

# WATCHUNG ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION –ZOOM MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, MARCH 28, 2022

## **1. Call to Order—Roll Call:**

- a. The meeting was call to order at 7:30.
- b. Present—Rachel Funcheon, Karen Pennett, Jim and Andy Stout, Doug Speeney, Andy Baldassarre, Coraleine Kitt, Council Member Wendy Robinson

## **2. Approval of Minutes—February 28, 2022 Teleconference:** The minutes were approved.

## **3. Speaker:** Resident Andrew Hokenson re: Green Acres on North Side of Watchung Lake

a. Issue—Andrew Hokenson and Michael Kania, residents of Stirling Road, joined the meeting to tell the EC about swampy conditions that exist on the Green Acres in their backyards on the north shore of Watchung Lake. They have observed increases in water levels approximately 40-50 feet from lake in backyards of 6-7 houses starting at Water and Wine. Areas used to dry after spring but now remain soggy and/or wet throughout the year and cannot be used or maintained. Continual wetness can increase mosquito population and other unwanted issues. An underground spring is suspected.

b. Attempts to rectify— Jason Cline (Borough Engineer) and Jim Damato (Administrator) have been consulted and walked the area, and Mayor Balla has been made aware. Water lines in roadway were tested for leakage with no evidence of water main break or storm drain problems, and no chlorinated water on property. Jim D. is open to finding level of equilibrium by lowering lake level a few inches as possible solution. This will be spearheaded by the Engineering Dept. Dredging was also mentioned.

## **4. Reports:**

a. Tree Report—March 2022  
--Inspections--There were 3 tree inspections with 69 trees to be removed and 38 to be replaced. Trees were removed without permits on 2 other properties. They were inspected by the Engineer.

--Discussion—Questions were raised about follow-up for replacement of trees that were removed with and without a tree permit. Need to create a process to make sure trees are being replanted per Tree Ordinance regulations. Suggestion was made to keep a list of properties that need to replant so they can be checked to ensure planting was done.

b. Planning Board  
--Discussion of Bd. of Adj. Annual Report recommendations—Board of Adj. had 2 recommendations:  
1) Every project should consider impact of downhill flooding onto Rt. 22 and main roads throughout the Borough. 2) There should be no limitations to tree removal under power lines, and residents should have more control regarding trees on their property.  
It was pointed out that utility companies remove what they need with no limitations, and trees that interfere with power lines are considered dangerous. The EC does not question these from being removed. EC has not denied trees to be removed while in the parameters of the Tree Ordinance. It was suggested that a letter be written to the Bd. Of Adj. regarding the above.

--Tree removal on weekends—Council Member Martino stated that the police should be called and can request to see the resident's permit. Engineer would follow up during business hours. EC should create a process for this which Council Member Robinson can share with the police.

---Related information—Talk of creating an invasive species ordinance, giving residents more control over what they replant with (using shrubs as well as trees), strengthening Tree Ordinance on what happens after trees are removed, that the Green Building Checklist should be incorporated into the Land Development Ordinance, and other issues.

--Rachel read the PB's response to the Bd of Adj's Annual Report into the record.

c. Recycling

--New Legacy Books—The company is ready for placement of the bin once area is leveled and graveled possibly within a month.

--Styrofoam Collection—June was suggested for possibly the next collection, as no Green Fair is presently scheduled.

d. Green Team—Still awaiting response from Warren regarding Green Fair. Farmers' Market could start in June if farmer is available.

## **5. Unfinished Business:**

a. Riparian Planting East of Best Lake—Council Member Martino can get discount on trees and will meet with Jim Damato who has also reviewed list and suggestions for T and B Committee. Doug marked areas for trees, and Jim D. will place order right away.

b. Seedling Giveaway—EC will bag and provide instructions for planting. DPW will pick up trees on April 13 with the giveaway proposed for April 23 with rain date of April 24 from 10:00-1:00. Distribution site will be either Texier House or Mobus Field, and milkweed seeds will also be available. Some seedlings will supplement Best Lake planting. Coraleine will prepare planting instructions for milkweed seeds.

c. Bd. of Adj. Application—1375 Plainfield Ave.

--First Public Meeting—Testimony from Applicant's Engineer, Architect and others, at public hearing on 3/10/2022 included discussion of impervious coverage, native plantings, bio-retention basin with plantings, shade and deciduous trees, 826 plantings in total, native trees to be removed due to resulting construction damage, 95 trees to be replanted, trash and recycling areas to be enclosed, utilities underground, 67 parking spaces, building to be prewired for solar. Bd. already approved waiver of Env. Impact Statement.

--Next meeting—March 31, 2022—Final presentation from Applicant will be Variance testimony by their Professional Planner.

--Rachel will email Teresa Snyder to ascertain if our letter was entered into the record.

## **6. New Business:**

a. ANJEC "Fundamentals for Effective EC's" webinar

--Summary—3 priorities—combatting climate change, advancing environmental justice, and controlling plastic pollution. There will be a virtual Earth Day celebration on 4/22/2022.

--Dini Checko, ANJEC Project Director and Plastics/Recycling Specialist, will be a guest at the 4/25/2022 EC meeting.

## **7. Special Announcements, Correspondence:**

--Somerset County DPW will be spraying herbicides (including Roundup) for Right-of-way Vegetation Control from March 31-Dec. 1, 2022, and ground and aerial Mosquito Control spraying will take place from April 1-Dec. 31, 2022.

## **8. Public Comment: None**

**9. Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 10:01 PM with the next meeting scheduled for April 25, 2022.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

# April 2022 Tree Report

## Tree inspections 3

trees to be removed 24

trees to be replaced 0

10 Sequoia: **12 Trees no replacements**

1 Cherry close to house

1 River birch close to house"

11 Ash dying

208 Valley: **6 Trees no replacements**

1 Maple (permit stated as Oak) dying

1 Oak dying

1 Tree snapped, basically a trunk, approx. 10' in height

3 Ash - dying

65 Crestwood: **6 Trees no replacements.**

3 Oak dying

2 Tulip dying

1 Ash, could be considered 2 dying