



Verona Environmental Commission

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

January 9, 2019

Dear Mayor Ryan, Mr. Cavallo and Verona Council

2018 Verona Environmental Commission (VEC) Annual Report

2018 Roster: The VEC has seven members plus two alternatives, Gloria Machnowski (Chairperson), Tony Saltalamacchia (Vice-Chair), Jessica Pearson (Planning Board Liaison), Sean DiBartolo, Martin Golan, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell, Walter Steinmann (through June), Frank Ceccacci, Michael Auteri (starting June), and Timothy Kiernan (starting September). All members are Verona residents and serve without compensation. Mayor Ryan is our Council Liaison.

The following outlines our initiatives, ongoing programs as well as a compilation of policy recommendations we have made.

- 1) Clean ups and Events 2018: Throughout this year, the Commission upheld its commitment to keep Verona's open space and parks free from debris and garbage. The commission held three annual cleanup events, two special waterway cleanup events, and participated events sponsored by the Hilltop Conservancy, Verona Park Conservancy and Sustainable Verona.
 - A) March 31st: VEC members attended the Hilltop Conservancy Prisoner's Pond Forest Restoration Project and clean up event that was also cosponsored by Sustainable Verona. The event's goal was to start the removal of invasive plant species with a focus on Brush Honeysuckle. This will be an ongoing project, spearheaded by David Freschi that will eventuate with the reforestation of the hilltop.
 - B) April 14th: the VEC teamed up with the Verona Park Conservancy and participated by cleaning up the Verona Lake. A large amount of debris was found and removed.
 - C) April 21st: the VEC's Annual Earth Day celebration and clean up at Grove Park where for the past 3 years, we were able to give away about 300 tree seedlings to residents of Essex County. The seedling program, run by the NJDEP New Jersey Tree Recovery Campaign may unfortunately be ending in 2019, but the commission was able to contract for 175 seedlings for our scheduled give-away this coming April.
 - D) April 29th: the VEC attended Verona Kids Rock Walk and Bike Event at the Recycling Center on Ozone Avenue. The event raised awareness for children on how the center works and why it is so important to drive less and recycle more.

- E) June 2nd: the VEC hosted its annual Peckman Trail / River Cleanup (National Trails Day - 50th anniversary). Verona Kids Rock attended and helped collect garbage and plant 50 free milkweed plants throughout the woods.
- F) September 8th: the VEC hosted a cleanup of the West Essex Trail. It also coincided with *National Day of Service*. We were joined by an entire busload of volunteer students from Montclair State University who helped collect trash and recyclable materials that were disposed of on the trail.
- G) September 22nd: the VEC led a cleanup of the waterway behind Douglas Place and Annin Flag. There was a great deal of trash behind the car wash and VEC members removed some downed trees blocking the waterway that may have led to flooding events at homes on Douglas Place
- H) October 10th: the VEC sponsored its annual Bike and Walk to School Day which included the annual Poster Contest for all students in Verona Public Schools. Each poster entry depicted green habits and living trends that are supported by the VEC. Six prizes of \$50.00 each were awarded to each individual school's most outstanding poster at the October 29th Town Council Meeting.
- I) October 13th: the VEC participated in the Verona Green Fair and Open Streets Fest. We hosted a table where we explained our mission, gave away free reusable shopping totes and asked residents to sign a pledge to stop using single- use plastic bags. We also co-hosted Verona's first Open Streets event on Gould Street.

2) Policy Recommendations 2018:

The VEC recommended that the Town Council pass ordinances or resolutions on the following:

- A) Mini cell towers Ordinance: The VEC supported the implementation of environmental impact study requirements for cell tower installation as well as the drafting an ordinance that rezones for their appropriate placement while prohibiting them in and around residential areas.
- B) Single-Use Plastic Bag Ordinance, which would ban single-use carry out plastic bags in the Township of Verona
- C) Supported a more stringent Stormwater Ordinance: due to the continued loss of open space, exacerbation of flooding and seeming lack of adherence to the basics of the State's Ordinance, the VEC recommended a stricter ordinance with lower thresholds that would trigger the Ordinance's rules.
- D) A new Tree Ordinance that would act to preserve more trees throughout the Township and on privately held properties. Currently, the ordinance, passed in 1964 only applies to undeveloped lands, of which Verona has very few left. The result has been a severe reduction throughout town of hundreds of trees which has also exacerbated local flooding during a growing number of severe storm events. A draft Ordinance was sent to the town in September 2018 for review.
- E) A new Site Plan Review Ordinance that redefines the complexities of the application process for land use boards. Currently, many applications are sent through with too little review time for community members or land use board members, and in many cases, the applications are not complete, lacking certain necessary materials for proper and complete review.
- F) The Township of Verona's Environmental Resource Inventory was drafted this year by *the Land Conservancy of NJ*. The VEC carefully reviewed the newly drafted ERI and submitted its recommendations for additional information to be included. *The Land Conservancy* was pleased with the additional input. (The ERI helps to inform land use

