

DENNIS TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes: August, 2016

Chairman Penrose led the flag salute and Mr. Rebmann took roll. Mr. Castor, Ms. George, and Mr. Rosenthal were absent. The commission voted to approve the June meeting minutes. There were no July meeting minutes, that meeting having been cancelled due to a power outage at the municipal complex.

Dennisville resident Don Gooch updated the commission on conditions in unoccupied properties in his community. He noted that exterior work had been started to cut grass and trim overgrown hedges but it had not been finished and sections of lawn were still 2-3 feet high. He provided photos of the properties in question. Mr. Rebmann will disseminate these to commission members as well as to Ms. Salimbene for township committee to review.

Ms. Leatherwood, who recently attended a meeting at which the issue of unkempt properties in the township was discussed, explained that there is a lengthy process to follow for anyone seeking to address such concerns as those Mr. Gooch brought to the commission's attention. The process begins with an initial contact with the township Code Enforcement officer.

After a complaint has been filed, code enforcement has to "post" the subject property. After allowing the responsible party time to respond, the township then communicates in writing with the owner of record (It was pointed out that many of the "problem" properties are bank-owned.) In many cases, after several attempts to resolve the problem at the township level, the matter is referred to the courts and a lien can be placed against the property.

"Local banks tend to be more responsive," Ms. Leatherwood pointed out.

Ms. Leatherwood added that township committee is currently developing an ordinance that would expedite the process, particularly with regards to getting a better response from bank-owners. Complicating matters is the facts that banks tend to try to sell delinquent mortgages to get them off their books, so it's not always easy to track down the most current owner right away.

This being an issue that appears to have increased in the township since the mortgage crisis of 2008, Mr. Rebmann suggested that the commission invite Dave Gonnam, code enforcement officer for the township, to address its October meeting. Commission agreed and he will send Mr. Gonnam an email extending that invitation.

Other items discussed include commission involvement in planning "events and projects" this fall. There will be a public meeting at the recreation center on September 13. The commission hopes to participate.

Ms. Leatherwood told members about a rain barrel workshop being held in Upper Township in September, organized by that community's Green Team. Commission has been invited to participate and Ms. Leatherwood has contacted the Green Team to learn more so that members can decide how to respond.

Having decided upon a site for the Eileen Turner Memorial, adjoining the municipal complex garden, the commission agreed to price signage and benches. The commission has about \$500 in its 2016 budget.

Members suggested other items including an arbor shelter that could be placed as a “gateway” to the garden. Mr. Rebmam will look into prices including contacting local artist/craftsman Chris Barry about the idea.

The commission also deliberated on the township’s grant application to Cape May County Open Space. Money will be used to extend trails at the recreation center, build a sledding hill, and create an enclosed dog park.

The commission voted to support the grant in concept but members voiced a number of concerns about different aspects of the proposal. Mr. Rebmam indicated a number of misgivings about a dog park, which he will attach in writing to the commission’s letter of support to be sent to township committee. Ms. Slotterback was concerned about the timing of any tree cutting involved in the project regarding bird migration and nesting. Mr. McManus was concerned about any additional lighting involved, indicating that current lighting at municipal properties can and should be reduced. Ms. Leatherwood considered privacy of nearby residents to the proposed dog park and expanded parking area. Several members questioned the need for any additional parking. All of these concerns will be forwarded to Jack Gibson, who is writing the grant.

Mr. Rebmam will draft a letter with the attachments to forward to township committee.

Commission also requested to see the actual grant proposal before it is submitted to the Open Space program.

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