



Verona Environmental Commission

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

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on February 17, 2016 beginning at 7:30 P.M. in the 2nd floor of the Annex Building in the Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona, New Jersey.

Attendees, VEC Members: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Anthony Saltalamacchia (Vice Chairman), Virginia Citrano, James Loudon, Jessica Pearson, and Martin Golan. Bob Williams (Verona Historical Society). Shade Tree Commission Members: Bob Dickison (Chairwoman), Bob Prout (Vice Chairman), Teena Schwartz, Bob Boeck and Sandra Borland.

1. Call to order: Chairperson reads the notice of Open Public Meetings law.

2. Minutes from the January 20, 2016 meeting were approved by members after Jessica corrected a typo (funding) in section 3.

3. Plans for Grove Park (42 Grove Ave.). Gloria welcomed the Shade Tree Commission members to the meeting and gave a brief introduction about the project, stating that over a year ago the Verona Environmental Commission joined forces with the Verona Juniors and the Historical Society to create this nature preserve and historic park. The lot is owned by the township since 1975 and can only be used for municipal purposes. The commission presented the project at the May 2015 Town Council meeting and with township authorization started cleaning up the property. The lot was used as a dumping, drinking and occasional camping ground. The group removed tires, blankets, furniture, bottles, cans construction materials and rusty metal drums used to make fires. Jim Loudon created a Master Plan, that was presented to the township and neighbors. Gloria mentioned that she personally met Mr. Dickison last year to discuss the project. They walked the property together. He identified the trees that needed maintenance and gave her suggestions about the best route for the dirt trail. Gloria showed him Jim's plan and Mr. Dickison had concerns about the trees placed blocking the gravel driveway and recommended Gloria to discuss the matter with the town engineer, Mr. Helb, which she did in June 2015. Mr. Helb liked the tree placement depicted on Jim's plan. He was not concerned about the trees blocking the driveway, he liked that the trees will follow the tree line and direct public to the stone path. He suggested to plant underneath some plants to discourage people from walking between those trees. Gloria mentioned that as Chair of the VEC she needs to listen to the town engineer recommendations, Teena said that she doesn't. Jessica added that Mr. Helb also recommended installing a decorative bollard by the sidewalk. Gloria confirmed this, Mr. Helb recommended to install a bollard or two in the middle of the new walkway, by the sidewalk –if needed- to discourage drivers from parking on the property. She mentioned that after Mr. Helb's review and the town manager approval on August 2015, DPW installed park benches and signage and removed the old driveway to install the current walkway, which is not intended for vehicular traffic. The park opening took place in November. Gloria asked if the

Shade Tree Commission had any questions about Jim's plan.

Mr. Dickison stated that his main concern is being able to reach the trees in the back of the property to maintain them. He added that if the driveway was blocked by new trees and plants, a crane could not drive on the walkway to reach the trees in the back. He also stated that both, Mr. Stern and the current property owner in the property on the right side, had security problems in the past and he would not encourage adding evergreens and so many bushes where potential criminals could hide behind, posing a security risk. He recommended scaling down the number of plantings to keep the area open and safe, since there are a lot of trees already in the property and there is not a lot of room available.

Jessica disagreed with the need to drive into the property, the gravel driveway was removed and replaced by the current slate walkway, which was done after the VEC got approval on Jim's plans by the manager and then by the interim manager on August 2015, and DPW was directed to do so. Jessica stated that there is no need to drive a crane into the property to access the trees in the back. She explained that tree maintenance is done all the time by walking into properties with equipment. She gave the example of the Peckman Trail, which is behind F. N. Brown Elementary school and not accessible by road and DPW takes care of those trees by foot. She also questioned the reasonability of maintaining trees on the North side of the Grove property by driving a crane onto it's South side.

Sandra Borland, who lives near the Peckman Trail mentioned that you could drive a crane by the neighbors driveways from the back. Jessica mentioned that the Peckman river is situated behind the woods so there is no access from either side and still DPW takes care of those trees without cranes.

Mr. Dickison mentioned that he is not familiar with the Peckman Trail and he thought that it was school property. He added that a plywood sheet can be placed over the slate walkway in Grove Park to drive over, and that there was no need to plant trees making the access more difficult.

