

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: February 24, 2016.

Meeting held at 5:30 p.m. at the municipal building.

Chairman Bob Penrose and member Alma George were absent due to illness. Members Hoff, Rosenthal, and Slotterback signed their oaths for reappointment and Mr. Hoff took his oath from Ms. Salimbene.

Mr. Rebmann led the flag salute to open the meeting.

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

Gail Fisher, Cape May County Coordinator of NJ Bluebird Society addressed the commission about encouraging an increase in bluebird boxes on township properties. The society has been promoting the cause since 2011.

Ms. Fisher stressed that suitable habitat is essential for bluebirds and it's better to have a series of boxes, set at least 100 yards apart along a cleared trail or the edge of an open field. Fewer is better than more when it comes to bluebird boxes. The society offers informational guidelines on how to build proper boxes complete with predator guards to protect nests from ground predators like squirrels. Even the size of the nest entry hole is important (to keep out starlings).

Additionally, bluebird boxes require closer monitoring than other types of man-made bird nests to make certain invasive species don't take over nests. House wrens poke holes in eggs and kill male bluebirds, for example. NJ Bluebird Society offers a service to help interested property owners plan and set up boxes.

Mr. Rebmann asked if the municipal garden would constitute a suitable site and was told that there was insufficient open space. Ms. Fisher cited suitable nesting locations such as the field next to the school on Hagen Road or Jalma Farms in Ocean View.

Ms. Leatherwood asked Ms. Fisher to attend Community Awareness Day on April 9.

Mr. Hoff asked how predators are kept out of nests. Ms. Fisher explained that baffles are placed on poles and waxed to make them slippery for climbing critters.

Ms. Fisher referred anyone interested on more "how to" information to the following websites: www.nabluebirdsociety.org and www.njbluebirdsociety.org. Boxes are available for purchase from the society.

Mr. Rebmann indicated that the commission will post the information on its Facebook page and website.

Next up was Meredith Brown from American Littoral Society, a return guest, speaking about water conservation.

A major reason we need to establish conservation practices, she said, is water use allocation in New Jersey. The state is allowing more water draws than supplies can be replenished. The State Water Master Plan, intended to address such questions, has been in a “limbo” status since 1996. Mr. Rebmann expressed dismay that there has been no action on the plan and wanted to know who is responsible for the situation. He wanted to know who makes water allocations and what agency people can contact to get movement on releasing a water master plan. Ms. Brown said she would find out and supply that information to the commission.

Citing some specific figures, Ms. Brown told the commission that people extract 60 million gallons per day from Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer, the township’s source for drinking water.

Mr. McManus and Mr. Hoff discussed water allocations and conservation methods for farmers. Ms. Brown mentioned drip irrigation as an effective way for farmers to save water. She referred anyone interested to the website www.sjwatersavers.org.

She also discussed water saving methods for homeowners and put in a plug for a rain barrel workshop in Upper Township coming up on May 18 that will include a “fix a leak” demo from Lowe’s. Typical water use is 100 gallons per person per day.

Some water saving tips she mentioned include low flow shower heads and faucet aerators (7600 gallons per year saved per faucet) and Energy Savers toilets (1.3vs 3-5 gallons per flush). She also talked about greywater reuse and lawn watering.

Mr. Castor noted that using a garbage disposal is one of the worst devices to use with septic systems. He recommended composting vegetable scraps.

Ms. Brown also discussed using timer sprinklers for watering lawns but only when ground is dry. She also advised leaving grass clippings to conserve moisture. Mr. Castor agreed, adding that mower blades should be raised while one heavy weekly watering when ground is dry is sufficient.

Ms. Brown next talked about conservation for businesses. She mentioned golf courses as one example of a business that could benefit a number of ways (environmental and financial) from conservation practices. Mr. Castor suggested the newly opened Slack Tide Brewery as a business that would possibly benefit. Ms. Brown asked the commission to refer any interested businesses to the society.

She described a new certification program for businesses interested in conserving water during operations. The free program rewards participants with positive publicity for their efforts.

Mr. Hoff asked about salt water intrusion into groundwater supplies. Mr. Castor agreed, noting the increase of standing dead trees near Dennis creek and problems farmers in the Eldora area are experiencing.

Mr. Rebmann indicated that commission members (himself and Mr. Penrose) are included in future meetings on this issue being scheduled by Senator Van Drew. No dates set yet on when this group will meet. Responding to Mr. Rebmann's request for a third commission member to participate, Mr. Castor volunteered pending the dates/times of scheduled meetings.

Moving on, Mr. McManus updated the commission on conditions of township dams. We have seven dams and nine spillovers and there is considerable volume of flowing water in the township. Mr. Castor added that he'd taken photos of Beaver Dam in South Dennis. He walked along the old tracks on the bridge and learned that the flow pipes are totally blocked and the area is generally in poor shape.

Ms. Salimbene followed up on discussion about storm water pollution between Mr. Rebmann and Township Engineer Jack Gibson. Part of that discussion centered on public education and Ms. Salimbene noted that the commission can satisfy the township's education requirement by sponsoring a poster contest having the theme, "Solutions to Storm water Pollution".

The contest would be a good way to promote the efforts of the commission. Ms. Salimbene offered to do the necessary "legwork" to organize the event. Mr. Rosenthal pointed out that the DEP website has a flyer usable in such matters and this would be enough to satisfy the municipality's education requirement.

In agreeing to the contest, the commission established some general guidelines. The contest will be open to 4th grade students. Posters will employ the themes "Don't Litter" or "Keep Litter Out of Storm Drains" with posters accepted in assorted media (ink, paint, crayon, etc.) on 8 ½ by 11 paper. Three winners will be announced on Community Awareness Day (April 9). DTEC will judge the posters and pick the winners. Deadline to enter is March 21. Prizes will be determined but commission members are leaning to Wawa gift cards.

Mr. Rebmann reminded members to get in their volunteer hours sheets for 2015. The DTEC 2015 Accomplishments Report is available for public consumption on the commission website.

Mr. Hoff asked for an update on the Eileen Turner Memorial. Mr. Rebmann replied that township committee had approved the idea and the preliminary plans already submitted. The commission can now begin with specific plans. Mr. Rebmann will list the matter on the March agenda.

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

