

Borough of Metuchen Environmental Commission 2007 Annual Report

Thomas Park Pond

The Metuchen Environmental Commission returned donations and grant money not used for the construction of a biological water filtration since construction and future maintenance would be cost prohibitive and the anticipated results were not certain. The Commission has chosen to take some small scale measures to try and improve the water quality in Tommy's Pond through the help of low cost biological techniques while at the same time obtaining information on the water quality trends in Tommy's Pond. In winter 2007, a water quality sampling kit was purchased with the help of the Edison Greenways Group and donations from local sponsors. The Metuchen High School Environmental Club has volunteered to take monthly samples to collect baseline water quality data that will be used to measure progress of future projects implemented to try and mitigate water quality at the pond.

In 2008, the Environmental Commission intends to distribute flyers to increase public awareness on what can be done to help improve Tommy's Pond. The Metuchen High School Environmental Club will begin to take water quality measurements, and initial biological measures will be implemented to try to minimize algal growth in the pond.

Greenway

We made it a policy to interface more actively with the Edison Greenways groups, in part to monitor the renovations of the existing Greenway and in part to join forces with them in pressing for an extension of the Greenway to the Dismal Swamp in northwestern Metuchen.

New Jersey Water Conservation Project

In December 2008, the Borough submitted an application to the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Program - Water Resources Program. The application demonstrates Metuchen's uniqueness and why we would be an ideal municipality to obtain assistance in implementing a water conservation project. If selected, Rutgers will work with the residents on ways they can conserve water and will include public outreach to different groups such as business owners, school children, and home owners.

Metuchen High School Indoor Air Quality

The renovation of the Metuchen High School created significant amounts of dust and particulates within the building. This was of concern to the Commission since the school continued to be used by students and staff during the construction. Due to concerns regarding the air quality within the school, especially with respect to levels of dust and particulates, the Metuchen Environmental Commission corresponded with the Board of Education on several occasions.

Commission members reviewed reports prepared by Board consultants on an initial investigation of the issue.

Based on the limited information provided, the Commission offered several preliminary recommendations:

1. outreach by the school to determine whether additional students have experienced respiratory complaints;
2. notification to all students and families of the situation and steps taken to improve it;
3. conducting all work and debris movement behind impermeable barriers;
4. obtaining comparison particulate measurements from other schools that have clean indoor air; and
5. using that comparison data as performance criteria to measure the effectiveness of particulate control measures.

The Commission was most concerned regarding the Board's decision not to follow procedures recommended by the United States Environmental Protection Agency to protect indoor air quality during school renovations. Only one of five Commission recommendations was implemented by the contractor and this was done after the majority of the demolition was complete. The Commission remains concerned that similar construction activities be more closely monitored in the future and that procedures be put in place to ensure that this occurs.

Edgar Pool Parking Lot Trees

The Environmental Commission, with input from the Shade Tree Commission and assistance from the Department of Public Works and Metuchen Cub Scout Pack 15, planted a small island of trees in the Borough parking lot between the Edgar School athletic field and the municipal pool at the Earth Day event on Saturday April 23, 2005. The purpose was to replace some of the many mature shade trees that once shaded the parking lot. As recently as the mid-1990s, almost the entire parking area was at least partially shaded. Unfortunately, automobile parking and driving immediately around the trees caused soil compaction that damaged roots and killed the trees.

The trees are configured in an "island" to maintain an area of loose soil around the base of all the trees and to facilitate watering, weeding, and mulching. The layout reduces any adverse impact upon traffic flow or parking availability. When the trees are mature, they will provide welcome shade to cars parked in the southern area of the lot near the pool. As we reach the third anniversary of this tree planting, all but two of the original trees survive.