Mr. Prout mentioned that Verona Park was built with plants and bushes surrounding the benches but that style was discarded, they got rid of those bushes, and he recommended to do the same in this park.

Jessica stated that she has a problem changing the plan because it was already approved last year by two managers and now Bob wants to use it as a driveway? She added that trees can be taken care of without a crane.

Sandra asked Jessica if she was concern with the slate walkway being damaged if a tree needed maintenance. Jessica stated that her concern was allowing people to drive over a new slate walkway that was not intended for vehicles to drive over.

Teena stated that if the slate walkway was damaged the township would replace it.

Bob Prout pointed out that the Shade Tree Commission is not redesigning the park or trying to block the driveway with trees.

Jim stated that his concept added a minimal amount of trees to provide a buffer to the neighbors, but, if this was not acceptable for maintenance or security reasons, he was willing

to change it. He mentioned that the neighbors have already evergreens and bushes planted close to their houses where people could hide, if they wanted to. He explained that his plan had two evergreens Limber Pine “Vanderwolf’s Pyramid” on each side to provide a buffer. He recommended those evergreens because they are columnar and don't get too wide, and he didn't like White Pines because they grow fast and get sappy and drop branches. In addition to the four evergreens his plan shows two flowering Dogwood trees, which are small trees, that's all, 6 small trees in total and the rest was not decided yet but it was comprised of low herbaceous perennials for ornamental purposes only.

Jessica mentioned that some plants will be planted under the Dogwood tree in the center of the grass area to protect its roots, but Jim said that he wouldn't place plants there, only along the edges of the park and walkway as shown in his plan.

Virginia asked how often the Shade Tree Commission needs to work in the 42 Grove Avenue property.

Bob Prout stated that the problem is when you invite the general public into the property and that there are liability issues that must be considered. He explained the difference between South Mountain Reservation which doesn't need to be manicured like Verona Park.

Jim noted that the Commission doesn't expect a large number of people visiting the park every day, maybe a few visitors per day, or perhaps a class or a group of people attending an especial event in the park.

Gloria pointed at the tax map and showed the location of the 1.3 acre lot at 42 Grove Avenue. She explained that since the township owned the property in 1975, the whole lot was accessible to the general public and people used to walk through the property from Fairview Ave. to Grove Ave., but now only the front grass area of the lot and the short dirt trail that goes to the stream is accessible to the public. She added that there are no more cars illegally parked on the property, which was very common before this project started.

Sandra asked how long the trail is. Gloria showed the dirt trail on the map (about 200 feet long) plus the front grass area represent about 20% of the property available to the general public. The other 80% is a protected nature preserve with wetlands. Gloria explained that the VEC asked not only Mr. Dickison to take care of the hazardous trees, but also Chuck Molinaro, head of the Verona Department of Public Work and they took care of tree maintenance before DPW installed the “Trail Rules” sign at the trail head and opened the park to the general public. Gloria added that “No Trespassing” signs were placed on the sides of the trail and at the back by the stream to keep visitors on the trail and off the Nature Preserve. She added that Mr. Helb's initial recommendation was to place signs stating “Please do not disturb wildlife”, since a family of red foxes live in the area. But the VEC didn't want the public to walk off the trail and disturb the vegetation and wetlands in the back. Gloria showed a poster with pictures of the park project, including the new trail, signage, walkway and benches, and the big patches of garbage that used to cover the property before the VEC started the project.

Jim added that his plan was a concept, and not something set in stone. But he said that it was not important if they planted his recommended trees or not, the important thing, he noted, was that some nice plantings were added to the park to frame what was already there.

Gloria mentioned that the VEC acknowledges that the township trees are responsibility of the Shade Tree Commission but also pointed out that the preservation of open space provides many benefits to the community and it is part of the responsibility of the VEC. She stated that people who questions the need of Grove Park should know that it is not only valuable because it is a nature preserve, but also a historic site and she introduced Bob Williams, from the Verona Historical Society, to explain why.

