

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: January 28, 2015.

Reorganization meeting held at 5:30 p.m. at the municipal building.

Chairman Bob Penrose led the flag salute to open the meeting.

Township Committee member Lisa Salimbene swore in reappointee Cindy Leatherwood. Committee member Al DiCicco performed similar honors for reappointees Alma George and Chris Castor.

Robert Penrose was reappointed commission chairman. Ray Rebmann was renamed vice-chairman.

ROLL CALL: All commission members were present except for Sue Slotterback who had previously notified Mr. Rebmann that she would be away.

The commission voted to approve the minutes of the December meeting and Mr. Rebmann will contact the webmaster to have those minutes posted to the township website for public consumption. Members also approved the 2015 meeting schedule with monthly meetings on the third Wednesday of the month at the municipal building, with the exception of meetings from June through September which will be held at the Old School House Museum. Mr. Rebmann will so inform the Township Clerk and webmaster.

Ms. George discussed obtaining tree seedlings from Department of Environmental Protection under the state's Tree Recovery Program. She will inform the commission as soon as the 2015 program gets underway, possibly in February.

Mr. Rebmann told members that he is preparing an annual accomplishment report for 2014. One, geared strictly to tree-related activities, will be sent to DEP Community Forestry Program. The second report which covers all commission efforts for the past year, goes to the local governing body. Rebmann requested input from members. Ms. George has already offered input which will be added to the final report.

Mr. Castor discussed his initial efforts developing a mission statement for the commission. He read a working draft and asked for comments and suggestions for revisions. Castor is also a member of a subcommittee exploring options for enhancing communications within the commission and with the community at large. Specifically, the subcommittee is looking into technology options and has been examining the possibility of creating a website for the DTEC.

Related to this, Ms. Leatherwood suggested that each member create a gmail account, this technology being superior to regular email in that it allows users to interface on

documents sent to members (such as requests for Agenda items for future meetings). Such accounts are free and easy to set up, she replied when asked.

A discussion about email, public access, and OPRA rules followed.

Mr. DiCicco pointed out the difference between using email to communicate information about meeting agendas (acceptable) and engaging in discussion/decision making via email (not acceptable). The commission agreed to invite Township Solicitor Jeff April to its next meeting to explain the nuances of OPRA and how they apply to the commission.

Ms. Leatherwood reminded members that she is trying to arrange permission to use the Dennis Township School computer lab for the purposes of hosting a public “technology night” that would include introducing the public to the commission and to the Facebook page she has developed.

This led to additional discussion about creating a website for the commission. Mr. DiCicco noted that the township website could provide a link for the commission to use. Mr. Rosenthal pointed out that the existing Facebook page could suffice for a website.

Ms. Leatherwood reported that there has been considerable interest shown in the Facebook page, particularly from ANJEC and other community environmental commissions.

“This part of our community outreach,” she said, adding that Facebook activity has already generated student interest.

Ms. Leatherwood said that Facebook could be included in the community training at the school during the Community Awareness Day event she is organizing. As an example of the educational value of the technology, she pointed to a recent Facebook entry, showing a sequence of photos of creatively utilized recycled objects. She suggested using Facebook as the vehicle for conducting a community survey for the commission to learn what issues are most important to Dennis Township residents.

Regarding a website, commission members asked about ease of navigation and whether a site separate from the township’s would serve the commission better.

Mr. Rebmann suggested inviting Tom Laughlin (township website manager) to the February meeting to discuss the commission’s options.

On the subject of Community Awareness Day, Ms. Leatherwood, described a multi-phase event including the aforementioned computer training as well as a tree planting. Members seemed receptive to combining technology with hands-on activities.

Mr. Rebmann asked Ms. Leatherwood to write down her ideas for the event so the commission can deliberate and, once agreed upon a course of action, designate specific tasks to individual members.

Mr. Castor will continue working on the mission statement, which he will present at the next meeting.

Mr. Hoff offered a list of potential goals for the commission to pursue in 2015. These include: seeking grants, commenting on site plans before the Land Use Board, providing information at public hearings and events, organizing clean-ups.

Mr. Rebmann proposed a Clean Community clean-up litter pick-up, sponsored by DTEC, along Hagen Road. The commission was receptive to the idea and agreed to a clean-up in mid-April. Rebmann will develop the idea more fully and present it at the next meeting.

Ms. George and Mr. Rosenthal followed next with motions to approve renewing commission memberships for 2015 in ANJEC and the NJ Shade Tree Federation.

Regarding ANJEC, Mr. Rebmann reminded the commission that he has a standing invitation to Jody Carerra from that organization to attend a meeting to tell members what ANJEC has to offer for DTEC. Given that two other speakers are being asked to February's meeting, Rebmann will invite her to attend in March.

Mr. Rosenthal informed the committee about the Sustainable New Jersey program. It has been in effect at the municipal level for five years. This year it is being expanded to schools, he said. Dennis Township is already involved as a municipality.

The program concerns environmental issues such as sustainable agriculture and recycling and offers grants to applicants interested in pursuing projects, with a education component, related to these areas.

Ms. George raised the question of the commission's annual budget when the vote was taken to approve renewal dues for the two memberships noted above. Mr. DiCicco said that \$2000 will be available (more than enough to pay both dues).

Ms. George also distributed time sheets for members to use in keeping track of their volunteer hours devoted for 2015.

Mr. Rebmann reminded members about the historical/significant tree survey that he'd mentioned at December's meeting. He has organized photographs from a book on the subject and hopes to break down the survey into communities with individual members assigned to individual members. The survey is a requirement of the Community Forestry Plan and should be completed in 2015. Mr. DiCicco advised listing the survey on the township website to make private property owners aware that they may be contacted. The commission will also develop an official letter to give residents whose property may contain trees relevant to the project.

The commission's Community Forestry Plan for the next five years is nearing completion. The subcommittee assigned the task has been reviewing, updating, refining, and formatting the plan which should be ready to submit in the near future. Ms George, Mr. Rosenthal, and Mr. Rebmann will review the edited plan before submitting it for review by the full commission prior to submitting it to the DEP. This could possibly occur before the April meeting.

There being no other business or discussion, Mr. Penrose closed the meeting.

