

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: April 15, 2015.

Chairman Penrose being absent, Vice-Chairman Rebmann led the flag salute to open the meeting.

ROLL CALL: All other commission members were present.

The commission voted to approve minutes of March meeting.

Ms. George reported that the township would get 1500 seedlings from NJ Department of Environmental Protection from the state's post Hurricane Sandy reforestation program. Ms. George will pick up the seedlings on Friday at 9am at the designation collection point, the Cape May County MUA facility at Woodbine. Ms. George also informed the commission that she'd been asked to assist the Borough of Stone Harbor to plant trees as part of its dune restoration program.

A question was asked about the type(s) of trees Dennis Township would be getting and Ms. George advised that the state would not provide that information to participating communities nor could participants request specific species.

The state will provide literature on what will be handed out, how to plant, and subsequent care of planted trees. Ms. George indicated that she would review the material for clarity and utility for residents participating in the program.

The first seedling giveaway is scheduled for Saturday, April 18 at the Old School House Museum.

Next on the agenda was the commission's first Litter Pick-Up, scheduled for Sunday, April 19. Volunteers will gather at the school on Hagan Road and will proceed to collect litter along that road up to the intersection at Kings Highway.

Commission members discussed various aspects of the event.

Mr. Rosenthal indicated that volunteers from the county MUA will participate, along with the MUA's recycling mascot. Ms. Leatherwood indicated that the Dennis Township School principal had signed off on promoting the event for student involvement and she said that everybody should know about it. She added that the commission should consider participating in next year's School Health Fair which could present an ideal forum for promoting events of this kind.

Ms. Leatherwood indicated that members of the school's Make a Difference Club will participate but added that lower numbers would reflect that it's a "tough time of year" for schools, given the number of competing events and the interruption of Spring Break.

Discussing promotion of the event, members talked about the different media that have been used to get the word out to the public, including Facebook, the township and commission web sites, posters placed in local stores and facilities, and local newspapers.

Mr. Rebmann indicated that posters have been posted at township post offices and municipal buildings. Ms. George will double check that the recreation center had received a flyer. Ms. Leatherwood indicated that Facebook postings have drawn notice, particularly noting that Hope Township has been regularly checking out our Facebook page.

The more we can offer the community, the more they will come out, she added. Mr. Rosenthal said that people from MUA had been checking in and complimented the site. He recommended keeping it active as the word is spreading.

A commission member pointed out that Clean Communities grant money has been used to pay for materials for events like this. Mr. Rebmann acknowledged that he only became aware of that fact after considerable planning had already gone into the event and Americorps Watershed Ambassador Jeff Brennan had already offered to provide materials.

“Clean Communities is (Committeeman) Don Tozer’s department,” Rebmann said. Recreation Director Kim Herron is the coordinator of the program. Mr. Rebmann suggested inviting her to meet with the commission.

More discussion followed about how volunteers would separate trash from recyclables. Mr. Rebmann supported Mr. Hoff’s idea of having collection cans on the back of the pick-up truck for bottles and cans. Ms. George suggested that there might be a problem getting people to run back and forth to the truck. She added that Public Works is expecting separated bags.

Since Mr. Brennan was unable to attend the meeting, commission did not know if he’d be providing different colored bags for trash and recyclables so the question was set aside until further information could be obtained.

Moving on to other business, the commission discussed its first work date at the township garden. Mr. McManus suggested Sunday afternoon, April 26 to get started. He offered a few suggestions including moving benches to the garden. Mr. Rebmann pointed out that two benches currently at the museum could be relocated and the township had okayed the move. Mr. McManus also recommended delineating paths and said he had red flags that will accomplish this. Another job that could be done on April 26 is digging a frog pond which was included on the original plan for the garden. The pond would be located toward the rear of the garden, the idea being to pull people into the garden.

Mr. Hoff suggested cutting back dead vegetation at the garden and commission members agreed to include this as part of the initial work to be done.

Mr. Rebmann asked about mulching the paths and Mr. McManus suggested that that might be done after the initial work was finished.

Mr. McManus also told the commission that Dennisville Girl Scouts (Troop Leader Roberta Nuss) wanted to return to the museum to plant a butterfly garden. The troop had

worked last summer, weeding and planting at the museum. According to Mr. McManus, the girls intend to purchase native plants to place at the museum.

In other business, Mr. Hoff discussed salt water intrusion at Dennis Creek. He referred to an article printed in a local newspaper about a meeting with Senator Jeff Van Drew, attended by representatives from bayside communities in Cape May and Cumberland Counties, apparently except for Dennis Township.

No one on the commission was aware of such a meeting. Ms. Salimbene from township committee indicated that that body was not aware of such a meeting and she agreed that the township should participate as saltwater intrusion in a community serviced by private wells, is a very serious issue.

Josh Babbish spoke during the public segment of the meeting. He'd been referred to the commission by Ms. Salimbene.

Mr. Babbish was concerned with issues on sustainable living and what bodies like DTEC are doing to encourage their communities to live more in harmony with nature. He stressed a need for lifestyle changes and urged to commission to reach out to the public to communicate the environmental risks entailed in persisting in the mass consumption behaviors that mark our society.

Examples of steps people can take include raising animals and vegetables locally and suggested that government entities can offer tax incentives for individuals who dedicate their land to such endeavors. He also touched on negatives, the proliferation of GMO foods, and how the use of pesticides has polluted air, water, soil.

Ms. Salimbene interjected that two well-known chain stores no longer sell plants that are treated with pesticides that have been determined to kill bees.

Mr. Babbish attributed our unwillingness to change bad habits even for health reasons to lack of good information and challenged bodies like this commission to provide better information for the public they serve.

Ms. Leatherwood, a professional educator, pointed out that people want to do the right things and will do so once they've been properly informed.

"You've come to the right place to start that process."

Ms. George agreed that it's the small steps, taken at local level, that eventually create change.

The commission broached one idea for future consideration: plan and create a community vegetable garden, an educational project focusing on local vegetables, along the lines of the municipal plant garden in process.

"Back to basics," Mr. Hoff added. "This GMO stuff is causing health issues."

Encouraging Mr. Babbish to continue his own efforts, members of the commission suggested that he reach out to other county environmental commissions as well as ANJEC and local “green teams”

There being no other business or bills to pay, Mr. Rebnmann adjourned the meeting.