May 30, 2020.

d. Green Team—The meeting was 3 1/2 hours long, as the team (with Joan and Coraleine as co-chairpersons) is working on trying to achieve Sustainable Jersey bronze status. The team has until November 2020 to pull the program together for the necessary points. The pandemic has slowed down the project. The team can get credit for the 2019 Green Fair. Carolyn is checking on the possibility of a regional farmers' market for the residents which could be a drive through.

4. Unfinished Business:

a. Giant Oak Seedling—The seedlings are being stored and being cared for while those in charge are looking for ways to do the plantings with the present constraints. These seedlings came from acorns dropped by the Salem Oak, and there is one oak seedling available for each municipality in NJ. We had discussed the Texier House as the location for planting the seedling, but area might not work.

Rachel cancelled our seedling order for the Green Fair which was not able to be held.

b. Rain Garden—4 sites were studied, and 2 sites were not accepted. Best Lake and the Rescue Squad property are still being considered, and a suggestion was made about Valley View School as a possibility. We

need to coordinate with Carolyn, Traffic and Beautification, and DPW, and Council President Robinson will contact Carolyn.

Community Garden—Individual residents have expressed interest in helping Councilman Pete Martino to set up this garden, which was proposed by the Environmental Commission, at Camp Endeavor, for use by residents. A suggestion was made to have included in the plans several raised beds approximately waist high to accommodate physically challenged individuals who have a love for gardening but cannot bend down or go into a squat position due to various limitations.

c. Board of Adjustment Recommendation—It has not been taken up by the Council.

d. Enforcement of Tree Ordinance—questions for engineer—The ordinance is enforced by Assistant Engineer Arlene McCoy, and fines and penalties are assessed after 30 days if a remedy is not agreed to. Questions could include how many fines were levied in 2019, what is the threshold, when is it used, and how often. Arlene will go out on weekends, if needed. Individuals should not deal with property owners regarding tree issues due to safety and liability concerns. Council President Robinson will check with Jim Damato, Borough Administrator, as to weekend procedures with the possibility of the police becoming involved if too much tree cutting is occurring on a property.

5. New Business:

a. Suggestion by Councilman re: ash trees—The Commission does not support the suggestion made by Councilman Martino for homeowners to be able to cut ash trees without a permit. Residents can easily mistake ash trees for other species resulting in the loss of valuable trees in town. All tree removal permits are free (if they do not involve land disturbance) and easily obtained online or at Borough Hall. We cannot allow tree cutting to become unregulated. It was emphasized that we need to keep track of the trees coming down in town.

b. Local Climate Activist—Rachel invited local climate activist Angelica Pasquali, a town resident, to discuss her "Plogging" project in which she has been walking and cleaning up litter in various parts of town for 31 days. Angelica recently graduated Ramapo College with a Contemporary Arts degree and is interested in photography and videography, with a focus on mental health and environmental protection. She takes daily walks and uses gardening gloves and a bag to pick up litter. Watchung DPW was helpful and supplied her with some bags. Once she fills the bag, the DPW picks up the bags which have now graduated from grocery bag size to Hefty bags due to the amount of litter that she finds. On Hillcrest alone, she filled 9 Hefty bags and 7 small bags. The Traffic and Beautification Committee sponsors a yearly clean up day, cancelled this year due to COVID19, and Angelica was interested in participating in that project which could be held more than once a year. Her project was featured on Facebook and in the **Echoes-Sentinel**. The Commission, or the town, might be able to purchase bags for her from their budget allowance.

c. Eagle Scout Project—The Commission was contacted by a local resident who helps Boy Scouts develop their Eagle Scout projects. The scout would like to build birdhouses to benefit local species of birds. Rachel called the Audubon Society for help recommending 3 species, and the Naturalist suggested building nesting boxes for Screech Owls, House Wrens, and Bluebirds. The scout plans to build a few boxes for each, and then will install them on private property in the center of Watchung. The project must be completed by his 18th birthday. It was mentioned that the scout must keep track of the hours in his project, so when assisting the scout through research or the actual project, we should track our time and report the time to the scout.

d. The Council and Commission budgets have survived the budgeting process.

6. Special Announcements, Correspondence:

1. Regarding the minutes, please let Rachel and Andy know when you review the minutes.

2. Bernards Township Environmental Commission has a Trex Challenge. They would like towns to write letters for the Somerset County Freeholders to sponsor the permanent collection of plastic bags.

