



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on December 21, 2016 - 7:30 P.M., conference room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Anthony Saltalamacchia (Vice Chairman), Jessica Pearson, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell, Sean DiBartolo, Walter Steinmann, Michael Foley (Planning Board Liaison) and Mayor Kevin Ryan (Council Liaison). Guests: Verona resident Frank Ceccacci and Carolyn Rubinfeld (NJWAP Watershed Ambassador).

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order and reads the notice of Open Public Meetings law.
2. Minutes from the October 19, 2016 meeting were approved by all present members.
3. Gloria presented the VEC 2016 Annual Report. Jessica mentioned that it is stellar. Sean suggested to add the number of plans that the Commission reviewed in 2016. Commissioners agreed with Sean suggestion. Commissioners voted and unanimously approved the report. It will be submitted to the Town Council and posted on the VEC's Web site.

Gloria added that the VEC has two accounts and she mentioned:

- a) The trust account (T-90-56-878-000) money can be used for any VEC disbursements. Balance as of 12/21/16 is \$2,659.11 with \$618.00 of that amount currently encumbered. The unencumbered balance is \$2,041.11 and can be used in 2017 and beyond.
- b) We anticipate our 2017 civic affairs budget to be \$1,000.
- c) The 2016 balance of the VEC regular account 6-01-28-374-296 will still be available in 2017 but it can only be used for items encumbered or purchased in 2016. The balance as of 12/21/16 is \$248.47 with \$45.19 of that balance currently encumbered. The unencumbered balance is \$203.28 and only can be used for 2016.
- d) The VEC expenditures from the 2016 regular account so far were \$300 for ANJEC Membership, \$ 106.19 for Americanwear Polo Shirts for all VEC members, \$45.34 for Amazon Supplies for the Poster Contest, \$ 300.00 paid to the six poster contest winners (\$50 each) and the renewal of the domain veronaec.org for 3 years for \$ 45.19 not yet paid.
- e) The total spent in 2016 was \$ 796.72. The Balance Unencumbered is \$ 203.28 (it can only be used for 2016). Gloria recommended to buy a few office supplies before the year is over, such as ink toner cartridge replacement for the printer and recycled print paper, for a total of about \$30. Members agreed. Sean asked if the balance could be spent on poster boards to distribute to students that participate in the poster contest. Members noted that the number of

participants in the different schools varies from under 100 to over 200 so it is hard to tell how many will participate, and the distribution of materials could complicate things.

f) Regarding the trust account T-90-56-878-000 the 2016 initial balance was \$2,037.50 and the VEC received a \$ 50 donation. The VEC only spent \$47.39 (\$18 in a Nature Preserve Sign for Grove Park and \$ 29.39 in supplies for the Grove Park Cleanup/Saplings Event.

4. Organic Community Garden and Green Infrastructure update. A few months ago the VEC started working with the Township to find a suitable location for an Organic Community Garden. VEC members proposed a grassy area located at HBW by the parking lot, near Park Place. Mayor Ryan, Mr. Cavallo and Superintendent of Schools Rui Dionisio are aware of this idea, and the VEC is working on a formal proposal, 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 not only the organic community garden, but other Green Infrastructure in Verona. Gloria mentioned that 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 Freedom-Liberty field complex, a porous pavement parking lot by the Verona Library and a cistern and community garden for the area 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.

Mayor Ryan mentioned that any planting should be approved by the Shade Tree Commission, and they should be incorporated in any document acknowledging their role. Jessica asked if the VEC needs approval from them to plant vegetables. Sean noted that the area is yet to be designed. Michael asked if the Verona Schools would be interested on installing a rain garden, for example, with a grant from Verona Foundation for Educational Excellence (VFEE). Tony mentioned that former VEC member Marjorie Williams tried to install one at HBW, and that VHS could install one, perhaps once the Verona BOE joins Sustainable Jersey. Walter suggested as a site the forest behind Forest Avenue School. Jessica and Carolyn agreed on the educational value of having a rain garden right in the front area of the Verona Community Center.

Mayor Ryan explained that he talked with Mr. Cavallo about an alternate site for the Community Garden, the grass area parallel to the street, by the old Community Center's playground, which will be demolished. The site has easy access to water and parking and it will simplify matters since the property belongs to the Township. Sean mentioned for the record that this location is in block 24.01 lot 5. Members liked this location as an alternative site for a Community Garden. Gloria asked Carolyn if the people from Rutgers could take a look at this new site.

