

BOROUGH of METUCHEN
Environmental Commission
Minutes of the April 21, 2010 Regular Meeting

A meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission was held on Wednesday, April 21, 2010 at 7 p.m. at Borough Hall. Present were: Council Liaison Will Waldron; Mark Herzberg, Chair; Pat Donahue; Ann Sardone; Steve Toth; Tom Rudel; and Brian Weeks. Absent were: Arline Zatz, Kathy Busch and Mike Vissichelli.

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE

Two editions of the DEP bulletin were received; there was nothing of immediate interest to the Commission.

OLD BUSINESS

Energy Fair: Discussion of Energy Fair with the Borough's Earth Day event, on Sat. April 24 at the Senior Center. The Energy Fair will run from noon to 1:30 p.m., after the traditional morning cleanup activities.

We will have four and possibly five speakers, as well as informational table presentations by those speakers as well as tow others. They include: 1) welcome remarks by Council President Pete Cammarano; 2) an overview of various incentives for energy efficiency and renewable energy by a representative of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities' Clean Energy Program (not yet confirmed); 3) home energy audits and upgrades by Randy and Scott Schless of Quality Air Specialists, Inc. of South Plainfield; 4) residential solar energy (photovoltaic) systems by John Ragan of entech group, Inc. of Denville; and 5) a case study of a successful residential photovoltaic system in Metuchen by borough resident Dave Vaccari, who is also a professor of engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology. In addition, See-More Appliances will provide information on Energy Star-rated appliances; and Daniel Lahey of Viridian Energy will provide information on purchasing 20% renewable electricity from this new entrant into the New Jersey market. Brian Weeks will coordinate as master of ceremonies.

Energy Audits: The Borough has decided to replace the very old and inefficient boiler at the DPW building. The Borough and the Board of Education have not yet decided which of the other energy-saving measures to implement from among those recommended in their recent energy audits by Steve Winter Associates. The primary concerns involve the cost, cost-effectiveness and financing mechanism for each of these measures.

According to the energy audits, however, a number of these measures (such as the latest high-efficiency lighting) should pay for themselves within a few years, even at current energy prices and without any financial incentives.

Middlesex Greenway: Middlesex County reportedly has received from its consultant complete bid package documents for construction of the Greenway from Middlesex Avenue (near the former Cryan's site) east to Crows Mill Road. The County reportedly will use these bid packages to publish notice of a request for proposals for construction in the near future.

The County continues to discuss with Conrail acquiring the Greenway extension from Middlesex Avenue west to South Plainfield. Reportedly Conrail has offered to sell the County ownership of the section from Middlesex Avenue west to Forest Avenue and an easement to the section from Forest Avenue west to South Plainfield.

Discussion of the plan for the Greenway extension, prepared with a grant from ANJEC and significant input from the public. Borough planner Jim Constantine has presented the plan to the Planning Board. Needed are a presentation to the Borough Council and reports to the County and ANJEC. Mark Herzberg volunteered to reach out to Jim again about organizing the presentation and reports.

Global Warming: No report.

Planning Board: No report.

Open Space: No report.

Dog Park: No report.

Edgar School / Borough Pool parking lot trees: Discussion of possibly including weeding the "tree island" during the Earth Day morning events.

Tree farm: Discussion of the many trees lost in the borough over the past couple of months. Many trees were knocked down or broken by the March wind and rain storms; and contractors have carried out several clear cuts through the borough: all along the northeast corridor railroad line and along several utility rights of way. Discussion of whether the Borough should organize an extensive community tree-planting effort in appropriate open spaces to try to offset this significant loss of trees.

Ann Sardone volunteered to look into the terms of easements and other deed restrictions along the railroad and utility lines to identify terms relevant to cutting and planting trees.

Tom Rudel volunteered to advise Fred Hall of DPW of numerous broken or leaning that seem to require removal for safety reasons.

NEW BUSINESS

Recycling: Discussion of falling borough recycling rates, and possible causes and solutions. Pat Donahue presented statistics sent to her by Fred Hall of DPW. Over the past ten years the total volume of both solid waste and recycled materials handled by Borough DPW each year has gradually fallen. The combined total weight of these solid waste materials generated each year has fallen from almost 10,000 tons in the late 1990s to just over 9,000 tons today.

Unfortunately, the percentage of those solid waste materials that is recycled has fallen significantly. The recycling rate in the late 1990s was approx. 55%; by 2009 that rate had fallen to only 46%. Of the materials recycled by the Borough, the recycling rate fell the most for all grades of paper and cardboard. The rate for “commingled” bottles and cans, and for metals, rose. The rates for leaves, grass, and brush and limbs remained almost flat.

That means that the Borough is sending to Edgeboro, the county landfill, an additional approx. 800 tons of solid waste per year.

At the prevailing “tipping fee” rate of approx. \$50 per ton, Borough taxpayers paid an additional approx. \$40,000 last year to dump materials that could have been recycled had the Borough maintained its recycling over the past ten years.

These short-term costs are in addition to the long-term costs and environmental benefits of recycling.

The main cause, of course, is individuals’ choosing not to separate materials that the Borough recycles from materials that the Borough does not recycle. Possible causes include automated pickup of large garbage containers and a lack of enforcement.

Discussion of periodic enforcement, with the main sanction to tag and leave garbage containers that include recyclables; a competition between neighborhoods for the most-improved recycling rate; and more public education. Other measures that could improve rates include placing a container for recyclables next to each solid waste container on the streets, in schools and other Borough buildings, and in Borough and school playing fields and parks.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9 p.m. The next meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission will take place on May 19, 2010 at 7 p.m. at Borough Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Weeks