

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: September 16, 2015.

Regularly scheduled meeting held at 5:30 p.m. at Dennis Township Municipal Building.

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

ROLL CALL: All present

The committee voted to approve the minutes of the September meeting and Mr. Rebmann will contact the webmaster to have those minutes posted to the township website for public consumption.

Mr. Rebmann mentioned correspondence from The NJ Shade Tree regarding its 90th annual conference October 23-24, to be held in Atlantic City. Ms. George, who has previously attended conferences explained how attendance earned continuing education credits for commission members and municipal employees and helped the township maintain compliance with the NJ Shade Tree Act.

Thus far, commission members Ms. George, Mr. Penrose, Mr. Rosenthal, and Public Works Supervisor Vern Champion are core trained.

Two people minimum must attend to obtain credits. An elected official or municipal employee can also attend. Mr. Penrose, Mr. Rebmann, Mr. Castor, and Ms George expressed interest in attending and have completed application forms. Mr. Rebmann will contact Mr. Champion to see if he is interested as well. Cost to attend is \$110 per attendee. Mr. Rebmann will submit applications to CFO Clarke once they've all been completed.

Township Committeeman Al DiCicco informed the commission that member Gerry McManus would be presented with a 4H special service award at the governing body's October 6 meeting. Mr. DiCicco invited commission members to attend in support

Mr. Rebmann reported that applicant Wawa postponed its appearance at the recent Land Use Board meeting so he had nothing new to report under that category.

Mr. McManus updated the commission on progress at the natural garden at the municipal complex. The pond is thriving and the paths have now been completely lined with wood chips. Next step is to identify individual plant species and create appropriate signage. Mr. McManus and Ms. Slotterback will work on gathering identification information.

Mr. McManus added that three volunteers now have keys to the garden watering system. Mr. Rebmann and two township residents who regularly visit the site will help maintain the pond's water level.

Guest speaker for the meeting was Ralph Cooper representing the Green Team from Upper Township. In response to Mr. Rebmann's question, Mr. Cooper explained how the Green Team operates, facilitating partnerships between various community groups interested in working on particular environmental projects.

Green Team is part of Sustainable Jersey from which it derives its resources. Mr. Cooper explained that Green Team projects involve environment, local communities, and the economy.

He cited several examples of projects such as developing an ordinance that encourages local businesses to promote customers bringing their own bags to shop. Another project is the community garden through which locals grow produce that was distributed to needy families via local food banks.

Mr. Cooper also mentioned a concept he called "Sustainable Schools". He was informed by Ms Leatherwood that the program has not been implemented at Dennis schools but she is in the process of forming an after school "environmental club" and would be interested in interacting with the Sustainable Schools program if and when the club is operational. Mr. Cooper added that there is grant money available from Sustainable Jersey" for qualified projects

Under new business, Ms. Leatherwood responded to the item on the August meeting agenda concerning developing a commission newsletter. In lieu of (or in addition to) a newsletter, she proposed developing a Facebook page

"We should utilize Twitter, Instagram and other available communications technologies to get our message out," she advised the commission. Ms Leatherwood offered to work on the idea in the near future and will report at the October commission meeting. She will also initially reach out to fellow commissioners for content ideas

Rebmann added the possibility of developing a newsletter to be released periodically (1-2 times per year) for the benefit of those members of the community who do not utilize electronic communications technology.

Ms George, Chairman Penrose, and Township Assistant Public Works Supervisor Vern Champion were approved to attend the New Jersey Shade Tree Federation training session on October 25 in Cherry Hill. Mr. Rebmann had prepared and submitted vouchers for the three (subsequently approved). This training will enable the township to remain qualified as compliant with guidelines established by the Federation.

With an eye to the commission's budgetary constraints, Mr. Penrose suggested checking with the township to see if payment for Mr. Champion's training could be made from the public works account.

Moving on to ongoing efforts to restore the natural garden at the municipal complex, Mr. Rebmann reported that Tuckahoe Nurseries has offered to donate plants. Mr. Rebmann is

developing a list of plants suggested by commission members and will forward this to Tuckahoe before the end of September.

