



## Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue  
Verona, New Jersey 07044

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on September 21, 2016 - 7:00 P.M., conference room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairperson), Jessica Pearson, Sarah Yauch O'Farell, Walter Steinmann, Sean DiBartolo and Mayor Kevin Ryan. Guest: Verona resident Frank Ceccacci.

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order and reads the notice of Open Public Meetings law.

Chairperson proposed to honor a Verona student and VEC volunteer, the son of VEC member Virginia Citrano, and asked everyone to please stand for a moment of silence in memory of Vanya Citrano, who passed away on September first.

2. Minutes from the July 20, 2016 meeting were approved by all present members.

3. Community Garden update. During the May, June and July meetings Commissioners discussed possible locations for an Organic Vegetable Community Garden. The Waste Water Plant and its greenhouses were not available. Most of the township's properties are wooded. In previous meetings Virginia proposed a grass area located at HBW Middle School, by the parking lot, near Park Place and members agreed with this location, it is centrally located and very accessible.

Sean visited the location and took some pictures, he estimates that the area could accommodate a half acre garden and the Commission could cooperate with local restaurants. Raised beds, water access and a fence will be needed. Gloria mentioned that she recently observed lacrosse drills in that area, students were participating in organized training. Sarah explained that she is familiar with the lacrosse drills since her kids practice this sport and she added that this shouldn't be a problem since there is plenty of room for kids to practice in other areas. She added that Eagle Scouts could be interested in the project as well.

HBW Science teacher Mrs. Thomas is also interested on having raised beds for students. Mayor Ryan looked at the site with Mr. Cavallo and had an informal conversation about it. He also mentioned the idea of looking at other properties identified by the Landmark Commission's study, to consider having a community garden in a historical property, similar to the Morgan Farm.

Mayor Ryan recommended Gloria to contact Mr. Dionisio and see whether or not he is receptive to this proposal. He added that the BOE doesn't have the budget for this type of project. Sarah suggested to contact Verona Foundation for Educational Excellence (VFEE) to partner with them for this project as well as the teachers who wish to participate. Mayor Ryan

explained that it is common for the Verona Department of Public Works to do field maintenance and cut the grass at Verona schools. Resident Frank Ceccacci mainly attended the meeting to obtain information about the Community Garden because he and his wife are interested on participating.

4. Grove Park plans for the fall. 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. In previous meetings the Commission agreed to wait until early September to do any installation to ensure the survival of the plants. Volunteers could do the planting. 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. She also proposed a list of plants to be purchased. Jessica mentioned that she is going to schedule a meeting with Mr. Cavallo to discuss this and other matters. She added that the perennials are dormant on October and don't need to much watering, they come back during the Spring. The flowerbed will be street-side and convenient to water with the township's truck. Jim offered some free plants from a hotel in West Orange that will probably donate them.

Sean said that the Commission will need commitment from the Township to water the new plantings as well as approval, including the Shade Tree Commission. Gloria mentioned that Suzanne Broullon, a Verona resident and master gardener who works at the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens, agrees with the plant list, it would make a nice pollinator garden. The five witch hazels that were planted over the summer were not watered enough and are all dead. 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). Suzanne also recommended cleaning up the lawn during the fall (it's mostly weeds) with a mix of tough grass seed and clover (no pesticides). Gloria added that she'll contact Bob Dickison before installations. Months ago Bob 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 they are 30' apart to develop individually.

In previous meetings 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.

5. Jessica presented the National Wildlife Federation Community Wildlife Habitat program: for over 40 years, NWF, through its Garden for Wildlife Program, has engaged homeowners, businesses, schools, universities, places of worship, parks, civic and community organizations in creating and certifying wildlife-friendly landscapes on their properties. The NWF Community Wildlife Habitat program, empowers citizen leaders to take action for wildlife in their own communities. The program provides a framework to restore wildlife habitat and educate and engage community members while working to attain NWF's certification as a wildlife-friendly community. Communities of all sizes are encourage to apply. To date, there are more than 90 certified Community Wildlife Habitats and more than 60 Community Wildlife Habitats that are registered and partnering with NWF to becoming certified. The application is on-line and a Team Leader for the Community will be needed. Jessica asked Mayor Ryan if the township could do a proclamation to invite residents. Members support the proposal.

6. Upcoming events:

a) Essex County Environmental Center Fall Festival is September 24, 11 am to 4 pm.

b) September 30 is the ANJEC Congress / Environmental Achievement Awards. Gloria submitted the VEC application for the awards. Grove Park Nature Preserve and Historic Park was selected to receive an ANJEC 2016 Environmental Achievement Award. The awards will be presented at the 43rd Annual Environmental Congress on September 30th at The Conference Center at Mercer County College from 9am-4pm. Keynote Speaker: Dr. David Robinson, State Climatologist. Featured Speaker: Seth M. Siegel author, Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World.

Gloria notified the Verona Juniors and the Verona Historical Society. She is planning to attend with Mayor Ryan. Registration was \$65 until September 15, now is \$75 for ANJEC members. But the VEC didn't pay since the Commission is entitled to one free ticket and the township paid for Mayor Ryan. Gloria will bring a display to highlight the project and participate in the workshops.

