

# WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION TELECONFERENCE MINUTES (FINAL)

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2020

**Present:** Rachel Funcheon, SONDY Epstein, Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Jim and Andy Stout, Council President Wendy Robinson. Also, resident Ray Barratt (Wildlife Management Advisory Committee member))

**Absent:** Joan Tak

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

**2. Special Statement:** There will be two Environmental Commission appointments up in December 2020, that of SONDY Epstein and Karen Pennett. SONDY will not be rejoining, and Karen is interested in being reappointed. All Commission members agreed that SONDY's contributions to tree preservation, and the environment, have been invaluable to the Borough, and all thanked her for her 10 years of devoted service.

**3. Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of the teleconference meeting of October 26, 2020 were approved.

## **4. Reports:**

a. Tree Report: The 2020 year-end tree report was submitted by the Commission tree inspector, SONDY Epstein, and included the number of trees removed with permits and the total of trees replaced. 636 dead or diseased trees and 214 live trees were removed, and 124 trees were replaced. SONDY reported that she had not been called out to inspect trees since our October 26, 2020 meeting because of sparse permits and no tree replacements being necessary. SONDY will go out with Shari Spero, a CME licensed tree expert, on Dec. 9, and Karen will join them.

Site Inspections and Violations: Concerns were expressed about 150 Vail Lane and the removal of many trees without a permit, plus the planting of large numbers of bamboo trees on the property. There have been two resident complaints to the Borough about this situation. It was emphasized that there are penalties for violations of the Tree Ordinance, and that there should be follow through on these issues.

The planting of bamboo is a continuing concern in town due to its invasive and potentially damaging qualities. SONDY pointed out that some replanted trees in town are not being protected with fencing thus resulting in deer rub, which can result in the trees dying after several years.

There was discussion again about increasing tree replacements requirements since the Borough is losing so many trees. Rachel cited Millburn and Bernardsville as having aggressive tree replacement rules.

b. Planning Board: The Environmental Commission's concerns regarding the proposed Learning Experience Daycare Center on 100 Union Avenue were submitted to the Planning Board. Copy attached. These concerns were reviewed with the Learning Experience applicants at the PB meeting on 11/17/20. The applicant was vague on many responses, and indicated further testing to be done after approval. Some of the concerns were wetlands, time frame of testing, tree removal, recycling, water runoff, and many others. The development must meet all DEP standards. Karen and Doug were major contributors to the EC report. The project will be discussed again at the next regular meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Master Plan will be presented to the public later this month at a special meeting. Any concerns can be brought up at the public meeting. The Environmental Checklist was included in the Master Plan.

The Bonnie Burn project is on hold and is still in the court system.

c. Recycling: No report. All projects will resume once it is safe to participate again.

d. Green Team: The next meeting will be December 22, 2020 at 4:00 PM. The Environmental Checklist is eligible for receiving Sustainable Jersey points.

## **5. Unfinished Business:**

a. SLF Mitigation: Rutgers Cooperative and Walter Lane, Somerset County Planner, can help with a plan. The Mayor requested that the Environmental Commission reach out to these two contacts. Rachel and Council President Robinson will set up a conference call with Walter Lane.

b. Tree Removal Permit Revision: Laws and Ordinances did not approve of the tree permit revision as written. Council member Daryl E.K. wanted it to be simplified with the permit viewed first followed by the text on another page. Daryl also preferred a simpler chart and wanted the dead, dying, and diseased tree section simplified. There was much discussion on what is required for the permit. The Environmental Commission finds the following items a necessity to the permit: 1) The license number of the tree service to be written on the permit. Ensures tree service is licensed, which is a state law. 2) Map of and approximate sizes of trees on property and those requested to be removed marked to allow for proper location and identification. The Borough Engineer looks at the trees before approval. Without map and markings it is difficult to determine which trees are to be removed.

c. Tree Bank Ordinance Revision: This has also not yet been approved by Laws and Ordinances

d. Trex Bench: Still no decision has been made by Mayor and Council on a location for the bench.

## **6. New Business:**

a. Bamboo: The Environmental Commission, and residents alike, have expressed concerns about the impact of planting bamboo in town due to its rapid and invasive nature and difficulties in removing it once it is established. It was suggested that an ordinance be considered that would restrict the planting and growing of bamboo. The multiflora Rose and Kudzu were also discussed, but Commission members voted to focus on bamboo first as the primary problem to be resolved. A motion was proposed, "The Environmental Commission will put forth an ordinance regarding bamboo." The vote was unanimous in the affirmative. A motion was proposed, "Should we write an ordinance only for bamboo?" The vote was 6 to 1 in the affirmative. One member would like to include other invasive plants, i.e. Tree of Heaven. Commission agreed to a possible follow up ordinance to include other invasive species. Rachel and Doug will work on the sample bamboo ordinance and send it out to the Commission members for input.

Council President Robinson will follow up on Doug's concern regarding bamboo growing out of a storm drain on Valley View Rd and the need to remove it. Educational outreach in the spring newsletter about bamboo would encourage support from residents.

b. Enclosures: This could be a future project which would help to put some areas back into a more natural state to encourage growth by excluding wildlife that can limit growth of natural plants and trees in unprotected areas.

c. EC Mission and Goals: the Mayor has asked all committees and commissions to submit a Mission Statement and goals for 2021. Goals that were suggested include instituting a Styrofoam recycling program, planning for the SLF mitigation, habitat restoration near the lake after it is dredged, tree planting programs, encouraging green building practices, restarting special recycling programs, and working with other Borough committees. Council President Robinson suggested that the Commission have 5 simple goals. Rachel will compile the suggestions, send to the members, and the members can vote on their preferences.

d. Other: Rachel asked for suggestions from the members for residents who might be interested in filling the open position on the Commission starting in January 2021.