Mr. McManus suggested setting a “work day” to clear areas in the garden for planting. Mr. Penrose asked if soil tests would be needed. Mr. McManus indicated that testing wouldn’t be necessary. He further indicated that any mulching/planting being considered should be done before November. He asked if Jo Ann Sopchak (Horticulture teacher at Cape May Tech) is “still interested” in helping with the garden. Mr. Rebmann said that she is scheduled to appear at the October 15 commission meeting.

The commission agreed to discuss the matter in greater detail at its next meeting when chairman Penrose will be available for input.

Reviewing ongoing work at the gardens, Mr. McManus told the commission that work at the museum garden is finished, adding that Roberta Nuss and the Girl Scouts will be returning to create a butterfly garden there.

Mr. McManus also reviewed work already completed at the municipal garden and Mr. Rebmann showed the commission laminated signs that will be posted at the entrance. Mr. McManus noted that mulching should take place in the near future. Letters have been sent to area businesses soliciting donations of plants for the garden, with September being the suggested deadline for replying. Also, JoAnn Sopchak, Horticulture teacher at the Technical High School is scheduled to attend the September commission meeting to discuss her class’s participation in future work at the garden.

Ms. Salimbene described the situation with natural habitat gardens at the schools and difficulties sustaining interest in maintaining them due to the retirement of staff members originally involved.

Ms. Slotterback, who has extensive experience working with schools on such projects, pointed out that at least two teachers should be involved in order for such projects to succeed. Supportive administrators are also essential.

“It’s an outdoor classroom,” she said. “It’s not there just to make the grounds look nicer.”

Ms. Slotterback expressed a willingness to conduct training at the Academy Road School if any staff members there express interest. Ms. Salimbene recommended contacting Amanda Unkle and Marni McCann, teacher advisors for Middle School Peer Leaders, for possible help at both schools and at the municipal garden. The commission agreed to reach out to them after the new school year has gotten under way.

Mr. DiCicco suggested establishing a commission subcommittee to deal with the school on this and a number of issues. Mr. Rebmann will submit the idea to Mr. Penrose and list it on the agenda for next meeting.

In other business, Ms George reminded the commission that the township's Forestry Plan expires this year. Mr. Rosenthal indicated that it might not be sufficient to comply with state requirements to simply update the current plan as Mr. Rebmann had suggested at an earlier meeting.

"Guidelines change. You really need to have someone who's informed on any new developments."

The commission has until the end of 2015 to submit its new plan. After some discussion, the commission agreed to let Mr. Rebmann review and revise the current plan, with commission member input and submit it with the idea of learning in the review process what areas need correction/elaboration. If that initial effort doesn't succeed, there would be sufficient time to secure the services of a professional.

Those services, however, would require an outlay of as much as \$3000.

Mr. DiCicco agreed that township committee might look more favorably upon incurring such a cost if the commission can demonstrate that it had first attempted a less costly in-house effort.

Ms. George also reminded commissioners that, as part of certification requirements, is attendance at certified core training programs. In addition to herself, representing DTEC, either a township employee or public official must participate.

Mr. DiCicco asked about cost of attending. Ms. George replied that the total should be \$300-320 for three people. Mr. Rebmann will contact CFO Glenn Clarke regarding the availability of funds.

The training takes place October 24-25 in Cherry Hill. In addition to Ms. George, Mr. DiCicco will contact Vernon Champion (Assistant Supervisor of Public Works) who had reported at an earlier commission meeting that he might be able to attend.

In the public segment of the meeting Lisa Salimbene discussed a new habitat restoration project in the works at the Hagen Road School in the large field adjacent to the school. Working with officials from Fish and Wildlife and obtaining donations of materials from local businesses, volunteers are using a two acre tract to plant native species and set up bird boxes.

The commission commended the project and Mr. Rebmann will write a letter to Township Committee expressing the commission's support.