Mayor Ryan proposed to present the award at the October 3<sup>rd</sup> Town Council meeting and invite all people involved in the project. Gloria will send a list of all participating organizations and volunteers to Jennifer Kiernan, Municipal Clerk, and Jennifer will formally invite them to attend.

c) Health, Fitness & Wellness Festival in Verona Park: October 1, 10 am to 4 pm. The VEC will not participate, there is not enough time to put this together.

d) Essex County Household Hazardous Waste Day: October 1 – E-Waste Day: October 15. The VEC posted this on social media.

e) Walk/Bike to school Day is October 5. The VEC is hosting its eighth poster contest. Gloria asked Mayor Ryan if the Award Ceremony could be scheduled for November 7<sup>th</sup> at Town Hall. The Mayor will confirm with the Town Manager. Mr. Cavallo approved to pay the \$300 on awards for the 6 winning students. The event flyer is in the Friday Folder, the VEC website and Twitter. It is also on VTV. Gloria asked Jim to print 20 flyers and she put them around town and at all the schools. She talked to school secretaries and some principals and gave them labeled folders to collect the posters. Mayor Ryan announced the event at the September 12 Town Council meeting. Gloria and Sarah will collect the posters and hung the exhibits on October 5 and 6. Tony will take care of the HBW exhibit.

f) Verona Park Conservancy Cleanup is October 8. Frank Ceccacci asked why Essex County doesn't clean up the park. Mayor Ryan explained to Frank Ceccacci the role of the Verona Park Conservancy and Hilltop Conservancy and how the VEC cooperates with both. Gloria mentioned that with the new "No biking, no rollerblading" signs in Verona Park young kids have no safe places to do those activities. Mayor Ryan mentioned that not everybody wants to share the road. Gloria added that kids are in school from 8 am to 3 pm or so, and it is actually after 3 pm or during the weekends that they could bike or rollerblade in the park. Mayor Ryan mentioned that perhaps it is too hot for people to go to the park while kids are at school.

g) Essex County Environmental Commission's Fall Round-table, Environmental Grants for

Municipalities: October 13. Gloria asked members who is available to attend. Jessica and Walter will try to attend.

h) Transportation Alternatives Program grants: Applications due Nov. 10. All applications for TAP are to be submitted online through SAGE (System for Administering Grants Electronically). For this solicitation, eligible projects must fall into one of the following 7 categories:

- Design and construction of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation (ie bike lanes)
- Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized transportation users.
- Construction of scenic turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.
- Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities both land and water such as building structures and canals.
- Community improvement activities, specifically: streetscaping and corridor landscaping.
- Environmental mitigation to address stormwater management, control, and water pollution prevention or abatement related to highway construction or due to highway runoff.
- Reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality or to restore and maintain connectivity among terrestrial or aquatic habitats.

Gloria said that this grant could be used to create some bike lanes in Verona, there are none. Jessica mentioned that avenues like Bloomfield are too dangerous, but perhaps Grove could be a good option to mark bicycle lanes to connect with Grove Park, F. N. Brown School, VHS and the West Essex Trail. Gloria could work with Steve Neale in this. Mayor Ryan said that Steve is getting married and will travel to Costa Rica so he will not be available to do it.

i) Hilltop Conservancy / Sustainable Verona Cleanup: Tentatively scheduled for November 19. Will be kid friendly and in a new meadow area that is going to be cleared by then. Also, Verona was accepted to participate in the 2016 Sustainable Jersey Solar Challenge with EnergySage. Runs from Oct. 2016- May 2017. Solar Monitoring display is installed and working in the lobby at the Community Center. People can also log into the program on-line.

j) Fair in the Square: December 3, 12 noon to 5 pm, set up at 10 am. Gloria asked members if they wanted to participate, since the VEC didn't participate last year, Commissioners are needed to man the table. Walter volunteered to help.

k) Volunteer Night: it was pushed to mid January to avoid holidays busy schedule.

7. New Business - Sean proposed to mark out in the streets the locations of curb inlets and drop inlets that take stormwater runoff from our streets. It would be helpful to have them marked in the street so that the VPW or Fire Department can clear the inlets to prevent flooding during additional rainstorm events or during the snow-melt. Members agreed. Gloria recommended Sean to talk to Mr. Cavallo and Verona DPW. Sean would like to see if the local Boy Scout troop could collaborate with this project.

8. Public Participation: Frank Ceccacci attended primarily to inquire about the Community Garden while bringing up for discussion the cleanup of the West Essex Trail. He uses the trail,

he walks and bikes there and regularly cleans up the trail from Fairview Ave. up to the Peckman Bridge, but there is a lot of garbage on the sides of the trail, such as car tires. Frank mentioned that there is a big mess before Route 23, around Aquabot Service Center located at 25 Rutgers Avenue in Cedar Grove. Frank proposed to organize a cleanup. He is a member of the Rail to Trail Conservancy. Gloria mentioned that the West Essex Trail is under Essex County jurisdiction and Mayor Ryan said that the VEC could approach the County to ask for authorization to organize a cleanup. Frank said that it is better to do the cleanup before the leaves fall or during the spring. Commissioners agreed.

Adjournment – Next Meeting Oct. 19, 2016.