**7. Special Announcements and Correspondence:** Rachel received the DEP New Jersey Forest Service Nursery seedling catalog and asked the members about possibly ordering tree seedlings for 2021. Shrubs can also be considered. Orders can be placed between December 1, 2020 and April 16, 2021. Rachel will send out the information to the members as to what is available.

Resident and Wildlife Management Advisory Committee member Ray Barratt commented on discussion of the Master Plan, on bamboo issues, and on Borough committees working together.

**8. Review of Assignments for the Next Meeting:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 PM with the next meeting scheduled for January 25, 2021.

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

## TREE REPORT Dec. 7, 2020

The commission was not called for tree inspections of 6 or more trees since the last report

The town approved by permit 29 dead or diseased trees.

6 live

4 no designation

0 replacements

For the year ending 2020 trees removed by permit application

488 dead or diseased

169. Live

88 replacement

7 trees replacement at 15 Glen Eagle . The owner  
In court for removals without permit

Watchung Environmental Commission  
Letter to the Planning Board  
Concerns about Proposed Learning Experience Daycare Center Project  
100 Union Avenue

QUESTIONS:

1. **Air Quality Dust/Particulate:**

Most quarries have some dust emission controls but they rarely result in no dust leaving the site. The closest neighbors can be expected to receive the most dust. Any air monitoring tests submitted to the Planning Board should be conducted during a blast, during dry periods and when leaves are off the trees to capture what would be expected to be the highest periods of dust. Air quality tests in the area were performed in February/March.

- Was blasting being conducted at time of tests?
- What were the weather conditions at time of testing?
- What is the activity of the quarry at this time of year? Is quarry operating at full capacity?
- How much will test results change after trees are removed? Without the protection of the trees will Air Quality/Dust Measurement be safe for children and adults?

An active quarry will attract a high volume of diesel truck traffic. The emissions from the truck traffic should be considered cumulatively with the other quarry/asphalt emissions (if applicable) when making a planning decision.

- At time of testing was truck traffic operating at normal capacity?

2. **Other pollutants:**

Many quarries have ancillary operations such as asphalt plants which produce odors and emissions that could impact a sensitive population. Any testing done to justify the siting of a child care facility should go beyond particulate and include metals and volatile organic chemicals (VOCs). Also, asphalt plants generally shut down in the winter months so any testing should be done only when the plants are in operation. Weldon quarry has asphalt operations on the Watchung site.

- Did the Ambient Air Quality & Dust Measurements include measures on metals and volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) specific to asphalt operations?
- If so what were the results?
- Were the asphalt operations operating at full capacity at time of testing?

3. **Contaminated Sites:**

A state level program has been established to ensure that child care facilities are not sited on contaminated sites.

- Has this site been tested for contamination to meet state regulations?
- Has documentation been provided to ensure that this is not a contaminated site?

4. **Noise:**

The noise and vibration associated with blasting could be aggravating for small children and would diminish the ability for napping. Certain Special Needs children might be particularly sensitive to the blasting.

- Will parents be told of nearby quarry and explosions prior to using Day Care Facility?

- How are the children at the day care expected to react to the noise and vibrations from the blasts and how will the staff members handle the children's reactions?

5. **Wetlands:**

Wetlands are currently maintained through natural processes of rain and snow.

- How will wetlands be maintained?
- Will proposed drainage system/detention basins decrease runoff needed to sustain wetlands?

6. **Drainage:**

- Are the drainage system/detention basins designed and certified to treat the toxins and carcinogens found in many herbicides, such as glyphosate and 2,4-?

7. **Recycling:**

- Will recycling be set up so that paper, cans and plastic are collected and then put out for collection?
- Will trucks be able to pick up within the parking area?
- Will recycling bins be set up outside of Learning Center to enable recycling trucks access for collection of paper, cans and plastic?

8. **Testing:**

All testing was completed prior to Bonnie Burn proposed housing development and other nearby housing developments.

- How will these new developments affect traffic studies and Ambient Air Quality Dust Measurement?

9. **Insects:**

Due to wetlands, more insects, especially mosquitos, will be present.

- Will there be any spraying for insects?

**REQUESTS:**

Landscape/insect maintenance should only use organic products for lawn care, not Roundup or synthetic pesticides. Pesticides/chemicals should not run into the nearby brook. Children will be playing in the grassy areas. They should not be exposed to synthetic pesticides.

Do not use pesticides or herbicides on undisturbed and natural areas unless specifically needed to treat infestations.

Tree replacement plan required. Only native trees should be used for replanting. Replace trees that are removed with the same species, such as Maples and Oaks being replaced with Maple and Oaks. Do not replace with Ash trees or Trees of Heaven due to Emerald Ash Borer beetle and Spotted Lantern Fly.

During construction, fencing should be placed around trees and areas not to be disturbed. Heavy equipment sitting on tree roots can kill trees

Use "shielded" light fixtures. The tops of shielded fixtures are solid, so that light can only point downward. This will decrease light pollution for neighboring streets/residents and the area in general.

November 13, 2020