

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: May 20, 2015.

Chairman Penrose led the flag salute to open the meeting.

ROLL CALL: All other commission members were present.

The commission voted to approve minutes of April meeting.

Commission members thanked guest Jeff Brennan, NJ Watershed Ambassador, for his help and participation during the commission-sponsored April 26 litter pick-up. Mr. Rebmann has submitted a formal thank-you letter to Mr. Brennan's supervisor at NJDEP.

Next item of correspondence discussed was an email from Eldora resident David Ennis regarding "rumble strips" that have been installed by NJ DOT along Route 47. Mr. Ennis is seeking the commission's assistance to address a noise issue arising from the proximity of the strips to his home. The purpose of the strips is to alert motorists that they are crossing lanes into oncoming traffic and thus prevent accidents from head-on collisions. However, the noise has created a hardship for Mr. Ennis, whose home is near the road.

Mr. Rosenthal commented that noise from the strips is annoying but the strips represent a positive approach by the NJDOT to address the traffic accident issue. More accidents typically occur in road sections that are curved.

Mr. Penrose suggested that federal guidelines governing the strips allow for omitting them in certain places along roads. He added that the commission would need to perform its own research before committing itself to a position.

South Dennis resident Joan Berkey, who also lives along Route 47, asked to address the commission on this issue. She indicated that she has also been negatively impacted by the noise emanating from rumble strips along the section of road in front of her home, a section that is a passing zone and experiences considerable activity.

"I hear noise all the time," she said.

Mr. Rebmann asked if she'd discussed the issue with neighbors with the possibility of developing a petition

Ms. Berkey has already contacted the NJ DOT and NJ State Senator Jeff Van Drew but, to date has gotten no satisfaction in the matter. She agreed that the intent of the strip is good, but causes noise disruption for those living along affected roads. Ms. Berkey lives in a home that is listed on both the state and national registers for historic homes. Mr. Caster said that the vibrations caused by vehicles crossing the strips might affect older homes. Mr. Rebmann suggested that the status of her home might qualify for an exception for relief. Ms. Berkey will explore that avenue.

Mr. Penrose asked if there have been any cases in which a resident has successfully challenged to have a rumble strip removed. Ms. Leatherwood, who has already begun to

look into the issue, said that studies have been conducted and, in some instances, the strips have been filled in to reduce noise impact.

Ms. George asked about the noise decibel levels and suggested that the Cape May County Health Department has a decibel meter to measure volume. She recommended that Ms. Berkey contact that agency.

While no formal action was taken by the commission, members agreed to conduct research with the possibility of communicating in the future with NJ DOT concerning the issue.

Mr. Rebmann read a second communication, from Roberta Nuss, Dennisville Girl Scout leader. Ms. Nuss' troop wants to install a butterfly garden at the Old School House Museum. The commission endorsed the idea and will communicate with Ms. Nuss to offer its assistance.

The troop had helped clean up the museum garden last summer and Mr. McManus added that the troop would like to plant native vegetation to attract butterflies this year.

Next on the agenda, Mr. Caster reported on his recent attendance, on behalf of the commission, at a workshop on septic systems presented by ANJEC. In addition to providing considerable information on septic and water quality issues he collected during the seminar, Mr. Caster presented a summary of the day's event.

Mr. Caster reported that presenters agreed that traditional on-site septic systems can be more efficient than mass systems, provided they are properly maintained. He recommended the ANJEC web site power point presentation for a clear explanation of how to maintain an efficient on-site system. Ms. Leatherwood indicated that she will try to place the power point on the commission's Facebook page.

Mr. Caster offered a detailed summary of how septic works in handling solids, black water, and living bacteria that breaks it all down

Mr. DiCicco asked if there was any discussion about recommended lot sizes for on-site systems, adding that smaller "grandfathered" lots might become a problem for the township. Commission members agreed, citing several examples with which individual members are familiar. Ms. George asked how the lot size issue was covered in the Master Plan, recalling a three acre lot size requirement.

Mr. Penrose asked if a faulty septic field can be "restarted". Mr. Caster said that it had to be "dried out" before that can be done.

For Pinelands, the lot size recommended is 3.2 acres. Mr. Caster added that the cost for a new traditional system is \$8-13,000. He added that, for existing systems, regular pumping is imperative to maintain the health of the system. DEP says it should be pumped every 3-5 years. A professional speaking at the seminar recommended every two years, according to Mr. Caster.

He added that the cost of on-site vs sewer over a lifetime is comparable with the former being more environmentally “benign”.

Mr. Caster offered some definite “don’t” regarding septic use including not using it to dispose of food scraps or grease. Grease especially clogs septic because it becomes suspended and eventually solidifies, becoming “water proof”. He added that synthetic clothing fibers are also clogging drains.