5. Upcoming 2017 initiatives:

5.1. January Volunteer Night: Tuesday, January 24th at 7pm at the VCC – Members needed to man the table, with new VEC polo shirts, a group picture will be taken. The VEC will ask residents to sign up for cleanups and other programs, preferable on a laptop so there are no mistakes writing hard to read email addresses on paper forms.

5.2. NJ Tree Foundation free trees: Gloria presented the application. Members like the idea of

planting saplings to reforest the woods at Grove Park and replace invasive Japanese Knotweed at the Peckman Trail. The VEC will need Shade Tree Commission authorization. Members suggested to contact the Hilltop Conservancy before ordering, to see if they want to share the saplings since the minimum order is 500 saplings that must be planted, not given away. VEC members voted and unanimously approved to order the free tree saplings if we can partner with other organization such as the Hilltop Conservancy.

5.3. West Essex Trail Cleanup: April 1st from 9 to 12 noon is the tentative date-time. Gloria contacted Cedar Grove Environmental Commission Chairperson Mara Silgailis, she talked to her commission and they like the idea and the date. Probably Sustainable Verona will help us too. Mr. Cavallo will contact Essex County to get approval. Jessica suggested to have a rain/snow date, April 2. Members agreed. Tony and Frank will visit the trail in advance to plan the cleanup. The biggest concentration of large garbage items including car tires is after crossing Keeney St, closer to Pompton Avenue (in both sides of the trail) behind Aqua Products Inc./ Aquabot, 280 Grove Avenue in Cedar Grove. The breakdown of tires releases hazardous wastes, heavy metals such as lead, that can persist in the environment and accumulate over time. The VEC could propose to ask for permission to start the cleanup from the parking lot of Aquabot, short-easy access to trail and Grove Avenue to move the garbage out, DPW could park a truck there, if approved. Franck noted that we could collaborate with Aquabot to focus on cleaning up that area first, and maybe use their dumpsters.

Once the County approves the date, the VEC will coordinate with all parties involved. Frank mentioned that the swimming hole is filled with garbage. Members mentioned that it is too dangerous to bring volunteers down there and suggested to focus on the trail and adjacent areas.

5.4. Bat houses, Life Scout project: Matthew Siegel contacted the VEC; he is a Life Scout in Troop 2 working towards his Eagle Scout Rank. For one of the requirements he must conduct a project that benefits the community. He would like to complete a project involving the Verona Environmental Commission, like building and installing bat houses in municipal properties such as the Verona Community Center, the Peckman Trail, Verona's Grove Park and/or the new Liberty-Freedom Fields.

Matt was not able to come to the meeting, but Tony knows him and will meet with him to work on this project. Essex County installed two large black bat houses on trees in Verona Park; one is near Bloomfield Ave. facing the lake. Bats can help control mosquitoes in a natural way without pesticides, and potentially could help fight the spread of the Zika Virus. Many golf clubs install bat houses for this reason. Bats consume high volumes of insects each night and are the only major predators of nocturnal insects. These insect pest control services are valued at an estimated average of \$22.9 billion annually in the U.S. The majority of bats (70%), including those in New Jersey, are primarily insectivorous.

Depending on the species, bats forage in both open areas and woodlands, but they concentrate their activity in places with high insect abundance. Bats are commonly seen feeding near bodies of water, under street lamps, and along woodland edges. "On a local scale, conservationists promote the installation of bat houses as a means of increasing suitable bat habitat." More information at <http://wildlife.rutgers.edu/bats/>

New Jersey supports 6 year-round resident bat species. The 2 species with which humans

come into contact most frequently are big brown bats and little brown bats. Both species prefer to roost in manmade structures. There are also 3 part-time resident bats in New Jersey. Walter and Michael suggested to look into the specific trees planted to support bat habitat. Carolyn suggested to contact bat biologist Lance Risley to obtain more information. Gloria will contact the Town Manager for approval.

6. Climate Change and Verona: the Essex County Board of Freeholders proposed Resolution # R2015-00560 (attached) "In Support of the State of New Jersey Taking Action on Climate Change". Gloria proposed to release a VEC statement in support of the Freeholders' Resolution. Tony read Virginia's draft:

VEC Supports Freeholders' Climate Change Resolution

Members of the Essex County Board of Freeholders recently proposed a resolution encouraging New Jersey to take action on climate change. The Verona Environmental Commission supports this resolution, which is critical to the health, safety and well-being of our town, our county and our state.

