

BOROUGH of METUCHEN
Environmental Commission
Minutes of the October 20, 2010 Regular Meeting

A meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission was held on Wednesday, October 20, 2010 at 7 p.m. at Borough Hall. Present were: Council Liaison Will Waldron; Mark Herzberg, Chair; Pat Donahue; Steve Toth; Arline Zatz, and Brian Weeks. Absent were: Kathy Busch, Tom Rudel, Ann Sardone and Mike Vissichelli. Guest resident attendee Joe Schaffer, who is interested in energy efficiency and renewable energy issues.

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

CORRESPONDENCE

Two editions of the NJ DEP bulletin were received; the only item of interest to the Commission was a 9/15/10 notice of an application to the DEP for a NJPDES stormwater general permit by the Suburban Square redevelopment project on Central Avenue.

OLD BUSINESS

Thomas Park Pond: Discussion of the pump for the well under the pond. The pump can be used to replenish the pond level with groundwater during dry spells such as this past summer. The pump has not been used for this purpose for some time, and a question arose as to its maintenance and reliability.

Planning Board: No report.

Dismal Swamp: No report.

Middlesex Greenway: Discussion of the Commission's booth at the Metuchen Country Fair on Sat. Oct. 2. Participants reed that many visitors to the well-attended Country Fair dropped by the booth to discuss the Middlesex Greenway and energy conservation. The Greenway presentation was particularly popular, with many asking when construction will begin on the first segment east toward Edison and Woodbridge and much interest in the plan for the Greenway extension west toward the Dismal Swamp.

On Mon. Oct. 4 Borough planner Jim Constantine presented the Greenway Extension Plan to the Borough Council. Attendees included members of the Environmental Commission, community members and Kerry Butch, a representative of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions ("ANJEC"). ANJEC provided the grant to fund development of the plan. Kerry spoke in support of the plan and the project. The plan was received supportively by the Borough Council. Mark will followup with ANJEC as to whether the Borough must file any more reports on the plan with ANJEC.

On Thurs. Oct. 7 members of the Environmental Commission traveled to the Middlesex County Freeholders meeting in New Brunswick to witness the award of the contract to begin construction of the first segment the Middlesex Greenway. Several community groups spoke in favor of the project, including the Greenway Coalition, Edison Wetlands and Mark Herzberg, Chair of the Metuchen Environmental Commission.

Dog Park: No report.

Recycling: Discussion of the falling amount of materials now recycled in Metuchen, and possible causes and solutions. Pat Donahue said she will request updated information from DPW to determine whether this trend has changed since her report to the Environmental Commission and Borough Council in April 2010.

In April, Pat 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. The Borough’s recent decision to discontinue pickup of grass clippings and instead to discard these with other solid waste may have reduced the recycling rate further.

Compared with the 1990s, 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 rate 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, and more public education. As a measure to increase recycling, the Borough has placed recycling containers near school playing fields and parks, and placed several recycling containers near solid waste containers on downtown streets. It is unknown whether this has helped increase the recycling rate.

Edgar School and Pool parking lot trees: Brian plans to prune the trees and plant some new trees and bushes on Election Day, Tues. Nov. 2. He invited Commission members to join him. He will circulate an e-mail with details closer to the date.

Open Space: No report.

Global Warming: No report.

Energy Audits: The Direct Install program of the State Office of Clean Energy reviewed the energy audits conducted for the Borough by Steve Winter Associates, and prepared a Scope of Work on each Borough building. Those Scopes of Work identified energy-saving measures that could be implemented in several Borough buildings and government and public utility incentives to pay 60% of the costs. These measures include, among other things, replacing old lighting with the latest high-efficiency lighting.

Implementing all of those measures would cost the Borough about \$52,000 but save each year about \$37,000 in energy costs. With a payback period on the investment of less than 1.5 years at current energy prices, implementing these measures would be very cost-effective. The Environmental Commission unanimously passed a resolution recommending that the Borough Council accept and implement all the energy-saving measures set forth in the Direct Install Scopes of Work.

The Borough also has applied for \$20,000 in federal stimulus funds for energy conservation measures, which could pay for a portion of these measures, or additional energy-saving measures. The Board of Education also has conducted energy audits and has discussed them with the Direct Install program. The Borough and the Board of Education have not yet decided which energy-saving measures to implement.

The Borough has retained Steve Gabel, an experienced professional energy consultant, to assist the Borough in its investigation of appropriate solar photovoltaic installations on Borough and Board of Education property. Significant government incentives are available at this time to defray the costs of such systems to either the Borough or a private vendor. If a private vendor were to install the system, the Borough could enter into a long-term power purchase agreement to purchase the solar electricity at a reduced price for the life of the solar panels. Mr. Gabel's expertise is to assist the Borough in understanding the issues and identifying the most cost-effective measures.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m. The next meeting of the Metuchen Environmental Commission will take place on Wed. Nov. 17, 2010 at 7 p.m. at Borough Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Weeks