

WWT ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

October 10, 2024

The October 2024 meeting of the WWT Environmental Commission was held on Thursday, October 10, 2024 via Zoom with Ephraim Buhks calling the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Pursuant to the Sunshine Law, a notice of this meeting's date, time, place and agenda was mailed to the news media, posted on the Township bulletin board, and filed with the Municipal Clerk.

ROLL CALL

Members: E. Buhks; E. Gordon; S. Parratt; I. Singh; L. Katz;
Liaison: F. Guzik Advisor: D. Parris Council Liaison: Andrea Mandel
Guests: Poornima Gupta, Sustainable Jersey Energy Team

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 2024 I. Singh motioned; L. Katz seconded;
Minutes were approved as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

CONTINUING BUSINESS: Project Review/Update

Community Park Rain and Pollinator Garden – S. Parratt provided an update on the Rain and Pollinator gardens. He noted some trash that had collected around the gardens. E. Buhks suggested I. Singh reach out to some of the Boy Scouts looking for projects and discuss the potential to provide cleanup on an ongoing volunteer basis. A. Mandel inquired if permanent signs for the rain garden had been purchased as discussed at a prior meeting. F. Guzik stated that informational signs had been purchased and would discuss details with S. Parratt to determine if these could be utilized in the gardens or if alternatives need to be purchased, incorporating additional seasonal information.

Community Solar Update – L. Katz reported that he is continuing to monitor the Community Solar Project and will report any information that becomes available to EC members. A. Mandel asked for a link or information about the Community Soar project to be included on the Environmental Commission website for residents to obtain more information and confirm available projects. L. Katz volunteered to draft a small paragraph and coordinate with F. Guzik to have it included on the website. He reported no updates on the West Windsor Parking Authority solar project at this time. To address recent requests from neighbors about headlights, the Parking Authority reviewed tree maintenance issues and issued a request for bids for a fence, which are due back soon and will be reviewed with the police for safety.

Planning Board – A. Baig was unable to attend the meeting. F. Guzik reported that there were no new reports at this time due to several recent meetings having been canceled. However, scheduled for review at the next meeting on October 16, 2024 is the application for Chick Fil-A located on Route 1 and Emmons Drive, as well as a request from Market Fair for site lighting upgrades for security purposes.

Township Council Update – A. Mandel reported that the township council is continuing to work on reviewing potential improvements for bicycle and pedestrian crosswalks near several of the schools to address recent safety concerns. One specific location for a potential pedestrian safety project would be the continuation of a multi-use trail between Ginny Lane and South Post to safely gain access to the fields and possibly further connect to the Mercer County Park crewing area.

NJDEP REAL Rules – E. Buhks stated that he and A. Mandel had recently attended the ANJEC Congress where they obtained more information on NJDEP REAL (Resilient Environments and Landscapes) Rules proposal. A. Mandel reported several topics were discussed, including the latest regulations on floodplain management and the potential impact on redevelopment. The new rules will potentially increase the regulations for water runoff improvements in redevelopment projects. As the rules are still under review and in discussion, the information is only preliminary and could be subject to change.

Natural Landscape and Lawns – F. Guzik provided a brief overview of the recent emphasis on enhancing residential landscapes for pollinators by either removing lawn or discontinuing maintaining lawn and embracing a natural environment. However, there is potential for conflict and concern with the general public and adjoining property owners who may not embrace these environments for multiple reasons. The Land Use manager requested that the Planning Board Landscape Architect Consultant draft a preliminary proposal to incorporate changes in the ordinance of the township code on Nuisances. The separate section would address natural landscapes and their maintenance, where non-compliance would be deemed a nuisance and enforced by the Health Department. The EC has been asked to review the document and provide feedback. Several members expressed support but felt it may be too broad and additional specifics need to be identified and incorporated. After some discussion, several issues were raised, including the exact definition of natural landscapes, whether it would pertain to any vegetative ground cover and shrubs or limited to certain varieties, whether the main concern to be addressed is on an aesthetic level or for health and safety issues such as line of sight or animal concerns, and if existing landscaping which had not been previously deemed a nuisance would be affected. D. Parris inquired if the same landscape proximity regulations in areas that include sidewalks would be applicable where sidewalks do not exist. Several members advocated for having information on the benefits and proper maintenance of natural landscapes provided on the EC website to educate and promote community residents' knowledge on the subject. E. Buhks requested EC members continue to review the document and develop specific comments or changes to be discussed at the next EC meeting. The comments will be compiled into one document and provided as feedback to township staff for further review and incorporation into the proposed ordinance.

NEW BUSINESS:

Environmental Educational Center Update – D. Parris reported that the recent Fall Festival event held by the Historical Society at the Schenck Farmstead on October 6, 2024 had a large turnout. Approximately 90 people toured the house and the Environmental Educational Center. Wildlife taxidermy mounts currently on display highlight prehistoric food sources. Several of these are approaching the end of their loan timeframe and will need to be returned to the state museum. D. Parris is determining which items to replace and update the displays to focus on current wildlife. The barn roof was recently restored, rectifying the water damage that was being caused. He is establishing the necessary procedures to expand the educational center and utilize additional space in the barn. E. Buhks suggested utilizing volunteers from Girl and Boy Scouts to assist with setting up exhibits and projects.

Sustainable Jersey Recertification – E. Buhks reported that WWT is due for Sustainable Jersey recertification in the spring of 2025 and will strive to obtain silver level status again. P. Gupta introduced herself as a member of the Sustainable Jersey Energy Team and a resident of West Windsor. She offered to assist the EC with energy and water conservation actions for their application. One suggestion she offered is utilizing the NJ Local Government Energy Audit (LGEA) Program, which performs free energy audits for municipalities, state colleges and universities, and eligible non-profits to evaluate current facilities and help identify energy conservation measures and provide guidance toward potential rebates and incentives for implementation. E. Buhks invited her to join the Green Team and thanked her for her anticipated assistance in the recertification process. F. Guzik will gather information and tools utilized by D. Dobromilsky in prior year recertification processes and reach out to EC members for assistance in completing the current application.

Science News Discussion – E. Buhks shared that Princeton University professor John Hopfield was announced as a recipient of the 2024 Nobel Prize in physics for foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks. Professor Hopfield will be recognized at a press conference and reception at the university on October 11, 2024. E. Buhks encouraged other EC members to share information or articles on local science and environmental topics.

There being no further business, S. Parratt motioned to adjourn the meeting seconded by I. Singh.

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Tomaro, Administrative Secretary
WWT Environmental Commission