



## Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue  
Verona, New Jersey 07044

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on July 20, 2016 - 7:00 P.M., conference room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairperson), Jessica Pearson, Virginia Citrano, Walter Steinmann and Sean DiBartolo.

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order and reads the notice of Open Public Meetings law.
2. Minutes from the June 15, 2016 meeting were approved by all present members.
3. The Chairperson welcomes new VEC members appointed on July 11: Sean DiBartolo, Sarah Yauch O'Farell and Walter Steinmann. Mayor Ryan is on vacation and sent his congratulations to new members. The Commission's new roster is posted on the VEC's website. The township's website was infected with viruses and it's under construction. Sean pointed out that the VEC's website is fine and up to date.
4. Community Garden update. The Commission discussed possible locations. The Waste Water Plant and its greenhouses are not available. Most of the township's properties are wooded. During June's meeting Virginia proposed a grass area located at HBW Middle School, by the parking lot, near Park Place. Members agreed with this location, it is very accessible. Raised beds, water access and a fence will be needed. HBW Science teacher Mrs. Thomas is also interested on having raised beds for students. Jessica pointed out that perhaps the township would like to expand its parking lot. Some residents went to recent council meetings complaining about parking restrictions on Bloomfield Avenue. Sean mentioned that it's possible to install elevated gardens over parking lots, but it would be too costly.

The grass area in question is located in BOE property. During June's meeting Mayor Ryan agreed to talk to Mr. Cavallo and the BOE about this location. Gloria proposed an organic vegetable garden. Walter suggested to contact local restaurant owners to see if they would like to participate. Sean estimated that the area could accommodate a half acre garden and offered to visit the location and take photographs. Gloria mentioned that Christine Liarkus from the green team proposed sending a survey to residents by email to see how many people are interested to have a garden plot and volunteer at a community garden. The sample garden plot registration from the American Community Garden Association has a volunteering section asking people to also help with maintenance, construction projects, watering, etc. Each gardener is expected to help during the season with general chores.

5. Grove Park plans. The proposed flower bed for the area surrounding the historical marker

and the right border of the slate pathway will extend to the wayside sign. The Commission should wait until late August/early September to do any installation to ensure the survival of the plants. Volunteers could do the planting. Jessica stated that when she built the slate walkway with Jack the old driveway was excavated and the borders of the walkway were filled with sand. The walkway is on a small slope and the sand on from the right edge comes out with the rain. Adding plantings on that area will help control erosion. Jessica offered to donate drought tolerant perennials, which are also deer resistant plants for full sun areas: Irises, Black eyed Susans, Milkweed, Columbine and Daisy. The proposed list for purchase includes: Russian Sage, Blue Fescue and Boxwoods. Jessica noted that the flowerbed will be street-side and convenient to water with the township's truck.

Gloria showed Jessica's proposal to Suzanne Broullon, a Verona resident and master gardener who works at the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens. Suzanne agrees with the plant list, it would make a nice pollinator garden. The recently planted witch hazels bushes are not watered enough and are drought stressed. Witch hazel prefers moist, well-drained soil. Perennials need water to establish so if the town can't water with the truck, the VEC can't plant the flowerbed. If the Commission can solve the watering problem, 1 or 2 volunteers are enough to care for the plantings (weed, mulch, water management) then the list provided should be fine. Suzanne recommended cleaning up the lawn during the fall with a mix of tough grass seed and clover.

Sean asked if the Shade Tree commission will be involved and if DPW will do the maintenance. Gloria mentioned that she contacts Bob Dickison before installations and that months ago he agreed to mark a flower bed in that area. He also agreed with the proposal to plant tree saplings with volunteers in the wooded lot as long as the saplings are 30' apart to develop individually. Jessica stated that the township could easily water the park's flowerbed with the same truck that they water the flower basket in Bloomfield Avenue. She added that during the installation of the walkway at Grove Park the Commission used the electricity and water from Bill Knight's home, the neighbor. Virginia recommended to install some kind of border for the flower beds to protect plants from lawn mowers. Jessica stated that volunteers could install that border with pieces of slate recovered from the property. Gloria asked Jessica to prepare a plant estimate to present to members and town manager for approval. She added that the VEC should remove all the broken pieces of the old walkway, which are a tripping hazards. Jessica will take a look with Jack, they already started repairing the old walkway.

6. The 31<sup>st</sup> Annual International Coastal Cleanup, hosted by the NJ Clean Communities Council runs from September 17 to December 31 -they provide cleanup supplies. Gloria mentioned that the VEC was invited to participate hosting a cleanup. Virginia is not available on the 17th. Gloria asked members to let her know by email which days would work for them.

7. October 5<sup>th</sup> is the 20 Year Anniversary of Walk to School Day. The VEC celebrates the event with a poster contest and exhibits at all four Verona Public Elementary Schools, H. B. Whitehorne Middle School, and Verona High School. Students Grade K through 12 are invited to create a poster and bring it to school. Winners receive \$50 and an award certificate from Verona Mayor during an award ceremony in November. Virginia proposed to host a video contest or ask students to post on Instagram their favorite walk and tag themselves. But the VEC would need written authorization from all parents of minors appearing in videos or photographs. Sean proposed that parents upload the videos themselves. Gloria mentioned

that videos make it too complicated and parents are already too busy. Schools require embedded videos, since they can't control the advertisements or suggested videos from YouTube. Jessica said that the Commission didn't include Our Lady of the Lake in the past to keep it simple, otherwise the contest would be too big and hard to manage. Walter proposed to continue with the poster format, perhaps students could depict their favorite scene during their walk to school. Other themes include how to make Verona more walk and bike friendly, how to make streets safer and calm down traffic.

Sean suggested to use QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response Code) at certain stops for the kids to read with their cellphones. Virginia mentioned that Suzanne Broullon used QR codes in the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens to provide additional information about the plants. Gloria stated that avoiding the use of cellphones while walking or driving is part of making streets safer, so she wouldn't encourage students using cellphones while walking to school. Jessica agreed, she doesn't use QR codes either. Gloria will contact the town manager to confirm that the township will support the contest again this year.

8. Martin Golan was not able to attend the meeting. He is in California, but he'll work on the leaf blower presentation to recommend adopting an ordinance or resolution. He'll present it to the VEC during the September or October meeting. The VEC doesn't meet in August. Virginia mentioned that DPW uses leaf blowers to blow dust and sometimes they start working very early in the morning.

9- Commissioners talked about New Jersey's two largest cities, Newark and Jersey City, that opposed a proposal by the Christie administration that would bring more residential development to the Highlands, saying that it could degrade water quality in their reservoirs throughout the region. Commissioners considered the possibility to join the opposition. Verona's water will be impacted as well.

Adjournment – Next Meeting September 21, 2016.