Bob Williams stated that Grove Park is the only historical park in Verona. Only White Rock and part of Kid's Castle belongs to Verona and have significant historical importance. He explained that before Verona Park existed the gathering place in the community was Personett's Grove. This property was settled by the Personett Family on the mid 18th century. Their homestead stood on present-day Personette Street. Joseph Personett had a stand of trees here. During the early 19th century this was a favorite gathering place in the community for celebrations, picnics and religious gatherings. Williams added that he was concerned with the idea of heavy equipment driving up and down the property because the remains of Dr. Whitehorne's house are still in this property. He was the the third county doctor, after Dr. Stephen Personett, and he was a founder of Mountainside Hospital. Williams pointed out that archaeological ruins are very provocative because evokes images in people who visit the park. Williams added that he understands the concerns with the trees, but in other areas of Verona trees are maintained without the need of driving in with heavy equipment.

Gloria mentioned that on the left side of the stream, Dr. Whitehorne's lilly pond cement walls are still on the property, about 150 feet straight from the driveway entrance, it is a circular structure similar to a pool and she doesn't think that trucks drive over that or over the stream, and wouldn't be driving on wetlands either. Gloria showed Mr. Dickison an alternative plan with only one new tree planted on the left side. Mr. Dickison mentioned that that was not the same plan. Gloria said that it was the same plan, after Mr. Helb revisions which included leaving at least a foot buffer between the new walkway and the neighbor's property line, avoiding stepping stones on the trail head (tripping hazard), installing a bench behind the stone path, not installing a waste receptacle near neighbors, etc.

Gloria added that she understands if the Shade Tree Commission needs more room to walk into the property with equipment, straight from the sidewalk on the left side, and therefore instead of two trees, the VEC could consider the possibility to plant one tree on that side to leave more room for tree maintenance.

Teena mentioned that she like trees planted on pairs instead of just one. Jessica stated that Jim's plan was already approved by two town managers last year. Dickison mentioned that he could solve this issue in twenty minutes with Jim.

Jessica disagreed; she explained that the Verona Environmental Commission doesn't work that way, all members have a say and a vote, this was not something that two men could solve behind closed doors. Teena disagreed, she stated that it is very common for Commissions to form subcommittees to take care of matter like this one.

Bob Prout mentioned that the property looks much better now without cars parked all over the place, that the park is very nice, the VEC did a good job, and now there are only details to take care of and he has no doubt that a solution will be reached. Jim agreed and said that he

thinks that together they can compromise and find a solution. He gave Dickison his email address to arrange a meeting and discuss the specific species and planting locations.

Jim asked Bob Williams if the grass area at 42 Grove Ave. was the front lawn of Dr. Whitehorne's house, and if he knows of any particular tree that was planted there, or that people used to plant back then in their front lawns. Williams confirmed that this was in fact the front lawn of Dr. Whitehorne's house but he was not sure about what tree used to be there. It was probably a Red maple (*Acer rubrum*) or Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*) that the fire department cut down years ago when they were considering to built a fire station. Gloria recommended considering native species, as that's what the VEC usually promotes. Bob Prout agreed.

Gloria told the Shade Tree Commission members that she appreciated their attendance and their recommendations and hopefully working together this matter was going to be resolved soon to move forward.

Members of both Commissions exchanged greetings and Shade Tree Commission members left.

Teena stayed and gave commission members a brochure about a private tree preservation program from England. Gloria gave her copies of a comparison report of private tree ordinances in Essex County towns and a preliminary draft presented at a recent meeting, which the VEC recently shared with Shade Tree Commission Chair and Vice Chair.

