

Watchung Environmental Commission – Minutes

Monday, June 23, 2025

1. Call to Order – 7:32 pm Roll Call - Present: Doug Speeney, Rachel Funcheon, Coraleine Kitt, Andy Stout, Denise Soppas, Jennifer Principato, and Paolo Marano. Karen Pennett was not present.

2. Approval of Minutes – May 12, 2025, meeting - approved and adopted.

3. Environmental Commission Website update - Rachel reached out to Borough Hall, but they can not make the changes to the website. There is a third party that designs and makes changes to the website. Rachel will be sending them the suggested changes/updates in writing.

4. Reports:

a. Tree Report (Update on required replanting) - 6 Tree inspections - all six approved. 54 trees to be removed. 1 to be replaced. Maria is sending out the letters about replacing trees, going back to those that lapsed from 2023. The letter mentions planting native trees.

b. Planning Board (Raising Cane’s Stormwater update (Doug for Karen)) - Shoprite has not gotten their final approval by the planning board engineer. One thing still pending is the electric vehicle charging stations. Doug spoke to the Raising Cane engineer. He mentioned that the native plantings are up to 70%. They also agreed to put in a rain garden similar to that of ShopRite’s to help with stormwater management even though it was not required by the ordinance.

c. Green Team - Farmer’s market will be canceled on Tuesday, June 24 due to the heat advisory. The Green Team would like to work with EC to hand out information at the market. Possibly give River Friendly pamphlets out and the Preferred Tree List. Small signs with QR codes in frames on the table would work best. Doug suggested a QR code to our website where people can find all the information.

5. Next steps for litter reduction efforts

a. Clean Communities “Be a Rock Star” Slogan Initiative email blast 5/19/25; deadline is August 21, 2025. - Clean communities is running the contest. The Borough sent out an email blast.

b. Update on litter reduction signs - Rachel reached out to Bill Hance to say we might want to use funds from the Borough's Clean Communities grant to have anti-littering signs made. Bill said there is plenty of money in the account for that. Once Doug receives a design from

Rachel he will ask DPW to post No Littering Signs, about a half dozen, to place at the entrance of Best Lake Park, Stirling Road parking lot by the Lake, The playground parking lot, as well as signs posted at all entry points into the Borough, such as at top and bottom of Hillcrest Road, Bonnie Burn road, Stirling Road, Valley Road and Somerset Street.

6. BOA Application BA25-04; Crown Cadillac - Rt. 22 car dealership. 75 plants will be planted on this new construction site. EC will ask them to plan on planting 70% native plants.

7. Hazard Tree identification/reporting - Doug reported two hazard trees were reported to Catherine Furlan, who sent letters out to the owners of the trees. He suggested with the recent storms that all members of EC should look out for other hazard trees and report them directly to Catherine's attention.

8. Reusable Shopping bag Recycling Program (Outside of the Farmers Market Season) - Denise and Doug discussed the bag collection to give to the food pantry. Denise spoke to Bill Hance and the library about possibly collecting the bags, but the library cannot, due to their temporary housing situation. Denise mentioned that she has been storing the bags but her garage is running out of space to continue to store the bags. Rachel suggested collecting the bags downstairs at Borough Hall, and also that DPW may have space in their garage on Somerset St. to store them. Doug suggested having a bin placed somewhere for the reusable shopping bags.

9. "Skip the Stuff" potential Ordinance proposal - The Green Team is getting a list of food services in Watchung to send them a survey regarding Skip the Stuff. The plan is to show local businesses are in favor of the Skip the Stuff ordinance when presenting the plan to the Town Council. Doug suggested joining forces with the Green Team by writing a joint letter to the Council to propose passing the ordinance as other towns in our area are doing such as Westfield, Montclair, and Maplewood.

10. Salem Oak Update - Rachel and Bill Funcheon cleaned around the Oak and DPW put down mulch and a larger fence to protect the tree. Doug spoke to DPW and they can get a rock so that we can put a metal plaque on the rock to memorialize when it was planted and its history.

11. Open Forum (New ideas/suggestions) -

HELPSY bin update. The EC met at the bin to take a picture with the mayor at the site to help promote. Rachel wrote up an article and sent it to Edith to send out to local papers along with the photo. They have collected 1,622 pounds of clothes to date.

Doug mentioned that he has been working to obtain a third-party certification from the Watershed Institute for the Riparian Buffer Restoration project. He just received an update this evening that the Institute is going to approve us for River Friendly Community Partner certification. Congratulations Doug!

12. Public Comments

13. Adjournment - 9:25 pm. Next meeting September 15, 2025

*Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/4653667048?pwd=OWFaNFR6VGxWdjlGRURCNkUxMHdqZz09>

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

Meeting ID: 465 366 7048

Passcode: 054425

July/August 2025 Tree Report

Tree Inspections: 7

Tree Removal permits approved: 6

Trees to be removed: 129

Trees to be replaced: 24

D. Soppas & K. Pennett

Tree Inspections:

305 Ridge Rd – 13 trees—Approved - 13 replacements

Inspection: 7/24/25. (DS)

- No tree service listed
- 13 living trees

20 Stanie Glen Rd – 20 trees—Approved - 4 replacements

Inspection: 8/7/25. (DS)

- G & R Tree Service
- 20 trees listed as dead, dying, hazardous – but spoke to the homeowner about 4 live trees. They will replace them. And also they agreed to discuss with their tree service about possibly treating or pruning some trees instead of just cutting them down.

35 Snoden Lane – 27 trees—Approved – no replacements

Inspection: 8/7/25. (DS)

- No tree service listed
- 27 dead Ash trees

524 Ridge Rd – 6 trees listed on permit—not Approved (pending marking the trees or revised the number to 5 trees)

1st Inspection: 8/7/25. (DS)

- Monkey Tree Service
- I observed 5 dead Ash on front lawn but they were not marked. The permit lists 6 dead trees. If they owner marks the 5 trees, we can approve. They may need to revise the number of the trees to be remove on the permit. (No one answered the door)

37 Redmont Rd – 21 trees — Approved – no replacements

Inspection: 9/2/25. (DS)

- J & L Budget Tree Service
- 19 dead Ash, 2 dead Maples

332 Johnston Dr – 39 trees -Approved – 7 replacements

Inspection: 2/2/25. (DS)

- Pritchett Tree Service
- 32 Dead Trees, 7 live trees (Fir and Oak) – replacements required for 7 trees

40 Forest Dr – 9 trees -Approved – no replacements

Inspection: 9/2/25. (DS)

- Francis Tree Service
- 9 dead Ash