Maintenance of the trees has required periodic weeding and mulching, watering during extended hot and dry weather, planting more saplings, and picking up litter during the Earth Day events in 2006 and 2007. Around the time of those Earth Day events, the Department of Public Works delivered and spread wood chip mulch and pulled weeds in the entire area. The Department of Public Works also has assisted by realigning concrete tire stops around the tree island and along the grass edges of the parking lot. The purpose of the tire stops is to deter parking against the trees and on the lawns during the summer. Volunteers, including Environmental Commission members, Cub Scouts from Pack 15 and off-shift teenage pool employees, have kept the trees watered each summer, picked up litter, and pruned the growing trees.

Our next volunteer tree planting event will take place along the northern edge of the parking lot outside the athletic field fence scheduled as an Arbor Day event for Friday, April 25, 2008 at 4 p.m. This event will be sponsored by the Shade Tree Commission and the Environmental Commission, with assistance from the Department of Public Works and Cub Scout Pack 15.

Dismal Swamp

Several attempts were made to utilize local volunteers to monitor conditions at the Dismal Swamp. These efforts met with limited success. As an alternative, an Eagle Scout project to clean up and improve the entrance to the area was approved and completed. The kiosk at the entrance was repaired; much litter and debris removed; and, fresh woodchips were added to the trails. Routine and on going maintenance of the Dismal Swamp area is required. In 2008, the Commission hopes to encourage the Department of Public Works to add Dismal Swamp to its list of locations to visit twice yearly. The Commission will continue to monitor Edison's efforts to preserve and promote their portion of the swamp with an eye toward future "connections" between the two parcels or with an expanded Greenway.

Dog Park

The Commission monitored attempts made in other surrounding municipalities to establish or maintain off leash dog parks. Some progress has been made in Edison to site such a facility. The former CIC site is one property that has potential to include a dog run. The Commission's efforts were supported by Edison Wetlands Association.

For the first time, dogs walked in the annual Winter Festival Parade sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce. The dogs will return in 2008 to join the Memorial Day and Winter Festival Parades. Information regarding these events will be distributed at the annual rabies clinic in May and will be posted on the website.

Tree Farm

The Environmental Commission investigated the feasibility of planting and maintaining a small number of trees at a tree farm site within the Borough. The purpose was to reduce tree purchase costs, increase the number of trees available for planting, and combat global warming. The initial plan to plant seedlings on Borough owned property was abandoned when the Department of Public Works decided that the pumping station site was unsuitable. Since the Edgar Middle School curriculum includes trees, science teachers were contacted regarding the feasibility of adding a tree farm concept. The idea was well received and further discussed with the administrators of the school. Outstanding issues include identifying an appropriate location, approval by both the Borough and the Board of Education, and maintenance of any site selected. This concept will be revisited when plans for the tree plantings for the parking lot are more firmly established.

Open Space

The Commission conducted some initial research into the ownership, tax payment status, maintenance, and zoning of several open space parcels within the Borough. A potential extension to the Greenway would allow pedestrian access from Metuchen to these high amenity places in the northwestern corner of the town. We will continue to monitor the status of these parcels and intend to invite the Mayor and Council to tour the area.

Global Warming

The Commission began discussing global warming in an attempt to develop an action agenda for the town on this issue. For example, the Commission began discussions regarding the installation of additional bicycle racks in the downtown area. These efforts are likely to become part of the publicity efforts to be undertaken by the Commission.

Planning Board

The Commission's Liaison with the Planning Board provided periodic updates on projects within the Borough. Of note and discussion were issues associated with locating dry cleaning businesses near daycare providers. Concerns regarding adequate parking, tree planting and lighting regarding upcoming projects were routinely discussed almost always to mutual satisfaction.

Publicity

An article written by a Commission member appeared in the Spring/Summer issue (#12) of the Metuchen Messenger. The article provided tips on how to reduce your water bill. Articles on topics such as recycling, electric bill reduction, and combating global warming are planned for 2008.

Discussions and planning for participation in the Country Fair were begun. This event is sponsored by the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce. The Commission's booth would provide information on topics of interest as well as promote worthy projects to encourage public support.