

WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION—ZOOM MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30, 2021

1. Call to Order—Roll Call:

- a. The meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM.
- b. Present—Rachel Funcheon, Karen Pennett, Jim and Andy Stout, Doug Speeney, Council President Wendy Robinson
- c. Absent—Joan Tak, Andy Baldassarre

2. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the Zoom meeting of 5/24/2021 were approved.

3. Reports:

- a. June 2021 Tree Report
 - General Report—203 trees have approval to be removed with 41 to be replaced.
 - EC Site Inspections; Violations—4 tree replacement inspections.
- b. Planning Board
 - Union Avenue Learning Experience application will be coming up for a vote at the next meeting with many variances involved.
 - Bonnie Burn project has been restarted. Organic pesticides will be used. Several DEP permits have been received which include many of the suggestions by the EC. A total of 15.52 acres will be disturbed.
- c. Recycling—Styrofoam; New Legacy Books
 - Styrofoam—Doug and Rachel visited the Farmers' Market and determined that it would not be a good location for Styrofoam recycling. With the Green Fair being held in Warren on 9/25/2021, and including the collection of Styrofoam, the EC will observe the operation and plan for Watchung recycling after the holidays.
 - New Legacy Books—A location has not been determined yet. Suggestions included Mobus Field, the Police Dept. parking lot, gravel lot by Mobus Field, Texier house near the shed, Firemen's Exempt, and the Friperery. The New Legacy Books business must receive approval by the Planning Board.
- d. Green Team—Green Fair, SJ, Farmers' Market
 - Green Fair—This could be an in-person event rather than virtual according to a representative of the Regional Health Board.
 - Sustainable Jersey—With enough points accumulated, Bronze and Silver could be earned in one year.
 - Farmers' Market—Has had its ups and downs with vendors unable to get labor force. More advertising is needed to promote it.

4. Unfinished Business:

- a. Trex Bench Plaque—The EC preferred the plaque in brass with black letters. Rachel will order.
- b. Fall Community Educational Programs—Suggestions included activities at the Harvest Festival, including a beekeeping demonstration which Joan will provide, scavenger hunt, sustainability table, and milkweed seed giveaway; also, movie night, or something at the Green Fair.

5. New Business:

- a. Impervious Coverage
 - (1) Board of Adjustment—Per the Code Book, copies of all applications to the Board of Adjustment should be forwarded to the EC for review prior to public hearing. ANJEC webinar said EC's should pay particular attention to requests by residents to their Zoning Boards to increase impervious coverage in an effort to avoid impervious coverage creep overall in the community. EC should advocate for mitigating conditions when these variances are granted, and increases should be offset by requiring rain gardens, dry wells, rain barrels, etc. Increasing impervious coverage can be detrimental to the town with increased flooding, runoff and erosion with more pollutants going into the waterways or impacting residents living on sloping terrain. An EC member will check the Board of Adjustment applications.

(2) Ordinance Amendment—Mayor and Council are amending the definition of "Impervious Surface" under certain circumstances in regards to decks, specifically decks exceeding 800 sq feet. As of 2015, Watchung's impervious surface was 16.5%.

b. Plastics Ban—ANJEC webinar said EC's need to start preparing their town's residents and businesses for the plastic and paper bag ban that will go into effect May 4, 2022. Plastic straws will only be available to customers upon request starting in November 2021. Shoppers must bring reusable bags to stores. Stores not in compliance could face fines. Clean Communities Council has campaign called "Bag Up NJ". Local EC's will provide information via press releases, newspapers, social media, and other means to prepare residents. Watchung EC will look into making more reusable bags to give to residents.

c. Open Space Preservation

(1) Research Inventory--An Open Space Inventory Report from 2018 was discussed. The report is available on the Borough website. Despite the town being mostly built out, Open Space preservation is part of the EC mission and we need to keep this issue on our radar. Also, discussed was the desire to maximize Green Acres funding whenever possible, including for enhancing the properties already owned by the Borough.

(2) Green Acres Program Grants—ongoing yearly

d. Free-cycling at curb—2 options—could put out useable materials for free several days before bulk recycling and remove before the bulk recycling pickup or have a separate day/days maybe once or twice a year. Doug will prepare a proposal.

e. Other—none

6. Public Comment: none

7. Special Announcements, Correspondence:

a. NJDEP Forest Service gave away seedlings from the Giant Salem Oak to 41 municipalities this spring. EC will try and obtain a seedling for Watchung.

b. The Boy Scout Eagle Project on which the EC was consulted was completed at Wilson Memorial Church. The Scout created a small bird sanctuary consisting of 6 bird houses and 3 nesting platforms on a path behind Wilson Memorial Church. All are welcome to visit.

8. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 PM with the next meeting scheduled for 8/30/2021.

Respectfully submitted,

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