

WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION TELECONFERENCE MINUTES (FINAL)

MONDAY, JUNE 22, 2020—7:30 PM

Present: Rachel Funcheon, Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Jim and Andy Stout, Joan Tak, and Council President Wendy Robinson. Also, resident Pam Lewis

Absent: SONDY EPSTEIN

1. Call to Order: The teleconference meeting was called to order at 7:34 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the teleconference meeting of May 18, 2020 were approved.

3. Reports:

- a. Tree Report: General report submitted by Joan Tak as substitute tree inspector for SONDY EPSTEIN.
- Schmidt Court had 12 dead trees not requiring any replacement.
 - Edgemont Road—The property owner is selling the property and, to do this, must make repairs to the septic system. 17 trees are to be removed, 8 needing replacement. The property owner has submitted a letter of appeal to the Mayor. Discussion ensued as to whether the owner should be required to replace the trees in question or contribute to the tree bank as the tree ordinance states. This could be a hardship situation. It was agreed that Arlene should negotiate a resolution with the owner which would satisfy all parties.
 - 15 Glen Eagles—The court date is now set for Wednesday, June 24, 2020, postponed from May.

b. Planning Board: At the old Sears property, Chick-fil-A will be going into one of the 4 pods, and an Urgent Care is proposed for another pod with this proposal requiring a variance for parking and set back. No wetlands are involved. The day care proposal for Union Avenue is on hold until September. With the Bonnie Burn issue, the applicant, BNE, has dropped out, so there will be a new applicant hired by the property owner. The Planning Board wants the new applicant to reapply and start the process again as opposed to allowing the new applicant to continue with the current plans to move forward as they are. It is possible that this will go to court which could impact the town in a less desirable way. COAH requirements must still be met. The Environmental Commission could recommend a builder that would promote Green Buildings and incorporate the Sustainable Jersey point version which is a low impact check list that can be used. It was also suggested that a letter be written to the Planning Board proposing that a new area of redevelopment be considered such as at Blue Star.

c. Recycling: Bottle cap and plastic bag collections are on hold. Residents are encouraged to keep recycling at home or take plastic bags to Shop-Rite in Stirling until the programs begin again. The Acme in New Providence is not taking any plastic bags during the pandemic.

d. Green Team: Recently met and it was determined that it was impossible to meet the deadline for the Sustainable NJ 2020 Certification. The team will continue its efforts and work towards the 2021 Certification. Coraleine Kitt, Chair, and Joan Tak, Co-Chair, have been working on determining the availability as well as ability of the GT volunteers to participate in this endeavor.

4. Unfinished Business:

a. Rain garden: nothing new

b. Enforcement of Tree Ordinance—discussion with Engineer: Arlene stated that maybe 2 fines have been imposed in the last 20 years for violators. The resident has 30 days to respond to the violation, and negotiation

is the way that resolution is achieved. Arlene stated that in her town, new owners must be aware that all old permits have been closed out. An ordinance like that in Watchung could be a way to inform new homeowners that permits are needed to remove trees. Arlene follows up on the trees that are involved in replanting.

c. Long Hill Tree Grant Program: The DPW plants all trees in the right-of-way, and not on private property, meaning no liability to property owners. The resident purchases the tree for \$200.00, and the planting is free. The Shade Tree Commission marks the spot and helps the residents choose the types of trees to be planted. Long Hill purchases the trees for wholesale and does a maximum of 24 trees a year. Council President Robinson will bring the information to the Public Works Committee, and it is possible that tree bank funds could be used.

d. Ash Trees: Council Member Martino would like to address the Environmental Commission. He would like a simplified process for residents to be able to remove ash trees on their property over a period of time. Arlene or Sony would have to verify that they are ash trees. Questions were raised about taking down a healthy ash tree, and members wondered if all ash trees in the Borough will die. Rachel will get clarification from Arlene. It was agreed that it would be best if Sony was present for this discussion with Councilman Martino.

5. New Business:

a. Ordinance about Feeding Wildlife: Discussion revolved around the possible necessity of an ordinance against feeding wildlife due to a resident feeding vultures in her yard and impacting upon the tranquility of neighbors whose yards are receiving the excrement which creates a health hazard and messy debris. Additionally, it was pointed out that Water and Wine has possibly open dumpsters which seem to attract these birds to the area. It was also noted that the vultures are protected birds and serve a useful function as "nature's garbage men", because they eat roadkill and other animal carcasses. The suggestion was made to have the Board of Health become involved in this issue.

b. Dandelion; Noise Pollution—guest Pam Lewis: Pam emphasized the importance of allowing dandelions to grow and remain in lawns and their importance to pollinators, birds and butterflies. She wrote an article on dandelions, and it was suggested that she submit it for the fall newsletter which she agreed to do.

Regarding noise pollution, it was pointed out that decibels above 85 can be injurious to hearing, and leaf blowers are major offenders with landscapers starting as early as 7:00 AM. The actual act of blowing can spread pollutants and debris which can be inhaled as well as disturb the peace. Some towns only allow electric blowers. Suggestions included requiring a later start time and reviewing health impacts. Council President Robinson will talk to Council Member Jubin regarding this concern.

c. **Site Plan Reviews:** Will be discussed at another time

d. **Fall Newsletter:** Articles are due by July 31, 2020. Suggestions for subjects will be appreciated.

e. **Additional issues:** There was a recent water pollution incident near Best Lake at the intersection of Knightsbridge Road and Valley Road. It was linked back to a resident who did pool repairs and discharged the pollutants to a storm sewer that enters Best Lake. The Division of Fish and Game responded to the incident. Doug will write an article on water pollution for the next newsletter that reminds residents that any pollutants that enter storm drains, such as the careless use of fertilizers, will impact our waterways and lakes.

There is a hazardous tree near Valley View School but on private property. Rachel will ask Arlene to look into it.

Bamboo was observed growing out of a storm sewer on Valley View Drive and Hill Place, and Borough property is now damaged. Council President Robinson will talk to the DPW committee who can discuss this with Charlie. There was discussion about possibly limiting the planting and growing of bamboo in the Borough.

6. Special Announcements, Correspondence: There will be no meeting in July.

There is \$5000.00 in the budget allocated to the Environmental Commission. It was suggested that the tree inspector(s) have shirts purchased for identification purposes when visiting a property for inspection. Some of the funds could be used for the purchase of a shed for Styrofoam recycling. No decisions were made.

7. Review of Assignments for the Next Meeting: The meeting was adjourned at 10:42 PM with the next meeting scheduled for August 24, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,

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