

# **Watchung Environmental Commission – Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, March 24th, 2025**

1. Call to Order 7:32 pm – Present: Doug Speeney, Rachel Funcheon, Coraleine Kitt, Karen Pennett, Andy Stout, Denise Soppas, and Jennifer Principato

2. Approval of February Minutes

a. Reviewed procedure for submitting minutes. Minute corrections will be made within a week of the meeting. Once approved at the following EC meeting, the Secretary will submit them to Edith Gil and cc. Doug Speeney (EC Chair)

3. Environmental Commission Website update suggestions. - Doug suggests we revamp and update the website. Jennifer and Rachel have some ideas and will meet to discuss.

4. Reports

a. March Tree Report (see full report attached)

Tree Inspections: 4

Tree Removal permits approved: 3

Trees to be removed: 58

Trees to be replaced: 39

Denise is following up with Jim Damato regarding the status of the town's enforcement of the tree ordinance replacement clause.

b. Planning Board

The Raising Cane application was discussed. The EC had submitted comments regarding the application regarding the environmental impact of having two drive-

through lanes. Other concerns by the E.C. include air pollution from car emissions and idling, especially for the outdoor diners.

American Recycling Tech is requesting Planning Board Approval to put a clothing bin by the City MD Urgent Care/Old Sears location. Some questioned if another clothing collection bin is needed since there is already one at the Blue Star Shopping Center near the Arby's and the new Helpsy bin already coming to the DPW Garage.

c. Recycling (Helpsy) - Rachel indicated that the Helpsy bin delivery has been delayed. She is following up with the company.

d. Green Team - Continuing to work on proposals for community gardens and getting ready for the Farmer's Market in June.

## 5. Tree Give Away

a. Seedling and Bare Root distribution plan - Doug proposed giving some of the seedlings away at town hall during the week of Earth Day in addition to giving them out during Operation Pride to try to reach more residents. Doug will check with Edith at Borough Hall first to see if they are open to the idea and can help to promote the free tree give away. The E.C. ordered 150 Bare Root trees and 90 Seedlings.

Friday, April 25 - Preparation of Trees for Operation Pride - Rachel's House  
Andy, Karen, and Rachel will label, separate and pack the trees to get them ready for Operation Pride.

## 6. Operation Pride & Riparian Buffer Stewardship Day April 26 (Rain date: April 27)

Operation Pride - 9 am -12 noon. E.C. Table will be handing out tree seedlings. Jennifer, Andy, Rachel, and possibly Karen will be on hand to help out.

Riparian Buffer Stewardship 1 pm - 3 p.m. - Riparian Buffer Stewardship Tree Restoration -Andy, Coraline, Doug, and possibly Rachel will be on hand to help out as well as an Americorps volunteer and some members of the Green Team. We will be planting seedlings, weeding, mulching and fixing deer fencing. Doug asks that all members please help spread the word. Doug will advertise as well through the Borough email blasts. Rachel suggested promoting it on Voices and Watchung Neighborhood Network on Facebook as well.

7. Catherine Furlan is the new Code Enforcement liaison regarding local code issues, including environmental matters. She expressed an interest in working with the EC on local environmental matters under her purview. She can be contacted via email at [boardclerk@watchungnj.gov](mailto:boardclerk@watchungnj.gov).

8. Bird Flu Public Outreach - Doug distributed the notice from Middlebrook Health Department, which gives instructions to residents about what to do if they encounter a dead or sick bird.

9. Lake Management update - Edith asked Doug to sign a letter advocating the dredging of both lakes, asking Federal officials to help pay for the project.

10. Open Forum (New ideas/suggestions) -

Jen questioned whether we could use Clean Communities money to address the littering problem in town. The members are open to finding additional ways to address the littering problem and potentially using CC funds. We discussed signs and traffic cameras as potential ideas. Two communities that do use cameras to enforce their littering/dumping laws are Patterson and West Milford. More discussions to follow in the months ahead.

Rachel attended the ANJEC webinar - An Hour of Action - Toxic Plastic Waste - two bills "Skip the Stuff" - no utensils for takeout and "Packaging Product Stewardship Act" - put your stuff in less stuff bill.

Two new Board of Adjustment Applications

The Dug Way BOA application for an inground pool was discussed Doug is submitting a comment on the application regarding EC concerns regarding increasing impervious cover on such a steep slope.

Rachel suggested we get a plaque made for the Salem Oak Tree to memorialize the tree. We could put a nice big rock/boulder to place the plaque on.

11. Special Announcements, Correspondence

Doug received The Shade Tree Bulletin. Doug will pass along to Denise and Karen. Rachel has trees if anyone wants them. Please reach out to her.

12. Public Comments NA

13. Adjournment - 9:50 pm. While there is no official meeting in April, those members that are available will be at Operation Pride on April 26. Next Meeting is on May 12, 2025.

## March 2025 Tree Report

**Tree Inspections: 4**

**Tree Removal permits approved: 3**

**Trees to be removed: 58**

**Trees to be replaced: 39**

**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

### **73 Ellison Rd.– 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  $\geq 18$  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)