Drafted by Freeholder President Britnee N. Timberlake, District 3 Freeholder Rolando Bobadilla, District 5 Freeholder Cynthia D. Toro and Freeholder-At-Large Patricia Sebold, the resolution notes Essex County's vulnerability to two major problems caused by climate change: a rising sea level and storm surges from more frequent and intense storms. The freeholders rightly note that these are problems with severe economic consequences. Just four years ago, Hurricane Sandy caused \$36.8 billion in damage to New Jersey, some of which has yet to be repaired.

The resolution notes that Essex County has already taken steps to reduce carbon pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by supporting increased recycling and usage of hybrid vehicles. The freeholders pledge to do even more in the future, by increasing renewable energy requirements or renewable portfolio standard ("RPS") to 80% by 2050, auditing County greenhouse gas emissions and reducing emissions 80% by 2050, buying 50% or more of the County's energy from renewable sources, incentivizing renewable purchases for County residents, easing the solar power permit process, updating building codes to promote increased energy efficiency for county and municipal buildings, and working with local building trades to create job training programs for solar installation and building retrofits.

All of these are extremely worthy goals that earn the wholehearted support of the Verona Environmental Commission. We look forward to working with the Freeholders and the Verona Town Council to implement these plans as we move the County towards a more sustainable future.

Jessica recommended to verify if the resolution was proposed or in fact adopted. Mayor Ryan asked if the resolution is available on-line. Gloria gave the web address but noted that the copy posted on-line is signed but the actual votes are not recorded. The seven present VEC members voted and unanimously approved the VEC statement with one condition: to verify if the resolution was adopted and if so to change the sentence "Members of the Essex County Board of Freeholders recently *proposed* a resolution" to "Members of the Essex County Board of Freeholders recently *adopted* a resolution". Once this is verified the VEC will ask

Mr. Cavallo to approve the statement for publishing.

7. VEC Social Media: Gloria mentioned that the VEC created the Web site veronaec.org in 2009 for free and it is hosted also for free on Google Sites. In 2014 the VEC 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.

Mayor Ryan explained that him and Councilman Jay Sniatkowski were contacted by one resident who complained about a VEC Facebook posting. Mayor Ryan called Gloria and asked her to remove it pending review by our manager as to what is appropriate for us to post on a website identified with a township commission. Jessica, the commissioner who posted this is in charge of the VEC's Facebook page, she immediately removed the requested post and articles. She explained that she met with Mr. Cavallo and agreed to avoid posting statements calling residents to contact their representatives to protect the environment or other statements that could be interpreted as political. Mayor Ryan explained that for certain statements the VEC would need consensus from the entire commission and even manager's approval. Gloria showed to members a hardcopy of the articles in question:

<http://www.myveronanj.com/2016/11/10/vhs-grad-pledges-keep-fighting-climate-change-trump-election/>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/12/07/trump-names-scott-pruitt-oklahoma-attorney-general-suing-epa-on-climate-change-to-head-the-epa/?utm_term=.4c30a144d1ab

Michael recommended to promote scientific articles, not politics. Gloria mentioned that since the VEC is a member of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) she contacted them for advice and read some of their recommendations: "Maybe it would help to draw up some posting guidelines regarding what you will and won't post and get agreement on them from other members of the commission... For example, maybe you would want to avoid articles that are from activist or lobbying websites and stick with mainstream media, which are more objective in their editorial stance. Of course it looks like you do that, but making it a policy makes it easier for your Town Manager to back you up when someone complains...Apparently the resident who complained doesn't believe in climate change, but it seems unreasonable to avoid posting about the most important environmental issue of our time...I would also suggest you make a special effort to post info about town events and local news coverage (I know you do a lot of this!) ...The Verona EC was among the first to dip a toe into Facebook and you've been doing a great job. I sincerely hope you can make the town see how valuable your efforts are with regard to social media and that you'll be able to continue!".

8. Composting initiatives: Olivia Pena contacted the VEC about the possibility to have a municipal composting program, she is a Verona resident and a student at the University of Vermont, she is a Senior majoring in Food Systems. In her letter she proposed a curbside-pickup food waste composting program in Verona.

