

Watchung Environmental Commission
October 28, 2024 Meeting Minutes

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.
Present: Rachel Funcheon, Karen Pennett, Doug Speeney, Andy Stout, Coraleine Kitt, Denise Soppas, Jennifer Principato
2. Minutes for the Sept. 23, 2024 Teleconference was approved.
3. Reports
 - a. Tree Report for October:
 - Conducted 3 tree inspections. A total of 53 trees will be removed, with 15 to be replaced.
 - b. Planning Board
 - PB 24-02, Raising Cane's - Planning Board did not discuss at last meeting. EC discussed concerns about double drive-thru lanes and excessive vehicle idling. Karen will bring issue up at Nov. PB meeting.
 - Bonnie Burn Project - Commission discussed monitoring and management of the construction process and compliance with applicable rules. Doug spoke with project Engineer. We can reach out to him at any time with questions. Arborist will be there on day 1 to oversee tree removal. EC also discussed sewer lines for project.
 - c. Recycling
 - The Commission discussed a new special recycling initiative through a company called HELPSY. They resell and recycle clothing, bedding, shoes and accessories. Bin is provided at no charge and items are picked up regularly. Borough is paid per pound collected. EC unanimously voted to present it to the Council for consideration.
 - d. Green Team
 - Watchung was approved for Silver Award for sustainability efforts.
 - Announced that final day of Farmer's Market is tomorrow.
 - Green Amendment: The town has not made a decision on supporting the amendment at this time due to League of Municipalities' lack of endorsement
4. Unfinished Business
 - a. Best Lake Project
 - Rachel and Doug discussed presentation of ANJEC Award at the Environmental Congress at Rowan College on Sept. 27th. Rachel sent all members a copy of the award and the Arbor Day Newsletter.
 - Six bird boxes were discussed for cleaning; two have already been cleaned. Members will clean the remaining boxes.
 - Doug and Andy worked at Best Lake Project twice. They planted 4 swamp milkweeds and did maintenance work, including watering. All

plants very dry due to drought. Removed some invasives, which are becoming a problem.

- Denise and Charlie Neiss led a bird walk around the buffer, sponsored by the library. Suggested doing a joint talk about birds and riparian buffer.

b. BOA applications

- BA 24-02, 55 Acorn Lane: Proposed multi-sports court. At Oct. BOA meeting, applicant's engineer presented updates. BOA started deliberations and voiced concerns about impervious cover. Took straw poll and voted no on the project. After short break, applicant said they won't build sports court, only do some other work around the property.
- BA 24-05, 1040 Johnston Drive: Revised plan will reduce 4-car garage to 3-car garage, also increase front yard setback. Discussed other changes. Neighbors again voiced their concerns about the project.
- BA 24-06, 149 Mountain Boulevard: Addition of a front porch. Application approved unanimously.

c. Adopt-a-Drain Initiative

- Council President Ead mentioned at recent meeting that residents should keep their storm drains clear and should tell their landscapers not to blow debris onto drains. Also, Rachel talked to head of DPW about keeping drains clean. He also said residents should clear the drains in front of their houses to help with stormwater control. Rachel suggested EC should follow up on this with Borough.

5. New Business

a. Environmental Commission In-Person Event Dates

- Members will attend Council meeting on Nov. 7 to be recognized by Mayor and Council for ANJEC award.
- Volunteer committees will be honored at Tree of Lights Ceremony on Dec. 7th. EC presence is requested.

b. Anti-Idling initiative at Watchung Lake

- Doug shared a success story of educating a bus driver who ceased idling after learning about the initiative.

c. Other Topics

- A resident reached out to EC about a bat house in a tree potentially slated for removal. Asked that the bat house be preserved or relocated. Jim Damato said house will be removed and delivered to resident for rehabilitation. Said it will be reinstalled on a healthy tree.

6. The meeting adjourned at 9:56 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 9, 2024.

November 2024 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 5

Tree Removal permits approved: 5

Trees to be removed: 76

Trees to be replaced: 26

Tree Re-Inspections: 0

Permit Closed: 0

Trees replaced: 0

D. Soppas & K. Pennett

Tree Inspections:

79 Park Place – 20 trees—Approved 23 replacements

Inspection: 11/14/24. (KP)

*New Construction

*Steep slope in back, being replaced with 3-tiered retaining wall.

Concerned retaining wall will cause water problems to neighbors. Spoke to engineer. They will discuss with owners

*Trees very large

*Current impervious coverage 1,784.48 increase to 4,960.39

*Replacing with 23 trees: Red Maple, White Pine, and Pin Oak

*Asked Doug Speeney to review for his thoughts. Doug reviewed: “The current house is more like a cabin.” Doug didn’t see how they could rebuild without removing the trees.

182 Ellison – 24 Dead Trees – Approved with 2 replacements

*Inspection: 11/18/24. (KP)

*Permit was submitted with letter explaining that trees snapped and/or dropped branches which did damage to automobiles and shed

*Recognized 6 ashes, 3 dead, 1 cracked in half, 1 oak

*Noticed 5 stumps of trees recently taken down (within last few months).

Not sure if had permit

*One oak, front side of house may be live tree

*Replace 2. Several trees on side of house not sure if dead

146 Hillcrest—10 Dead Trees Approved no replacements

- *Inspection: 12/6/24. (KP)
- *9 Ashes, 1 unknown Application had 10 Ashes

71 Carrar Drive—12 Dead trees no replacements

- *Inspection: 12/6/24. (KP)
- *Most were oaks. Trees were reviewed by arborist, trees infected with Hypoxylon Canker

121 Stanie Brae—9 trees replace 1

- *Inspection: 12/6/24. (KP)
- *Permit stated 9 Ash trees 8 dead 1 dying. One tree was an Oak questioned condition.