recommendations and future policy insofar as Verona's Master Plan reexamination and future Zoning Code updates.)

- G) Supported the Township of Verona joining Sustainable NJ Essex Alliance to collectively purchase renewable energy for its growing list of municipal members.
- H) Recommended adopting a Complete Streets Policy for the Township of Verona.
- I) Produced and promoted a press release on the confirmation of the Emerald Ash Borer in Verona with actions to take when signs of infestation are discovered.
- J) Supported a proposed Township Resolution in support of a Federal Carbon Fee/Tax.

3) Presentations, Meetings, and Actions 2018:

- A) February 22nd: the VEC led a presentation for the Verona Planning Board on our Stormwater Ordinance requirements and Land Use Board's responsibility to oversee applicant compliance. VEC Member and licensed professional engineer Sean DiBartolo led the presentation.
- B) Ongoing commitment to Sustainable NJ Schools. Anthony Saltalamacchia, VEC Vice Chairman is a member of Sustainable Verona for Schools. They meet quarterly and have introduced color coded recycling containers and have studied how to reduce waste and increase their overall recycling.
- C) February 3rd: The VEC supported Mayor Ryan's attendance of the Mayor's Climate Summit at Rutgers University.
- D) Supported the application of permeable pavement at a planned parking lot at the end of Park Place, behind HBW field. The township plans to use this area for expanded parking but has yet to decide as to the materials that will be used for paving.
- E) April 16th: Walter Steinmann presented the VEC's observations during the Verona Lake Cleanup event to the Town Council. As a formal follow up, the VEC submitted a letter to the Mayor, Town Manager, and Council in July providing our observations made during the cleanup and recommendations to be considered including the creation of a larger wetland buffer to reduce runoff and nutrients reaching the lake, solar panel aerators to help with eutrophication and algae blooms and requested lily pads to aid with oxygenation of the water. A bulk of the Commission's findings were maintenance-based.
- F) Attendance at the Essex County Environmental Commission Roundtable events. The ECEC hosts two roundtable events each year. This year the discussions focused upon ridding communities of single-use plastic, initiative for fresh food access through farmers' markets, and the utility of urban community gardens. Verona is considering joining ECEC as a full member. Martin Golan, Sarah O'Farrell and Frank Ceccacci attended.
- G) June 21st: NJ Sustainable Summit at the College of NJ. This year the Summit focused upon how our individual behavior impacts the quality of air, water, health and the economy.
- H) Attendance at Implementing Complete Streets at a Local Level conference. Councilman McEvoy, Township Engineer Mike DeCarlo and Steve Neale attended as well.
- I) Throughout 2018, the VEC reviewed 13 Site Plans, many of which had multiple re-submissions, for land development in Verona. Each plan review requires our plan review committee to research the plans and draft comments and recommendation for the land review boards that hear the applications.

4) Installations 2018:

- A) The VEC's application for the ANJEC Open Space Stewardship Grant of \$1500.00 for a rain garden was approved by ANJEC. However, the VEC had to forfeit the grant for this

year. It was decided that the sites that were chosen for the installation were either too small, did not receive enough sunlight or had hidden underground utilities that would have posed engineering issues for such installations. The VEC has decided to revisit a grant opportunity next year after conferring further with Township officials.

- B) Organic Garden. The VEC has been working on the installation of a community organic garden Near HBW's running track. After much collaboration with the Board of Education, the VEC is quite hopeful that this installation will occur in 2019.

We would like to thank Verona residents and the Township for supporting our programs and helping make Verona a more sustainable community this year. For more information please visit www.VeronaEC.org or contact us by email at veronaenvironmental@gmail.com.

Regards,



for

Anthony Saltalamacchia

Vice-Chair, Verona Environmental Commission
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