



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044

www.veronaec.org

December 21, 2015

Dear Mayor Ryan, Mr. Cavallo and Council Members,

Please see below the 2015 Verona Environmental Commission Annual Report:

VEC Current Roster: The commission has nine members; all serve without compensation and are appointed by the Mayor. Current members include Gloria Machnowski (Chairperson), Tony Saltalamacchia (Vice-Chair), Virginia Citrano and James Loudon (Plans Review), Jessica Pearson (Treasurer), Michael Foley (Planning Board Liaison), Chris Stark, Julia Capuano (Alternate 1-VHS Liaison) and Martin Golan (Alternate 2). Kevin Ryan had been our Council Liaison since 2011.

Anti-Idling Resolution: At VEC encouragement, Verona Township adopted an Anti Idling resolution on January 20, which reinforces existing NJ State Law, prohibiting vehicle idling beyond 3 minutes while parked. It also encourages drivers to turn off their engines immediately, especially near schools. This also applies to municipally-owned vehicles. Emissions from gasoline and diesel powered vehicles contribute significantly to air pollution that can trigger asthma and other respiratory problems. Enforcing the resolution would significantly improve public health and air quality.



Earth Day Cleanup: We organized a community cleanup on April 11. About 40 people donated their time to take care of the woods adjacent to the Peckman River, helping to keep our waterways and trails safe and healthy. Volunteers included a large group of students from Verona High School and Montclair University. We removed cans, bottles, broken glass, a hot water tank from the river, wire fencing, bed springs and pipes, pulled out invasive Japanese Knotweed plants and applied mulch. The Department of Public Works provided supplies and removed the collected garbage.

Open Space Stewardship Grant: The commission installed Bat, Screech Owl and Bluebird houses along the trail behind F.N. Brown School. We also planted a dogwood tree and 40 American sweetgum saplings. The saplings were donated and the other items were purchased with grant money received from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions to restore the municipal woods. The woods had sustained substantial damage in past years due to storms and the spread of invasive plants.



Grove Park: The VEC introduced the creation of a pocket park during the Town Council Meeting on May 19. The Verona Junior Woman's Club and the Historical Society donated \$4,000 to the Verona Environmental Commission to support this initiative. The three groups joined forces to create a nature preserve and historic park in the 1.33 acre municipal lot located at 42 Grove Avenue. We cleaned the woods of years of debris. The wooded lot was restored and a sustainable nature trail was created. Park benches and signage with information about the history of the site were installed.

In the early 1800s this lot was the site of Personett's Grove, a favorite meeting place for picnics, religious meetings and Fourth of July celebrations. Grove Ave. got its name from Personett's Grove. This was later the homestead of Dr. Henry B. Whitehorne, the namesake of Verona's middle school.

The woods at 42 Grove are now home to many kinds of wildlife, including a family of foxes and wild turkeys. Vegetation includes a huge patch of skunk cabbage and jack-in-the-pulpits, native sycamore, black cherry, hickory, tulip poplar and red maple trees. The park's ribbon-cutting ceremony took place on November 21, 2015. Trees and plants will be added during the spring of 2016. Open space provides many benefits to the community. In rapidly growing urban areas, any preserved land can offer relief from congestion.

Sustainable Jersey: At VEC encouragement, Verona Township joined the program Sustainable Jersey, and achieved bronze certification. The VEC participated in Verona's 1st Green Fair on May 30th. We played the recycling game with visitors, and distributed recycling bins, barrels and native white pine tree saplings. Fair participants included Liberty Science Center, PAWS, NJ Electric Auto Association, Morgan's Farm, US Green Building Council of NJ and Essex County Master Gardeners among many others. The VEC also produced a video which is posted on-line and on VTV.



Poster Contest: The VEC conducted its 7th annual poster contest opened to all public schools in Verona in October 7th. This year's theme was sustainability. Walking or biking to school, preserving open space, composting, and buying locally are just a few ways to make Verona more sustainable. The event is aimed at supporting Walk to School Day and raise awareness for Verona's environment. We received over 200 entries and exhibited the posters at all 6 schools, at the Verona Community Center and at the Hilltop informational kiosks. The commission produced a video depicting the students' artwork and presented the video during the award ceremony at Town Hall.

Volunteer Night: The VEC participated in Verona's Volunteer Night at the Verona Community Center on December 1st. This was a wonderful opportunity to meet residents and other organizations.

Development Plans and Legislation Review: The VEC evaluated proposed development and submitted comments to the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and Board of Education related to the preservation of existing natural resources. The commission recommended adopting a Steep Slope Ordinance. Disturbing slopes increases stormwater runoff and sedimentation of streams. The steeper the slope, the greater the impact. Stormwater runoff and surface water quality are serious problems in New Jersey. The State's guidelines attempt to minimize the impacts while still allowing reasonable property development. Most towns have gotten on board with the State's recommendations, and it seems reasonable for Verona to do the same.

Social Media: The Commission maintains its website up to date, and has joined Facebook and Twitter last year, expanding opportunities to communicate with residents and increase participation, all free of cost. For more information please visit the commission's Web site at www.veronaec.org

Regards,

Gloria Machnowski
Chairperson, Verona Environmental Commission