

# Borough of Metuchen Environmental Commission 2008 Annual Report

## Thomas Park Pond

A flier focusing on non-point source pollution was distributed on Earth Day to homeowners living near the pond. The flyer included recommendations about lawn care, car washing and related activities that may impact the water quality of the pond. The Metuchen High School Environmental Club participated in some water quality sampling at the pond. In the coming year, the Commission hopes to have a volunteer take samples on a monthly basis.

Several meetings were attended by a New Jersey Watershed Ambassador seeking partnerships with likeminded organizations such as the Commission. Several viable ideas, such as a workshop on being a river friendly resident, have been discussed and we look forward to continuing this collaboration.

## Greenway and Open Space

Commission members continue to attend monthly meetings of the Middlesex Greenway Coalition to keep up to date on issues surrounding the Greenway. The Coalition anticipates the county moving forward on construction this year. The Commission wrote to the NJ Department of Transportation to express concerns regarding their plan for the reconstruction of the Lake Avenue Bridge over the Greenway.

On Earth Day, Commission members, the Mayor and some members of the Borough Council toured several potential land acquisitions along the Greenway extension, including the Woodbrook Pond property. At that time, various ways that the town could proceed, both in extending the Greenway and preserving the undeveloped land, were discussed. The elected officials expressed interest in exploring what could be done to protect this valuable open space parcel. The Commission investigated ownership and tax status issues on several plots in the general vicinity of the potential Greenway extension, including Woodbrook Pond, for possible inclusion in the Borough's open space inventory at some time in the future.

A poster regarding the Greenway extension was presented at the Country Fair in October. Commission members spoke with interested citizens about the potential extension of the Greenway to the Dismal Swamp.

## Dismal Swamp

During 2008 arrangements were made with the Department of Public Works to conduct periodic inspections of the entrance to Dismal Swamp and to perform general maintenance if needed. Copies of the Dismal Swamp brochures were distributed at the annual country fair, and a number of inquiries were answered from the public regarding access to the area and the presence of plant

and wildlife species. The brochure, photographs and additional information were installed in the kiosk located at the entrance to the Dismal Swamp trail. The brochure was also added as a link to the website. On Earth Day, a large contingent of volunteers removed litter and debris at the site. The Mayor and members of the Borough Council also visited at that time.

Toward the end of the year, the State Legislature took up the issue of preserving the swamp by initiating dialogue between the three municipalities that have areas of the swamp within their borders. A regional land use commission to oversee the swamp was proposed. Most recently, Commission members attended a Borough Council meeting to express support for a plan to create, through legislative action in Trenton, an intercommunity coordinating council to oversee the protection of the Dismal Swamp.

### Dog Park

The Commission continued to monitor efforts in surrounding municipalities to establish or maintain off leash dog parks. A successful collaboration with Edison resulted in that Township's acquisition of the former CIC property with development plans that include the establishment of an off leash dog park. This has enormous potential for Metuchen residents as the property is located along the border between the two municipalities.

Information regarding the dog walk in the Memorial Day Parade was distributed at the annual rabies clinic in May, posted on the website, and fliers were distributed at dog friendly establishments in town. Seventeen dogs participated. Unfortunately, inclement weather led to the cancellation of the Winter Festival Parade in which dogs were also scheduled to march.

### Edgar Pool Parking Lot Trees and Tree Farm

The Environmental Commission accepted 6 trees and shrubs donated by Home Depot. These were planted in the circle at Edgar School as part of Arbor Day festivities. Commission members undertook a rigorous watering regime to keep the trees and shrubs viable over the summer. Only one small bush was lost. There are plans to replace it in 2009. This is the second tree planting undertaken by the Commission. The trees and shrubs planted in 2005 near the entrance to the Municipal Pool are doing well. Volunteers routinely weed, mulch, water, prune and pick up litter at this site.