4. Chairperson Report:

- Gloria mentioned that Julia Capuano officially resigned to the Commission; she is too busy at VHS. Martin Golan therefore was appointed from Alternate II to Alternate I. He said he was glad and members congratulated him.
- Mr. Cavallo is putting together a policy for people that want to donate money and dedicate a park bench located on municipal property. Once the policy is in place the VEC will be able to advertise the program and potentially receive more funding for Grove Park. Gloria mentioned that Nina Piccuiro recently contacted her and she is still interested on dedicating one of the benches in Grove Park to Brian Stevens.
- Gloria stated that she met with the Town Manager Cavallo and talked among other things, about the payment of the membership dues for the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions due on March 24, 2016. The annual membership is \$300 and covers 7 members. The VEC's operating budget is only \$500, nevertheless Mr. Cavallo recommended to renew the \$300 membership, and maintain the projects that the VEC usually runs every year. He mentioned that the township would find a way to help if needed. Jessica stated that she likes the fact of being part of a larger community and that she supported to renew the basic membership, but she wouldn't pay the additional \$60 workshop plan. Gloria agreed and reminded members that the membership is up to seven members and the commission has nine, and ANJEC requires to submit a current roster of the Commission members. Virginia proposed to leave out the two Commission liaisons, Mayor Ryan and Mr. Foley. All members approved, Gloria will submit the paperwork to Mr. Cavallo for approval.
- Bob Williams mentioned that he needed to leave the meeting soon, but before he wanted to talk about the land behind Green Acres and Brookdale Avenue School. The wooded area has a stream and historical significance since there are still stone walls,

pits and foundation from the old Railroad. Williams added that it would be interesting to know who owns the property since it could be a nice preserve. Gloria mentioned that a few years ago the VEC conducted a cleanup in the property with help from the Verona Juniors and community volunteers for Earth Day. Virginia will contact the tax office to find out who is the owner.

- Gloria asked members if they wanted to prepare and submit an application for the 2016 ANJEC Open Space Grants for environmental commissions up to \$1,500 due on April 1st. Jessica stated that the Commission is too busy with other projects and it would be better to apply in 2017, once there is a need for it, maybe to restore the Railroad property. Jessica asked Williams if he is willing to engage in future meetings to talk about his proposal. Williams said he is willing to participate in future projects with the VEC. Members agree on applying for the ANJEC grant in the future, not now.
- After membership approval Gloria prepared and submitted the application due on February 12 and signed by Mr. Cavallo to receive free tree seedling from the New Jersey Tree Recovery Campaign. Members approved to host the distribution event: People who seek to enrich their yards and benefit the environment can obtain free tree seedlings on Saturday, April 30 from 9 am to 11 am at Grove Park, located at 42 Grove Avenue in Verona. Offered by the Verona Environmental Commission as part of the New Jersey Tree Recovery Campaign, a project overseen by the state, all the seedlings will be native tree species, which means that in addition to providing beauty and shade, they also help support our native insects and birds. The commission is working with the municipal government and the DEP to conduct the distribution of 150 free trees in Verona. The 1' to 3' high bare root tree seedlings will come with instructions on how to store, care for, and where to plant them. The giveaway is open to all property owners. Gloria reminded members that the trees need to be picked up on Friday, April 29 from 9 am to 3 pm at the Essex County Environmental Center.
- Members approved to participate in Verona's 2nd Annual Green Fair on Saturday, May 21st from 11 am to 4 pm in the Verona Civic Center Square. Gloria talked to Chuck to confirm that he has recycling bins and barrels available for the Commission to distribute at the fair. He has about one hundred recycling bins and offered to bring some to the VEC table as well as the new recycling brochures. Members approved to provide information about the municipal recycling programs and have free recycling bins and barrels available for pick-up. The giveaway will be open to Verona residents only. Gloria will fill and send the registration form to Steve Neale.
- Chapter 16: Environmental Commission of Verona Code. Gloria read a segment with some very old dates: "Members shall serve for terms of three (3) years or until a successor is appointed and qualified, except that of the first members appointed, the terms of three (3) members shall expire on June 30, 1993, the terms of three (3) members shall expire June 30, 1994, and the term of one (1) member shall expire June 30, 1995." Virginia proposed to contact Mr. Cavallo to fix this. Members approved.

5. Vice Chairperson Report: Tony presented the VEC Revised Standing Rules pending approval as follows:

1-Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month (excluding August) at the Community Center Annex 2nd floor room.

2-In Compliance with Sunshine Law, the agenda and meeting notice are posted 48 hours in

advance on the municipal bulletin board and sent to the newspapers VCG Times and Star Ledger (Resolution No. 2016-21).

3-Members' addresses, phone numbers and emails shall be kept confidential unless members choose to make it available to the public.

4-VEC meetings are open to the public and minutes will be kept.

5-Any VEC member may suggest items for the meeting agenda, which shall include a time for comment from the general public.

