

Watchung Environmental Commission – Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 12, 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 March Minutes

a. Reviewed procedure for submitting minutes. Minute corrections will be made within a week of the meeting. The E.C. has one week to submit changes to the secretary. Once the final approval is given at the following EC meeting, the secretary will submit them to Edith Gil and cc. Doug Speeney (EC Chair).

3. Operation Pride - April tree seedling distribution review -

Operation Pride had a low turnout in the morning. The E.C. was left with dozens of trees to distribute. It is highly suggested that next year we only order 50 trees and to reach out to Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District, who gave us free seedlings this year. It is recommended that only tubelings be ordered for next year's event. The Echoes Sentinel highlighted Operation Pride Day event with a photo of EC members Rachel, Andy, and Karen and Mayor Jubin at the table distributing tree seedlings.

4. Riparian Buffer/Best Lake Stewardship 4/27 event review. - The afternoon event had a good turnout with about 20 volunteers including Mayor Jubin, Council President Ead, and Council member Marano. 12 seedlings were planted, including Chestnut Oak, Dogwood, and River Birch. In addition, weeding, fencing, and mulch distribution around the trees was accomplished.

5. Environmental Commission Website - Jennifer and Rachel have met and came up with a list of ways to improve and update the site. The recommendations were discussed and will be sent in writing to Doug so he can begin on getting the initial changes made.

6. Reports

a. Tree Report (see attached)

Tree Inspections: 11

Tree Removal permits approved: 11

Trees to be removed: 182

Trees to be replaced: 56 excluding 270 Valley Drive

b. Planning Board

Raising Cane is moving forward. They will be replacing all removed trees with native species. The third lane drive through is still in the plan that has been approved.

c. Green Team

The Green Team received a grant from PSEG for commercial energy efficiency outreach. The plan is to use this grant to reach out to local businesses to install energy efficiency enhancements. Green Team also applied for a grant to cover green team operations This grant will be used for farmer market expenses. Community gardens proposal sites have been recommended to the council. Farmers market to open in June.

7. Next steps for litter reduction efforts/Ideas for consideration.

EC agrees for the need of No Littering signs with fines posted throughout the Borough.

Rachel suggested asking Clean Communities if they will provide signs.

Jennifer, Denise, and Coraleine will discuss further to brainstorm ways we can work on educating and promoting the public about litter reduction.

a. Clean Communities Slogan Initiative.

EC agreed to ask Edith to send out a blast to residents about the Slogan contest. Submission deadline August 21. The winner will be chosen by New Jersey Clean Communities.

b. Increased penalties - EC discussed penalties for littering, such as enforcing fines and maybe warnings to residents. Concerns about the enforcement of the tree ordinance were also discussed. Specifically, the town does not appear to be following up to ensure that the required replanting is being carried out.

c. School Art contest - Discussed possibly tying in a Borough wide littering campaign to a School Art contest.

8. Helpsy bin update - Bin has been placed at DPW next to styrofoam bin. So far 995 pounds of textiles have been collected. The Borough is scheduled for weekly pickup. Rachel will schedule a photo shoot for members of the EC and the Mayor and Council for an article about the bin in the Echoes Sentinel.

9. EC comments on BOA (Case NO. BA25-01 (45 Dug Way)

10. Salem Oak (maintenance and sign) -

EC discussed getting a sign with a brief mention of the history behind the Salem Oak and to memorialize the original Oak, considered to be one of the largest in New Jersey. Rachel will weed and mulch the tree and ask DPW for better fencing.

11. Open Forum (New ideas/suggestions)

Watchung librarian, Manny Miracle, invited Doug to give a short presentation about the Riparian buffer area at Best Lake during the library bird watching event on May 1st . The library has organized three free bird watching programs led by Denise and Charlie at the Riparian buffer area of Best Lake. The program highlights the connection between the recently restored habitat and the increasing residents' appreciation of birds and other Watchung wildlife. It is a great spot to enjoy the natural habitat. Denise reported seeing a lot of activity in the bird boxes. The bird watching group witnessed the Tree Swallows building their nests in the new bird boxes. At the event, Charlie proclaimed, "the Riparian buffer is nationally recognized" by being on the cover of the Arbor Day Foundation magazine.

12. Public Comments NA

13. Adjournment - 9:30 pm. Next Meeting is on June 23, 2025.

Submitted by:

Jennifer Principato
Secretary

April-May 2025 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 11

Tree Removal permits approved: 11

Trees to be removed: 182

Trees to be replaced: 56 excluding 270 Valley Drive

Tree Re-Inspections: 0

Permit Closed: 0

Trees replaced: 0

D. Soppas & K. Pennett

Tree Inspections:

240 Valley Road – 22 trees—Approved no replacements

Inspection: 3/22/25. (KP)

*Most Trees already down. When on previous section noticed many trees down on this property. Reported to Jim DeMato

*Trees that were down were ashes.

*Additional trees to come down were in poor health

35 Crestwood – 15 Trees – Approved with 3 replacements

*Inspection: 3/22/25. (KP)

*Dead Tree Permit was submitted. Some trees seemed ok

*Ashes ok to take down, tree on drive way rotten near bottom ok to remove.

12 Kappelman—17 mostly smaller trees Approved no replacements

- *Inspection: 3/22/25. (KP)

*8 plums, infected with black fungus, couple already dead. 8 various trees mostly small pines, dead and 1 large tree split ½ o ground, other half may fall soon.

45 Knollwood Dr.—6 trees Approved no 2 replacements

- *Inspection: 4/10/25. (DS)

- Tree Service: Robert Griscom – expertly written explanation of the health of the trees and reasons for removal

*2 living White Pine, 1 dead Spruce, 3 dead Ash

747 Johnston Dr.—6 Ash no replacements

- *Inspection: 4/10/25. (DS)

- KSD Tree Service

*6 dead Ash

270 Valley Drive 14 trees--11 dead 3 dying – Approved no replacements

*Trees in front yard near road. Area gets very swampy after rain. Will be planting 20 Arborvitaes in back.

140 Vail Lane--12 Trees- Approved replace 6

*Application noted 7 dead trees, map provided by applicant showed 8 trees, 12 trees marked. Of the 12 trees marked, 5 dead, 1 very small permit not required remaining 6 to be replaced.

*Spoke to person inside house they rent from people at 150 Vail, not aware of permit

150 Vail Lane--20 dead trees- Approved replace 4

*4 very large trees in front already taken down, stumps remain. Trees removed prior to permit Replace 4

85 Acorn: 21 Trees: 13 dead Approved replace 8

132 Anderson: 6 trees Approved no replacements

390 Valley Road 27 trees, replace 19

*Permit for 27 dead trees, 19 live 8 dead

14 Ellison: 10 trees no replacements

*All trees were dead, many additional trees dead/hazardous. Told applicant more could come down

89 Spencer: 18 trees replace 16(?)

2 permits one 5 trees the other 13 trees. id'd 12 trees. Map difficult to follow, trees marked with string hard to see. 5 tree permit marked with white string, 13 tree permits marked with 2 strings one white and the other blue, another set of 12 trees marked with blue sting. Most blue string trees very small permit not needed. Permits indicated most trees dead, actually 16 live. Two 6" diameter trees in front live on steep slope should keep. One tree 8" diameter in back hazardous center rotting. One tree dead.

Maria informed me that the one application that was denied, applicant appealed to mayor. Mayor approved permit. Do not know address