Also in celebration of Arbor Day, Commission members provided a great deal of assistance to the Shade Tree Commission in planting many large trees along the fence at the perimeter of the Edgar School playing field. Cub Scout Pack 15, the Department of Public Works and approximately 100 attendees also participated in the effort. The location of each tree was determined by a Commission member using the Global Positioning System. Each tree was photographed, measured and identified by species. This information was provided to science teachers at Edgar School for inclusion in the curriculum. Students will monitor the growth and development of the trees from year to year. A Commission member distributed over 200 energy efficient light bulbs and nature books for free to those in attendance.

The Shade Tree Commission's Community Forestry Management Plan was approved by the New Jersey Forest Service. The plan includes the possibility of establishing a Tree Farm in the future, a concept that the Environmental Commission strongly supports. The Environmental Commission looks forward to continued collaboration with both the Shade Tree Commission and the Department of Public Works to develop an overall maintenance and improvement plan for the pool parking lot, which, due to the continued loss of mature trees, remains in need of additional plantings.

Of particular concern this year and for the coming year is the improper pruning of trees by contractors hired by Public Service. Some of the work is far more damaging than necessary and may result in unsafe trees being created. The members would like more dialogue with the Shade Tree Commission on this issue.

### Global Warming

The Chamber of Commerce donated \$250 for the purchase of a bike rack to be installed in the downtown area. Unfortunately, difficulties have been encountered in the selection of a location. The Commission will work more closely with local businesses, the police department and the borough's planner and zoning officer to ascertain where bike racks can be installed. Members remain excited at the possibility of installing bike racks that are also works of art.

With assistance from the Commission, the Borough successfully applied for and received approval to conduct an Energy Audit. The audit is designed to identify potential energy and cost saving measures that could be taken on three municipally owned buildings.

### Planning Board

The liaison to the Planning Board has worked to facilitate communication and collaboration between the Environmental Commission and the Planning Board so that issues concerning the protection of the environment are appropriately addressed and considered by the Planning Board as it reviews applications for development. Although all development applications, small or large, are reviewed and monitored for potential environmental issues, the Environmental Commission was particularly active with regard to the Renaissance project at the old supermarket site, the Suburban Sports Land project (old Borough Motors site), the proposed redevelopment of the Oakite site, and the condominium project on Amboy Avenue as these are all large scale developments and, as such, have multifaceted environmental concerns.

Currently, the Planning Board and Environmental Commission are working together and along with the Shade Tree Commission and the Borough Administrator to develop a means of earmarking funds collected from developers for monies owed toward the replacement of trees. Additionally, the Environmental Commission has been discussing biking as an environmentally friendly form of transportation and is working with the Planning Board to request that safe and adequate bike lanes and bike racks are added to the town's transit grid and landscape.

## Recycling

Flyers regarding electronics recycling were distributed in conjunction with this year's town wide garage sales in an effort to reduce the disposal of televisions, computers and similar items in the waste stream. DPW provided pick up services after the garage sales for any unsold items to encourage recycling rather than disposal.

A representative from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection attended a Commission meeting and provided valuable information regarding improving recycling. Playing fields, Main Street, and schools were identified as particularly important locations to increase recycling efforts.

As a result of the recycling display at the Commission's booth in the Country Fair, a presentation was made to the Mayor and Council regarding trends in recycling with a particular emphasis on cost savings that could be realized by the Borough from increased recycling and avoidance of solid waste disposal fees. The Mayor and Council expressed an interest in publicizing this issue to borough residents.

## Publicity

Country Fair – The Environmental Commission celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary by sponsoring a booth at the Country Fair. Three themes were selected. These were recycling, preservation and protection of the Woodbrook Pond property, maintenance of Tommy's Pond and tree plantings.

Metuchen Messenger – Articles appeared in this publication on ways to save money on heating, air-conditioning and water bills.

Edison Environmental Commission – The new Edison Environmental Commission, through their Council Liaison, requested guidance and assistance from the Metuchen Environmental Commission. Two representatives were selected to work with our neighbor on areas of mutual interest.