6-All members shall be given a respectful hearing of their thoughts on the agenda and matters before the Commission.

7-A quorum of four members must be met for voting. All members can vote, including the Planning Board member and Alternates (when regular members are absent). The Council Liaison does not have voting power.

8-Approved minutes must be submitted to the Municipal Clerk and posted on the Commission's website.

9-The Commission will form subcommittees for site plan reviews, legislative drafting, and projects such as the Peckman and Grove Park Cleanups, Earth Day, Green Fair, Poster Contest and Resident's Night.

10-Members unable to fulfill VEC commitments attend meetings or help with projects or events shall notify the Chairperson in advance.

11-Any member absent from three consecutive meetings will be contacted by the Chairperson to determine whether the member is still interested in serving. Thereafter the matter will be referred to the Mayor.

12-All public communications presented in the Commission's name must be approved by Chair or Vice Chair. All entries to the VEC website, Facebook and Twitter must be approved by the Chair, Vice Chair or the person designated to post on behalf of the VEC.

13-Commissioners can only spend money as approved by the majority and a purchase requisition must be approved by the Town Manager. Receipts must be given to the Chairperson within 20 days of the purchase.

14-The Environmental Commission shall keep records of its meetings and activities and make an annual report to the township governing body.

15-The Standing Rules should be reviewed at the February meeting every two years. At the same meeting, the Commission shall elect a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary Webmaster and a person in charge of Social Media.

16-These rules may be suspended at any meeting by a majority vote.

Martin Golan recommended capitalizing the word Commission all through the document. Members accepted the suggestion and approved the Standing Rules.

6-Treasurer Report: Jessica presented the 2014-2015 ANJEC Grant Report, the 2015 Regular Expenditures Report and the 2015 Grove Park Donations Report. All reports were within budget and she also presented a projection of the 2016 expected expenditures. She mentioned that the VEC has a \$500 operational budget but Mr. Cavallo has made clear that Verona will help with the Commission's current programs such as paying for the annual \$300 on awards, \$50 for each of the poster contest winners from each of the six Verona Public Schools. The VEC plans to pay in 2016 from its regular operational budget \$300 in ANJEC membership, \$75 to feed volunteers at several events and cleanups, \$50 on office supplies for events, and \$100 on printing and promotional items for events; totaling \$525. Jessica said that she spoke to Mayor Ryan who explained that the VEC officially is not required to have a treasurer and the Chair is the only person allowed to sign paperwork. Jessica wanted to hand all the paperwork to Gloria but she asked her to keep her records and together they will prepare paperwork as needed.

Gloria added that the report was not easy to put together because she submitted some paperwork with the name of the event but not the specific account number, for some \$30 and the township initially assigned it to different accounts but they corrected this already. The Township has three different accounts for the VEC, which names recently changed as well. But, most importantly, the Township recently switched to a new accounting system and the VEC was able to compare its own records with the township's.

Regarding VEC account coded 90-878-000 (Junior Woman's Club and Historical Soc. \$4,000 Donations for Grove Park), the Commission thought that all was spent on park signage, benches and slate for the walkway. But the CFO confirmed that the available balance for the park is about \$ 1,300 which the Commission could use to add trees and plants to the park. Basically, there were initially \$4,235 in this account (not \$4,000), and the township didn't use this money to purchase the 2 park benches (Wabash Valley \$1,142 – 5/30/15).

The Township approved Resolution No. 272 authorizing their treasurer to pay \$300 from the Recycling Trust, \$50 to each of the 6 students that won the VEC Annual Poster Contest on 11-2-2015.

In the township new system the VEC accounts have new numbers as described here:
The old 90-878-000 (donations, Grove Park) is now called T-90-56-878
The old 60-715-308 (grants, ANJEC) is now called G-60-41-714-308 (\$41.30 available).
The old 15-374-296 (regular expenditures 2015) is now called 5-01-28-374-296
The 2016 regular expenditures account is called 6-01-28-374-296 (\$500 available).

Members were glad to hear that the Commission has some money to purchase some trees and plants for Grove Park.

7. Adjournment 9:30 pm – Next Meeting March 16th, 2016.