



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044
www.veronaec.org

December 22, 2016

Dear Mayor Ryan, Mr. Cavallo and Council Members,

Please see below our annual report:

Current Roster: We have seven members plus two alternates. All members are Verona residents and serve without compensation. Mayor Kevin Ryan is our Council Liaison. Current members include Gloria Machnowski (Chairperson), Tony Saltalamacchia (Vice-Chair), Virginia Citrano, Jessica Pearson (Social Media), Sean DiBartolo (Plans Review), Martin Golan, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell (Alternate I), Walter Steinmann (Alternate II), and Michael Foley (Planning Board Liaison).

Steep Slope Ordinance: At VEC encouragement, Verona Township adopted a Steep Slope Ordinance on April 4, 2016. The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the degree of disturbance of areas of steeply sloping terrain in order to limit soil loss, erosion, excessive stormwater runoff, the degradation of surface water and to maintain the natural topography and drainage patterns of land. Disturbance of steep slopes results in accelerated erosion processes, increased flooding potential, further fragmentation of forest and habitat areas, and compromised aesthetic values. The Township Council adopted this ordinance to ensure against the adverse consequences of such disturbances.

Free Tree Giveaway: To honor Earth Day we hosted a tree seedling giveaway and community cleanup at Grove Park on April 30th. The tree giveaway was open to all New Jersey residents as part of the New Jersey Tree Recovery Campaign. Seedlings included Red Oaks, Flowering Dogwoods and Douglas fir trees. We worked with the municipal government and the Department of Environmental Protection to distribute 150 free trees with planting instructions.





Green Fair: We participated in Verona's 2nd Annual Green Fair on May 22. The VEC distributed free recycling bins and barrels to Verona residents. We played a bean bag educational game with children to teach them how to reduce climate change and its impacts. More than 65 vendors and organizations participated in this free event.

Peckman Cleanup: Our annual river and woods cleanup behind F. N. Brown Elementary School took place on June 4. The event was part of the New Jersey Clean Communities Clean Water Challenge, they provided the cleaning supplies. Community volunteers helped cleaning the river and woods, restoring the trails, and pulling out invasive plants. We removed lots of garbage, pulled out pipes, lamps, lead acid batteries, cans, bottles, plastic bags, Styrofoam cups, and a lot of of invasive Japanese knotweed. The Verona Department of Public Works removed the collected garbage.



ANJEC Award: We received an Environmental Achievement Award from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions for the project Grove Park - Nature Preserve and Historic Park, during the 43rd Annual Environmental Congress at Mercer County College on September 30. Mayor Ryan presented the award at the October 3rd Town Council meeting and thanked the VEC, the Junior Woman's Club of Verona, The Verona Historical Society, the Department of Public Works and all parties involved in this project.

Walk-Bike to School Day: Since 2009 we sponsor an annual poster contest open to Verona Public School Students Grade Kindergarten through 12. We encourage students to walk and pedal more while reminding drivers to be responsible and provide a safe environment for all. This year Verona celebrated the 20 year anniversary of Walk-Bike to School Day on October 5th. Over one hundred posters were exhibited at the schools and entered into the contest. Students and families were invited to walk and bike to school and learn more about pedestrian and bicycle safety. According to the National Center for Safe Routes to School there is a significant decline of walking and bicycling to school in the U.S. In 1969, 48 percent of children 5 to 14 years old walked or bicycled to school. In 2009, only 13 percent. We are working to change that!

Winners received \$50 dollars and a certificate from Verona Mayor at the Award Ceremony in Town Hall on November 7. During the event the VEC showed a video with a sample of the entries, currently posted on the VEC website and VTV. We noticed a significant increase on walkers and cyclists numbers, not only during Walk to School Day but in general. This is a great opportunity for Verona residents to show support for a cleaner environment, healthier habits, and pedestrian and bicyclist safety in our community.



For safety reasons the Verona Public School District only allows students to use bicycles to go to school starting at Grade 5. To make streets safer we recommend looking into the Complete Streets program and following recommendations from the New Jersey Safe Routes to School: www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/nifit/complete.shtm and www.saferoutesnj.org Streets are for everyone, rather than walking and biking less we should work together to make our streets safe for all. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Transportation released the 2016 update of the New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in November: njbikepedplan.com Some of the main goals of the master plan are to continue to move Complete Streets from policy to implementation and improve and expand the transportation infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians throughout the state.

Donations: Verona resident Kimberly Williams Manis donated \$50 to the VEC in June. The VEC encourages people to consider donating to the Commission by writing a check to the Township of Verona with "VEC Donation" in the memo line. Donations can be drop off at Town Hall, or mailed to 600 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, NJ 07044. Matt Laracy, Verona's CFO, deposits the funds into the VEC trust fund. The Township is not a 501-c-3.

Hilltop Cleanup: We participated in the November 19 cleanup with the Sustainable Verona team, the Hilltop Conservancy and numerous volunteers at the Hilltop Reservation. Volunteers helped to clean up a new restoration site. This was a family friendly event and several children participated, including boy-scouts.



Social Media: The VEC maintains its website up to date, and has joined social media, expanding opportunities to communicate and inform residents. We post articles about the environment, town events and local environmental news. We provide helpful information to town residents and free publicity for town-sponsored initiatives. Social media provides a free, immediate, interactive channel of communication where residents can express their likes and concerns and learn about important environmental matters.

Development Plans: Every year the VEC evaluates proposed development and submits comments to the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and Board of Education related to the preservation of existing natural resources. This year we submitted eight sets of comments regarding applications, site plans and supplemental materials.

Green Infrastructure: A few months ago we started working with the Township to find a suitable location for an Organic Community Garden. We are collaborating with Carolyn Rubinfeld (NJWAP Watershed Ambassador WMA 4, NJDEP), Chris Obropta (Green infrastructure professor, Rutgers), Hollie Dimuro (Rutgers) and Steve Neale to put together a proposal to implement Green Infrastructure in Verona. The group visited several locations and picked a few sites for a few projects: two possible rain gardens and bicycle racks at the Community Center and field complex, a porous pavement parking lot by the Verona Library and a cistern and community garden location behind H. B. Whitehorne Middle School. The first step is to produce an Impervious Cover Assessment and an Impervious Cover Reduction Action Plan. Approved plans could be submitted to receive grant funding.

Upcoming Events: We plan to participate in January's Volunteer Night and the Green Fair in May. We are collaborating with Cedar Grove Environmental Commission to organize a community cleanup of the West Essex Trail in April. We are also collaborating with local Life Scouts and Environmental Clubs in a few projects. We will continue the efforts to clean up and preserve Verona's Grove Park, the Peckman River and Trail in 2017.

We would like to thank Verona residents and the Township for supporting our programs and helping make Verona a more sustainable community this year. To participate in future events please contact us at VeronaEnvironmental@gmail.com - For more information please visit www.veronaec.org

Regards,

Gloria Machnowski
Chairperson, Verona Environmental Commission