Verona Township did a lot of research regarding town wide composting program of organics

collection. Gloria talked to Sustainable Verona Chairman Steve Neale. Since Verona is so small, to make this program work we'll probably need to team up with neighboring municipalities. Steve said that there are some good options out there but there are also some serious hurdles including cost and shipping. The biggest challenges facing these programs in NJ is the cost and processing. There is one plant in NJ. Princeton has a program in place but it is not even close to self sustaining and they are beginning to feel that pain. The town ends up subsidizing all the costs and it has affected the taxpayer.

<http://www.princetonnj.gov/organic/CurbsideOrganics.html>

One of the big issues is there aren't many places that are taking it and processing it right now so the transportation costs are high. The added cost of the collection and shipping make it tough for municipalities to adopt right now. Steve talked with Morgan's Farm about getting a possible program together with them. They are on board with the idea but there are some liability issues with that type of program. This could be our best option and save us on transportation costs but we would still need to figure out who would be doing the collection and drop-off and we would need to make sure that Morgan's Farm is composting properly. Regular garbage trucks would not be allowed on the property so smaller trucks would have to be used. We would assume a lot of liability as well. Maybe we could try some sort of pilot program but the first step is to get feedback from the residents and gauge their interest level. If we don't have the participation it wouldn't be cost effective which is a big factor.

Members agreed that the first step would be to launch a Verona Backyard Composting program, to provide information and offer residents to purchase compost bins on-line at a discounted price, so they can manage their own organic waste in their yards. After ordering, residents could pick up the bins at a local event such as the upcoming Verona Green Fair in May 2017. We could also have composting demonstrations at the fair to teach residents how to use their new bins. Steve agrees.

A yard compost program could better prepare residents for potential future curbside-pickup programs. Gloria contacted Lynn Ruck, from Rain Water Solutions, the people that have an agreement with Rich Mattesky from McIntosh Controls to provide their rain barrels through a program website for Verona Township. They purchase their compost bins through Redmon. But online companies sell these for much less than they can purchase and deliver them. So they have decided not to carry the bins unless their prior customers do not mind the price difference. They sell them for \$65.00, but \$49.00 is hard to beat. They do this by having a better shipping rate than we do. Rich sells the Good Ideas 52 Gallon Compost Wizard Jr. Recycled Plastic Compost Tumbler – Black for Sustainable Verona maybe for \$120 since the price is \$160. But online companies like www.hayneedle.com sells it for \$99.98 (38% OFF) with free shipping! Steve will talk to Rich Mattesky after the holidays.

Tony mentioned that he used a drum composter and he doesn't recommend it because the materials don't truly degrade. He prefers the stationary composters, which allow the materials to be in contact with the soil and bugs and worms to help accelerate the composting process. Mayor Ryan agreed.

9. Complete Streets: Mayor Ryan indicated that they are considering the idea to install a bicycle path in Fairview Avenue in Verona, perhaps all the way to connect with the new Community Center in Cedar Grove. Members welcomed the idea but noted that Fairview Ave. is dangerous since people drive too fast. Mayor Ryan mentioned that there are also plans to

make Fairview safer by for example, installing a traffic light at the intersection of Fairview Ave. and Sampson Drive, by the Verona High School, and a sidewalk in the other side of the school. He added that the town has been asking the County for this traffic light for a long time and the Cedar Grove new Community Center got a traffic light right away so there is hope that now Verona could get a new traffic light at the high school.

9. New Business: Verona's Natural Resource Inventory is too old. It was called "Resource Inventory for Verona Township", published by the VEC in 1999, and prepared by March Associates Landscape Architects, with a grant from the DEP, Office of Environmental Services. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/31827/>

According to Sustainable Jersey the Environmental Commission and Planning Board should be an integral part of the process, however spending money will require municipal governing body approval. The NRI can be completed or updated in house or by hiring a consultant. Municipal structure and existing staff capacity will also impact the types of additional resources needed to conduct an NRI. For example, mapping is a required element of an NRI and geographic information systems (GIS) skills and software will be needed for an in-house job. Experienced municipal officials have indicated that an NRI typically costs a municipality between \$8,000 and \$15,000, if developed by a consultant or less if done in-house. The Land Conservancy of NJ is offering assistance to help with certain Sustainable Jersey actions including the Natural Resource Inventory, which is a priority. So Steve will reach out to the Land Conservancy and see if they can get the grant application together in early January.

10. Adjournment – Next Meeting January 18, 2017.