

Metuchen Environmental Commission Minutes of the September 17, 2008 Regular Meeting

- **Regular Meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission was held on Wednesday September 17, 2008.**
- **Review and approval of July 16, 2008 Minutes.**
- **Present were: Mark Herzberg, Chair, Will Waldron, Council Liaison, Patricia Donahue, Thomas Rudel, Steve Toth and Brian Weeks.**
- **Absent were: Arline Zatz, Mike Vissichelli and Ann Sardone.**
- **Changes in membership: John Leazer, our former Liaison to the Planning Board, is now no longer a member of the Environmental Commission but has been appointed a full member of the Planning Board. The Mayor has appointed Kathy Bush as a new member of the Environmental Commission.**
- **Correspondence: DEP Bulletins (7/23, 8/6, 8/20 & 9/3): Two minor actions pertaining to Metuchen: Freshwater wetlands action behind Borough Motors property; and Application for sewage treatment works tie-in for new 12-unit condominium development to replace two existing homes on Amboy Avenue.**

Old Business

Thomas Pond: Fred Hall of DPW reported to Mark that the pump for the well is working. To reduce the algae bloom in the pond, DPW opened the fire hydrant that drains into the pond for an entire day on July 24. That flushing and the heavy rains of Hurricane Hanna seem to have washed much of the algae downstream.

Mike reportedly will prepare a visual presentation to promote public awareness of the pond as a natural resource at the Oct. 4 “Country Fair” on Main Street.

Discussion of the purpose of monitoring water quality in the pond and its relationship to the proposed algae mitigation project using bales of barley straw. Reportedly students with the high school environmental club performed 2 or 3 rounds of pond water sampling. Further discussion tabled until a meeting when Mike, a water quality expert, is in attendance.

Planning Board: No report.

Dismal Swamp: Steve reported that DPW has begun a regularly scheduled monthly “sprucing up” maintenance at the Liberty Street entrance to the swamp.

Steve also reported the Middlesex County Mosquito Commission is developing a plan to reduce mosquito populations in the swamp by improving water flow. The Mosquito Commission proposes to clean sediment, solid waste, branches and other debris from ditches, culverts and creeks in the swamp, in Metuchen and Edison. Steve will provide suggestions to them such as avoiding work at sensitive times (i.e., spring spawning and fall migration seasons), avoiding damage to trees where birds

may nest and removing debris in which mosquitoes can breed. The Mosquito Commission anticipates commencing its work in one or two years.

The environmental group “Friends of Dismal Swamp” will present, at the Borough Council’s Oct. 6 meeting, its proposal for an inter-local services agreement to regulate and maintain the Dismal Swamp. It would involve Metuchen, Edison and South Plainfield and would be modeled after a similar agreement regulating the Great Swamp in Somerset and Morris Counties. Local advocates of the proposal include former Metuchen Mayor and current land use attorney John Wiley, and Assemblyman Peter J. Barnes III.¹

Dog Park: No report

Tree Farm: At its most recent meeting, the Borough Council reportedly discussed whether to establish a tree farm in the Borough. Representatives of the Shade Tree Commission pointed out the logistical difficulties.

Discussion followed of the benefits of a tree farm to the community, and whether the Environmental Commission should ask the Shade Tree Commission to reconsider its position or consider developing a tree farm on its own initiative. Further discussion was tabled, no decision having been reached.

Edgar School Trees: Volunteers (Pat, Mike and Brian) continue to water the new trees planted on Arbor Day. All but one tree appear to be in good health.

Brian will prepare a visual presentation to promote public awareness of the Edgar School Trees at the Oct. 4 Country Fair.

Recycling: Discussion of recycling tonnage figures. Pat will ask DPW, and Mark will ask DEP, if either has more comprehensive data on the amount, rate and cost savings of recycling in the Borough. DEP collects some of this data, and on that basis recently awarded a number of municipalities grants toward their recycling costs. Metuchen received a grant of \$60,000.

Mark reported that DPW distributed flyers for post-garage sale solid waste pickup.

Pat will prepare a visual presentation to promote public awareness of recycling at the Oct. 4 Country Fair.

Country Fair: Discussion of and planning for the Environmental Commission booth at the Oct. 4 Country Fair.

¹ Assemblyman Barnes co-sponsored A3072, which would establish the Dismal Swamp Preservation Commission and appropriate for it \$95,000. It was introduced 9/15/08 and has been referred to the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee. The primary purpose of the Commission would be “to provide comprehensive regulatory authority and regional planning for the area with a primary focus on protecting and preserving the ecological, historical, and recreational values of the area.”

http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2008/Bills/A3500/3072_I1.PDF

The Environmental Commission plans to present four issues at the Fair. They will be prepared by: Mike, on Thomas Pond; Pat, on recycling; Brian, on the Edgar School trees; and Tom, on Woodbrook Pond.

A schedule was prepared for members to work in the booth for at least 2 hours each on Oct. 4: Pat, 9 to 11 a.m.; Tom, 10 a.m. to noon; Brian and Mark, noon to 2 p.m.; and Steve and Mark, 2 to 4 p.m.

Arline has obtained free handouts for the Fair, including nature books for children.

Global Warming: Discussion of the bike rack proposed for adjacent to the bench on the New Street side of Metuchen Savings Bank. Tom will ask the Bank for consent to install the rack at that location.

Open Space: Discussion of whether the proposed inter-local services agreement for the Dismal Swamp may facilitate acquisition, possibly through the county, of Woodbrook Pond and adjacent open space along the Greenway.

Greenway: Reportedly construction of the pedestrian bridge over Route 1, as well as along the Greenway, has been suspended pending application for and approval of the required stormwater runoff permit.

No new information on when construction of the Greenway will begin or on planning for the trailhead.

New Business: The Borough's planner Jim Constantine will present to the Borough Council on Oct 20 a plan to study improving vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic in the Borough.

- There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.