7. Review of Assignments for the Next Meeting: The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 PM with the next meeting being scheduled for June 22, 2020.

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

TREE REPORT MAY 2020

148 45

DEAD LIVE

1		2/28	25 SHADY BROOK CT
2		3/03	220 Bayberry Ln
14		2/25	78 Century Lane (commission not present)
7		3/03	183 Washington Rock Rd
16		3/03	435 Valley Rd
1		3/09	279 Sterling road
3	1	3/16	37 Hughes Lane Replace 1 @ 2 ½"
	1	1/16	75 Maple Replace 1 @ 2 ½"
2		3/16	35 Deer Run
9		3/17	151 Johnston Drive
1	2	3/17	474 Ridge Road 2 within 15 ft of building
4		3/25	744 Mountain Blvd. Replace 4 stipulated by planning board
			Screening so must replace.
3	17	3/24	103 Brook Dr. construction Replace 16 @ 2 ½", 1@4"
1	1	3/25	36 Sequoia Dr. 1 within 15 ft of foundation
	1	4/06	129 Washington Drive within 15 ft of foundation
		4/13	Letter of violation: 15 Glen Eagles tree removal without
			Without permit second offense.
14	7	4/13	68 Maple: replace 7 @ 21/2 "commission not present"

4/16 Letter of violation: 44 Joan Dr. tree removal without permit

Paper work permit to follow

Dead LIVE

4/16 Letter of violation: 35 Shawnee Dr. tree removal without permit

- 2 4/16 91 High Tor: trees within 15 ft of foundation
- 3 2 4/24 1020 Johnston Dr. 2 trees within 15 ft of foundation
- 1 4/16 155 Johnston Dr.
- 1 3 4/24 **56 Beachwood Pl: PERMIT after the removal:** photos of stumps provide 1 dead. **Replace 3 @ 2 ½"**

4/16 Letter of violation: 20 Glen Eagles; removal of trees without permit

4/24 letter of violation: 10 Glen Eagles Dr. removal of trees without a permit , topping of tulip trees

- 4 1 5/12 810 Johnston Drive 1 within 15 ft of foundation
- 3 5/08 160 Hill Hollow Rd.
- 5 5/08/ 430 Phillips Lane
- 1 1 5/04 866 Johnston Dr. 1 within 15 ft of foundation
- 1 5/04 856 Johnston Dr.
- 2 5/13 49 High Tor; **Replace 1 @ 4"** //1 within 15 ft of house
- 30 4 3/06 1111 Johnston Drive **Replace 3 @ 2 ½ "and 1@ 4"**
- 21 5/13 561 Valley Rd: 55 trees to replant past permits

Complaint reported to the DEP, about trees being cut at Diamond Court. Arleen investigated and found that no trees were cut inside perimeter of Diamond court. Driving along East Dr, just above this area of the Point, she saw a strip of land separating the point and East Drive, hat was not very well maintained. Arleen call the point and they said, that last year or so there was outside cutting of dead trees and brushes. The point has budgeted for replanting some bushes & trees later in this year.

April 30, 2020

To: Borough of Watchung Engineering Department – Bruce Koch, Engineer

Re: Tree Ordinance Violation at 15 Glen Eagles Drive

Dear Mr. Koch,

The Environmental Commission met on April 27, 2020, and discussed the Tree Preservation Ordinance violation at 15 Glen Eagles Drive. The Commission voted and unanimously agreed to recommend that the homeowner, Louis Ferroni, face penalty action for removing trees from his property without a permit, in direct violation of the Ordinance. This was his second offense, as he also received a letter of violation of the Tree Ordinance in March, 2017.

We recommend that the offense be resolved with both a monetary penalty and replanting, as defined in the “Violations and Penalties” section of the Ordinance. This includes 1:1 replacement of each tree removed, in full compliance with the Ordinance, AND a fine, the amount to be determined by the Borough.

As the Ordinance states, the trees are of significant value to the Borough and they must be protected and preserved. This homeowner has violated the law twice and we believe penalty action is required.

Thank you for your consideration.

Watchung Environmental Commission

Rachel Funcheon, Chair

Karen Pennett

Sondra Epstein

James Stout

Andrea Stout

Joan Tak

Doug Speeney

CC: James Damato, Borough Administrator

Keith Balla, Mayor

Wendy Robinson, Borough Council President