

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: March 18, 2015.

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

ROLL CALL: All commission members except Sue Slotterback were present.

The commission voted to approve minutes January and February meetings.

Americorps Watershed Ambassador Jeff Brennan was guest. He'd been referred to the commission by member Brad Rosenthal. After briefly explaining his program, Jeff joined a discussion about the commission's upcoming litter pick-up. Americorps partners with organizations on local environmental projects and as part of his involvement Mr. Brennan will offer a watershed presentation at a gathering after the work is completed.

Mr. Brennan remained at the meeting until the commission discussion later about the April 19 event.

Township webmaster Tom Laughlin was in attendance to answer questions about ongoing changes to the commission's web and Facebook pages. Ms. George commended Mr. Laughlin on the fine job he's done on getting the DTEC.Dennistwp.org up and running. Unfortunately the wifi was not available to view it live. Instead, copies of the webpages were provided; a review of those pages was discussed. Ms. George asked about removing meeting minutes from the web site for years 2010 through 2012. In addition, Mr. Laughlin answered questions from Ms. Leatherwood about procedures for getting items posted on the site.

Ms. Leatherwood pointed out that the sites' appearance has generated considerable community interest. To help coordinate the flow of information, any information to be posted on the web site will be forwarded to the chairman or vice-chairman who will then communicate with the webmaster.

Ms. Leatherwood asked members to submit environmental links to add to the web site. Mr. Rebmann will contact Mr. Laughlin to make that request. Ms. Leatherwood also suggested using the web page to ask community assistance with cataloguing the township's "historically significant" trees, a project the commission will be undertaking in 2015-16.

Ms. George talked about the seedling distribution. She told the commission that the seedlings should be distributed quickly. While there's no specific list of what trees and shrubs the township will get they should be labeled and have planting information. Ms. George said that the commission had requested 2000 seedlings and pick-up will be Friday, April 17 at the Cape May County MUA facility in Woodbine.

The commission discussed possible venues for getting the seedlings out to the public and agreed to conduct a distribution at the Old Schoolhouse Museum on Saturday, April 18th 9 am to 1 pm followed by another distribution at the "Let's Pick It Up In Dennis Day!" on Sunday, April 19th at 1 pm. Ms. Leatherwood suggested a third event, a dance Friday night April 17th at the Academy Road School. Ms. Leatherwood will be in attendance. It was suggested that Ms. Leatherwood promote the April 18th and 19th events since

distributing the seedlings indoor at the dance could pose problems. Mr. Penrose suggested seeing what interest there might be at the school for the idea.

Mr. Hoff asked about how many seedlings will be given to each person ~~asking~~. Five was the suggested amount by the State.

Ms. George will take care of the seedlings until they are distributed.

Ms. Leatherwood also moved to table the Community Day event for the time being citing the Commissions' plate being full with involvement in the "Let's Pick It Up In Dennis Day!" litter pick-up and seedling distribution.

The commission was agreeable but would still like to organize a program at the school focused on technology in the near future.

Ms. Leatherwood told the commission that she will be participating in a Health Fair on March 27 and planned to distribute environmental information, particularly about composting.

Mr. McManus told the commission that he'd heard from JoAnn Sopchak from the Tech School and she informed him that she'd be unable to participate in work at the municipal garden this year. He pointed out that he had a copy of the Ms. Slotterback's original drawing of the municipal garden which will be very helpful in moving forward. Ms. George will ensure additional copies are stored in the DTEC office. Mr. McManus pointed out that there's a lot of work that should be done in the next month. *All hands on deck!*

"I went there today," he said. "The path we cut last year is over grown. It needs to be cut back." He also noted that the original plans allowed for benches and a pond water source.

He and Mr. Rebmann had spoken to Mr. DiCicco about moving one or two benches from the museum parking lot to the garden and there appears to be no problem with this. Ms. George suggested that the commission needed to reach a "happy medium" for the municipal garden. While it is important to promote planting native species as well as creating native habitats, it has to be manageable and attractive to the general public.

The commission agreed that new garden plantings must consist of plants suited to the area. The garden can't look overgrown.

The commission agreed that since this is intended to be a public demonstration garden, it can't be left to be *totally* natural in the sense of being untended.

"If you let it go, it will go through succession and eventually revert to natural habitat," Mr. Caster added. "You have to interface with it."

There was discussion about whether to install a "manmade pond". A decision will be made later after work has progressed. There was also discussion about state designation of "natural gardens" or "backyard native habitat garden". Mr. Rebmann asked how such a designation benefits the township. It was explained that there is an educational component in the project that encourages residents to utilize native plantings as much as practicable.

“We can do a few things this year and call it Phase I,” Mr. McManus, a Master Gardener, suggested. He said that he will remain in contact with Ms. Sopchak and possibly involve her in 2016.

Mr. McManus added that he and Mr. Rebmann will visit with former commission member Gordon Engel who was involved in the original planning for the garden. They will visit his home garden which could serve as a model for the type of project the commission is contemplating.

The general consensus of the members was that we should again cut back the paths, determine what plants are remaining and where we need to replant or change plantings. The benches should be moved to appropriate locations within the municipal garden.

The commission agreed to an ultimate deadline of April 17 for registration for "Let's Pick It Up In Dennis Day!". Mr. Rebmann next asked commission members to develop a list of specific assignments for the event.

Ms. George is working on a flyer which she will send to the committee liaison for review after which it will be distributed to appropriate individuals, groups, and sites. The flyer will also mention the seedling giveaway.

Ms. Leatherwood is the school contact. She will promote the event at local schools and develop a list of students/parents/staff who will participate. Ms. Leatherwood will also promote the event on Facebook. Mr. Rebmann will develop a press release and contact the media and township committee. Mr. Brennan requested a copy of the release which he will also use to promote the event under his program.

Mr. Brennan indicated his program can provide supplies such as bags, trash pickers, and reflective vests. The commission will try to let him know about quantities by April 1.

Mr. DiCicco will notify the state police and Ms. George will contact Public Works.

Since there will be separation of trash from recyclables, questions were raised about having two colors of bags.

Mr. Caster and Mr. McManus will provide pick-up trucks to transport litter to public works complex. Mr. Caster will contact the Gem store to order post event refreshments once a count has been obtained.

Mr. Hoff mentioned ongoing problems with one particular item of “litter”: the free samples periodically distributed curbside by a local newspaper. Mr. Caster suggested taking a photo of this to send to the paper. Mr. Rebmann agreed that such a photo “op” could be used to lobby the paper to discontinue the practice and the commission agreed to add this to the event.

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