Ms. Slotterback emphasized the importance of separating potentially reusable grey water from wastewater. Mr. Caster indicated that would involve a separate system with separate costs.

Ms. George mentioned problems with nitrates at Magnolia Lake resulting in a proliferation of water lilies. Mr. DiCicco noted that the problem is township-wide concern. Ms. George added that the commission should consider organizing a community outreach in the fall to discuss septic and related issues for property owners.

Ms. Leatherwood agreed, noting that the school is the best target audience. She suggested the Pride Committee could be involved in arranging a program at a school event like Parents Night or the Health Fair, that would include septic and a variety of other issues of concern, including trees.

Ms. Salimbene added that in the fall, Back to School Night is a big event.

Ms. Leatherwood also specifically cited the recent litter pick-up along Hagen Road, noting that significant percentage of the trash collected was empty alcohol containers. She cited a concern in the school and community about underage drinking and suggested that data about the litter could be used by a group like the Municipal Alliance in its efforts to curb underage consumption.

Ms. Leatherwood stressed the need to become involved with the school.

“Any time the school has a function, we should have informational flyers to hand out,” she said.

Mr. Rebmann expressed concern about timing how and when to interact with the school. He asked about scheduling and how to arrange for the commission to become a part of future school functions.

Mr. Penrose said that he would discuss this along with other topics when he meets with School Superintendent Miller later this summer.

Ms. George next asked about Clean Communities Program saying that 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. The commission agreed and Mr. Rebmann will extend an invitation for the June meeting.

Moving on to other business, the commission discussed its next work date at the township garden. Mr. McManus suggested Sunday afternoon, May 31. He reported that two benches had been located at the front of the garden. These need to be moved back to the pond that commission members dug during the first work session in April. Also at that session, Mr. McManus delineated paths with red flags and along with Mr. Hoff, Mr. Rebmann and Alicia Rebmann cut back and raked dead vegetation at the garden.

Mr. Rebmann asked about the paths and Mr. McManus suggested that wood chips could be spread on the paths after the initial work was finished. Mr. Rebmann will contact Public Works after the May 31 work session.

Mr. McManus also asked for more rocks for the pond bottom. Mr. Caster said he would contact Bohm’s Sod Farm to get rocks.

The Community Forestry Plan subcommittee reported that, except for a few small touches, its work is finished and the plan will be submitted to the full commission for review before the June meeting. The mayor must sign it before it can be submitted to the appropriate office at the DEP. There was some question of whether the full township committee has to vote on the plan and Ms. Salimbene indicated she would find out. Mr. Caster asked what requirements were used in developing the plan.

Ms. George noted that the plan must be approved by DEP by December 31, 2015.

In other business, Mr. Caster cited concerns with the road project ongoing along Sea Isle Boulevard. The road is being raised four feet. He noted that there is no erosion stopping system in place and was worried that marsh habitat might be impacted.

Mr. Rosenthal said that Dale Foster (County Engineer) should be looking into that since the road is a county project. He added that there’s presently a work stoppage because of nesting ospreys. Mr. Brennan said that he would also do some research since the question raised involved water quality.

Ms. Salimbene addressed the commission about the recent spraying for carpenter bees at the municipal buildings and recreation center.

She indicated that although the bees are “harmless” the public has concerns. So in response the committee authorized that the dugout areas and other buildings at the recreation center be sprayed.

Several commission members voiced concerns about this, suggesting that there are organic remedies that would not require the use of chemicals. Mr. Penrose added that using treated wood seems to deter the bees. Mr. McManus said that there are traps available to catch the bees. The traps are simple to build.

Ms. Leatherwood suggested that this would be a good cooperative project for the commission to undertake with local scouts.

Ms. George reminded the commission that the township has an Integrated Pest Management Plan and wondered who decided to spray.

Ms. Salimbene replied that there were so many complaints from the public that the township decided to use an exterminator. Ms. Leatherwood observed that as a coach, she's seen youngsters become upset by the bees. She added that as far as she knew, the bees do sting. Ms. George stressed that in the future the commission should be consulted before such an action is taken.

The commission agreed to develop a flyer to educate the public about the benefits of bees as well as the relative harmlessness of carpenter bees.

Last item to be discussed was a wrap-up of the commission's seedling giveaway. Ms. George announced that all 1500 seedlings had been distributed, including a two day giveaway at the township schools and a Saturday at the museum.

Suggestions for improving upon that performance included a giveaway at the opening day for baseball at the recreation center, an idea that was agreed to assuming the DEP distributes the seedlings in time to organize.

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