

BOROUGH of METUCHEN
Environmental Commission
Minutes of the November 19, 2008 Regular Meeting

A meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission was held on Wednesday, November 19, 2008 at 7:30 PM at Borough Hall. Present were: Mark Herzberg, Chair, Tom Rudel, Steve Toth, Brian Weeks, Pat Donahue, Arline Zatz and Ann Sardone. Also present: Heather Barrett, N.J. Watershed Ambassador; Evelyn Grant, Metuchen resident; and Kathy Busch, Planning Board liaison. Absent: Mike Vissichelli and Will Waldron. .

The meeting was called to order at 7:40 PM.

The minutes of the October 15, 2008 meeting were approved and accepted.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Landfill as an Ecosystem and MUCUA's Wastewater Division booklets published by the Middlesex County Utilities Authority were handed out to all present.
- Three editions of the DEP bulletins dated Oct. 15, Nov. 5 and Nov. 19 were received, but didn't pertain to Metuchen.
- An E-mail received from Reed Leibfried stated that he is willing to serve on any Board that needs help.
- The Environmental Commission will now maintain a list of those who are available to help when needed.
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OLD BUSINESS

Thomas Pond Park

Ms. Grant felt that the barley hay might impede fishing at the pond. Chair Herzberg explained that the bales of barley hay placed at the edge of the pond emit a small amount of natural chemical, and that the pond is being monitored and information collected to see if this procedure is helping the water quality. The barley hay is inexpensive and easy to place, but it's too early to see if it makes a difference.

Member Steve Toth added that although the bales may interfere with fish that frequent shallow areas, the main purpose is for water quality and, while it may reduce the smaller fish who eat the majority of food, it may increase the bass population.-

Planning Board

Kathy Busch, liaison to our Commission, noted that the KED group application was approved to build condos, 2 retail uses, and a third floor unit added at the former bike store location on Main Street.

Minor changes were made in the Renaissance plans; and in the Fox & Fox Development subdivision on Myrtle Avenue, 6 new trees will be planted – three trees on each side of the house and two trees in front.

Member Pat Donahue raised the question about whether the owner of each new house would be free to take trees down; Busch will check on the town tree ordinance and with the Planning Board to see if there is a requirement in place to keep trees once the house is sold.

Chair Herzberg inquired as to whether the developers were dealing with the issue of surface water and possible contamination at the Oakite site. Busch will look into this at future Planning Board meetings.

Dismal Swamp

Steve Toth suggested having a ‘Bioblitz’ event on Earth Day in which various people are brought in to look at the site and identify the flora and fauna y. This will be a quick one-shot environmental survey. Pat Donahue suggested picking quadrants to scout and perhaps introducing people to geocaching as another activity on Earth Day.

Since many people cannot locate Dismal Swamp, Commission members will look into having a sign made to direct people there from the main road.

Mark will speak to Fanny about following-up on the problem of Brazil Bros. dumping their waste into Dismal Swamp.

Dog Park

Pat Donahue reported that she wrote to Edison’s Mayor and other persons congratulating them for gaining property for a dog park but did not receive a response.

Recycling

Pat Donahue appeared before the Council on November 17 to talk about the decrease in recycling in Metuchen and how much money we are losing as a result. It is hoped that we can educate people on the importance of recycling.

Metuchen Matters.com approached Pat on the idea of installing triple bins for recycling. Pat also mentioned an article written about how to properly dispose of florescent bulbs.

Open Space

Nothing new to report.

Greenway

**Senator Barnes and Mayor John Wiley spoke about the Greenway at the Council meeting, Monday, November 17. Chair Herzberg received a response from DOT about the bridge over Lake Avenue. **

Edgar School and Pool Parking Lot

We are waiting until spring to see how the trees we planted survived over the winter.

Tree Farm/Bank

Pat Donahue advised members that the Shade Tree Commission mentioned a tree farm in their forestry management plan. Details are posted on the borough web site.

Chair Herzberg told our Planning Liaison that there has to be a mechanism to check on where a tree is planted, who owns what, etc., and that a dedicated fund should be created for trees with an administrator appointed to manage it.

Bike Racks

It was agreed that an ordinance should be drawn mandating racks to be placed in line with traffic meters. Since this is considered a “Transit Village” town, Chair Herzberg requested members attend the December 6 workshop meeting at the Senior Center to discuss the placement of bike racks.

NEW BUSINESS

Member Arline Zatz spoke about the damage Nelson (hired by Public Service Gas & Electric) is doing to the town trees while trimming branches next to the power lines. She explained that while branches almost touching or interfering with the power lines must be cut, the men doing the cutting are trimming much more than necessary – leaving trees one-sided or with the centers cut out in many cases. Not only does this leave the trees ugly, but dangerous – since a windstorm can blow the weakened or one-sided trees down on a house, car, or person. A motion was approved to try to remedy future trimmings by writing to PSG&E. Before the Environmental Commission writes to PSG&E, Arline will attend the December Shade Tree Commission to ask if they will join with the Environmental Commission in drafting a joint letter. She will also contact Fannie to see if there is anything written in the town’s code, or the state’s code stating how far they may cut.

Member Arline Zatz announced that she has become a Certified Master Tree Steward for the 4-H Rutgers University Extension Service and will be presenting education talks to 4th graders on the importance of trees.

Heather Baret, New Jersey Watershed Ambassador, advised that she is available to assess streams visually and biologically and wishes to form a partnership with host agencies, such as Metuchen's Environmental Commission. She is available to give residents tips on rain gardens – where to put same, use of rain barrels, etc. Member Steve Toth suggested she present a joint program with the Environmental Commission at the library. Member Tom Rudel suggested making an inventory of the town's wetland areas, and Chair Herzog mentioned the possibility of her looking into Tommy's Pond water quality, ideas for a biofilter or the barley hay as a natural algaecide. We will wait for Baret to formulate a program for residents.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:40 PM. The next meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission will take place on January 21, 2009 at 7:30 PM at Borough Hall.

AGENDA

Metuchen Environmental Commission

January 2009

Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Correspondence

Old Business

Thomas Park Pond

Planning Board

Dismal Swamp

Dog Park

Recycling

Open Space

Greenway

Edgar School and Pool Parking Lot

Bike Racks

New Business