

Watchung Environmental Commission – Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 24, 2025

Call to Order at 7:34 pm

Present: Rachel Funcheon, Doug Speeney, Coraleine Kitt, Karen Pennett, Andy Stout, Denise Soppas, and Jennifer Principato

Special Guest: Nandini Checko from ANJEC

ANJEC is hosting Fundamentals Training Workshops, starting on March 18

Announced An Hour of Action on Thursday at 12 noon - looking for volunteers to help make calls to State legislators to pass the Packaging Reduction Bill.

On a local issue calling for towns to pass an ordinance to “Skip the Stuff” reducing the use of single use items by local take out and food delivery services.

Reorganization for 2025

Election of Officers

Chair - Doug Speeney

Vice Chair - Coraleine Kitt

Secretary - Jennifer Principato

Rachel Funcheon stepped down from her role as Chair. The EC thanks Rachel Funcheon for her 5 years as a dedicated Chair and for her professional leadership and many hours of research. She has started a legacy through the projects she has spearheaded including habitat restoration, planting of trees, and promoting and organizing the Borough’s recycling programs. Her hard work has been recognized not only locally, but also by the state and nationally through the Arbor Day Foundation’s magazine.

Meeting Schedule for 2025

March 24

May 12

June 23

September 15

November 17

All voted on the Approval of Minutes from our Dec. 9, 2024 Teleconference - The minutes will be sent by Jennifer to Edith Gil at the Borough Hall within one week of approval.

Reports

Tree Report - Jan. Tree Report: 1 inspection; 10 trees to be removed; (all dead Ash Trees); 0 replacements. No February Tree Report. Doug asked if there has been any follow up with the Borough to see if they are sending letters to residents about replacing removed trees from

private properties. Denise said she will check with Maria at Borough Hall to see if any letters have been sent out.

Planning Board - met in February for a reorganizational meeting. There were no changes to the Board officers. Karen will forward the 2024 Planning Board Annual Report to all members of the EC. They discussed the new affordable housing mandate and are looking to form an Ad Hoc committee led by Mayor Jubin.

Recycling - The Watchung Borough Council approved to allow HELPSY to place a bin for used clothing and textiles to be placed at DPW site on Somerset Street.

Green Team - New members have recently joined the Green Team reenergizing the team's efforts. There has been interest in a community garden that the team is proposing to the council. The team is also planning for the upcoming Farmer's Market and looking into accepting SNAP to help residents afford fresh local produce. The green team has received 2 grants. One is for energy efficiency outreach the other is a general grant for running the Green Team.

Unfinished Business -

The EC's article for the next Borough Newsletter article will feature information on *Why Trees are Good*.

New Business

New BOA Application, BA25-01 - 45 Dug Way - asking to use 24% impervious coverage where 17.4 % is allowed for a property on a steep slope. Application did not mention how many trees were going to be removed. EC recommends a 1:1 replacement ratio and is against the overage on impervious coverage. The applicant is seeking a variance to install an inground pool. Doug will write a letter to Catherine Furlan with our concerns.

Operation Pride; Seedling Order in place for 30 Red Oak, 30 White Oak, and 30 Chestnut Oak for the upcoming Operation Pride Day on Saturday, April 26.

NJ Salt Watch - Salt levels rise in local drinking water. The NJ Watershed Institute has formed a volunteer based Salt Water Watch, asking concerned local residents to take samples of water to be tested. Doug and his daughter, Emma, are taking part and have already taken samples of Best Lake Watershed to be tested.

Other - The Bird Flu - All types of birds are being found dead on local properties. There are procedures on what to do if you see a dead bird on your property suggested by the Department of Agriculture. Doug will get in touch with Bruce Ruck at the Borough to see if he can help to get word out to the community about the procedures.

Special Announcements & Congratulations -

Bill Funcheon was recently recognized by NASA as a volunteer Solar System Ambassador and will be holding an Amateur Astronomers night at Wagner Farms on Saturday, April 5 at 8 pm.

Denise Soppas is being honored and recognized at the upcoming Women in Watchung ceremony at the Watchung Arts Center on Thursday, March 6.

Adjournment - 9:55 pm

Next meeting on Monday, March 24 at 7:30 pm.

*Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/4653667048?pwd=OWFaNFR6VGxWdjJGRURCNkUxMHdqZz09>

Dial-in by phone: 1-646-558-8656 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 465 366 7048

Passcode: 054425

March 2025 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 4

Tree Removal permits approved: 3

Trees to be removed: 14

Trees to be replaced: 9

Tree Re-Inspections: 0

Permit Closed: 0

Trees replaced: 0

D. Soppas & K. Pennett

Tree Inspections:

54 Valley Drive – 6 Cherry Kwanzan, approved with 5 replacements

- Inspection: 3/5/25. (KP)
- Trees that were marked were not cherries. Very large trees, diameter 12+", bark was not cherry bark. There were cherry trees in yard, with deer fencing around. Spoke to homeowner through doorbell. She insisted trees to be removed were cherries. 1 of the marked trees was dead. Could not determine if other marked trees were dead. 5 replacements

127 Valley Drive – 8 trees, 2 of which are ashes Approved with 4 replacements

- Inspection: 3/14/25. (KP)
- One ash broke and just missed house, home owner concerned
- 2 Ashes
- 2 Bottom of tree rotted, dangerous
- 4 species unknown, approx. 8" diameter, near house, outside envelope. To be replaced.

705 Johnston Dr.– 44 trees, Approved with 30 replacements

- Inspection: 3/20/25. (DS)
- 14 Dead, 30 live
- Most trees were up against the fence around the tennis court. Trees planted too close together.
- No tree service listed

705 Johnston Dr.– 8 trees, not approved

- Inspection: 3/20/25. (DS)
- A & W Landscaping and Tree Service
- 8 healthy live large trees (6 Maple, 2 Oak) – 7 of the 8 are ≥ 18 in (or close to 18 in) in diameter
- The homeowner's son indicated that they wanted to remove the trees because they were too big. The homeowner is getting older and is having difficulty with landscape maintenance. They are willing to replant smaller trees in the back yard.
- I contacted Jim Demato indicating that I recommend NOT to approve this permit. (have not heard back)