



Verona Environmental Commission

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

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on January 18, 7:00 P.M., conference room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J. Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Anthony Saltalamacchia (Vice Chairman), Martin Golan, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell, Walter Steinmann, 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 Act.
2. Minutes from the December 21 meeting were approved by members. Mayor Ryan noted that they are considering (not yet planning) to install a bicycle path in Fairview Ave. (item #9).
3. Volunteer Night is January 24 from 7 pm to 9 pm at the Community Center. The VEC will have a table with displays about the role of the Commission, local cleanups, the treasured tree program and Grove Park. The VEC will also have a laptop with a short volunteer form that visitors can fill out. Walter, Martin and Sarah are available to attend and man the table. Members will use the new maroon shirts and take a group picture.

The Treasured Tree Program started in 2002, the VEC created a virtual tour with a map and pictures of all the trees at www.veronaec.org/treasuredtrees – The VEC encourages residents to contact the Commission at veronaenvironmental@gmail.com to nominate beautiful, mature trees. These trees add great beauty to Verona and improve our environment. Inclusion in the Treasured Tree program does not preclude a homeowner from caring for a tree, should the tree become diseased. Homeowners receive a plaque from the Commission that they may display on their tree. There are currently 18 trees in this program. There were 3 more but those were removed at Forest Ave. School, Laning Ave School and VHS. The last tree was added to the program in 2011. Gloria encouraged members to help add more treasure trees.

4. A few months ago the Commission started working with the Township to find a suitable location for an Organic Community Garden. There are currently two alternatives: a grassy area located at HBW by the parking lot, near Park Place and the area adjacent to the old Community Center's playground. VEC member Sean DiBartolo prepared the site sketches for the two proposed locations. It is a good starting point to discuss more details. Gloria shared those plans with Carolyn, Steve Neale, Hollie and Chris at Rutgers. Both sites have easy access to water and parking.

The VEC is also 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 other Green Infrastructure in Verona. The group visited several locations and picked a few sites for 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. Carolyn will check if the site at the VCC is appropriate for a cistern. She indicated that probably in a month or two the Impervious Cover Assessment and Impervious Cover Reduction Action Plan will be ready. Approved plans could be submitted to receive grant funding.

There is an ANJEC grant for \$1500 that the VEC could apply for to install the rain gardens. The grant is due on April 7, 2017. Members suggested to contact Rutgers to see if the rain gardens' plan could be available sooner to start working in this grant application.
<http://www.anjec.org/EnvCommissionGrantPrograms.htm>

One of the grant categories is "Educational stormwater management projects on open space lands". Members expressed support for the educational value of having rain gardens in the Verona Community Center and new fields.

Mayor Ryan asked if Mr. Dionisio expressed interest on installing the organic community garden in back of HBW. Gloria said that she didn't hear anything yet. Tony added that that is a busy corner at HBW. Members agreed that it is probably easier to install the garden at the Verona Community Center since the land is owned by the township and there is already water access there (block 24.01 lot 5).

Mayor Ryan walked the property with Mr. Cavallo and mentioned that the old playground and bathroom/deposit will be demolished. Members asked if the playground could be renovated, instead of demolished, so children can continue playing there while parents or older siblings work in the garden or participate in sports. Members also proposed to use the old structure as a deposit for gardening tools and materials. Mayor Ryan will check with Mr. Cavallo. Tony left the meeting for a few minutes to check out the old playground and confirmed that the flooring is rubberized concrete. Tony added that community garden members could have a combination to access the equipment in the garden deposit.

Walter suggested to ask a local business for donations to install the community garden. Mayor Ryan mentioned that the town accounts used to be in Chase Bank but it moved to Investors Bank, and they sponsor the Fair in the Square and Town Concerts.

Gloria mentioned the need to form a group independent from the VEC, to coordinate community garden activities. Frank agreed, this project needs a champion. He asked if the garden will be ready for the planting season. Members explained that this is a long term project and it is better to do it right than quick. If the garden is located at the VCC, the Recreation Department will be involved. Members talked about the Morgan Farms.

Sarah mentioned the West Caldwell Community Garden, located on the grounds of the Crane House at 289 Westville Ave. Their website shows thirty 10' x 15' plots. West Caldwell residents can rent a piece of land on which to grow their own vegetables and flowers. Residents from neighboring towns are also welcome to apply. Plots are available on a first-come, first-served basis at a cost of \$50.00 per plot to cover water, mulch and other related items that are provided by the Township. Anyone interested in securing a plot may contact West Caldwell Town Hall at 973-226-230. The Mayor suggested to send a survey to residents to see how many are interested in having a plot.

Martin noted that it is too bad that there are only a few historic homes left in Verona, 16 Mountain Road was also demolished. Sarah noted that Verona doesn't have a protected Historic District. Mayor Ryan said that it is up to residents to preserve their historic homes. He also mention that the Verona Landmarks Preservation Commission was established by the Town Council to assist in the identification and preservation of our town's landmarks and historical sites.

5. April 1st West Essex Trail Cleanup update. Tony, Frank and Gloria visited the West Essex Trail. Walter asked what kind of garbage is currently there. Tony said that there is a very heavy safe near to Durell Street. Gloria said that from Fairview Ave. to Durell the trail is pretty clean. Frank already cleanup the litter located after crossing Durell. They all said that the biggest concentration of large garbage items including car tires, beach chairs and construction debris is located after crossing Keeney St, when you get 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.

Sean was not able to attend the meeting but informed Gloria that he had a chance to speak with the deputy director of the Essex County Parks and Recreation Department about the cleanup, they're willing to work with us and they're going to see about providing a staff member to help with the cleanup. Unfortunately, they do not have anything in the way of plans or Trail maps to provide us to showcase at volunteers night. Sean will try to come up with some kind of map of the trail to show at the volunteer night.

Gloria contacted Town Manager Cavallo and Tara Casella from Essex County, Tara said that the County Parks Department is aware, approves, and will assist in whatever way they can. Gloria showed members the forms that Tara provided: a clean-up request form for the Commission to fill out, as well as liability waiver forms for those participating to fill out and return to the Essex County Parks Department. Anthony Puglisi was copied in the email, and Julius N. Coltre, Director of Purchasing. Gloria shared the forms with Mara Silgailis, Chairwoman of the Cedar Grove Environmental Commission. Members suggested that young kids should not participate in this cleanup and everybody should wear work boots (instead of sneakers), long pants and long sleeves.

Members suggested to contact Aquabot to see if volunteers can meet at their parking lot the day of the event. That location has easy access to the trail and Grove Avenue to move the garbage out, DPW could park a truck there. Members would like to focus on cleaning up that area first, and maybe use their dumpsters.

Gloria informed members that Mara is contacting Aquabot to see how they can collaborate with the cleanup and she asked if the county could contribute vehicles/manpower to cart away the big stuff. Instead of filling out two forms, Gloria will complete one and send it to Mara and Cavallo for approval before submittal. Mara's biggest concern is whose DPW would do the carting away (due to costs). The litter/garbage is on county land.

Another issue Mara raised is the 50 feet of "spontaneous path" (all on county land) that connects the West Essex Park Trail with the bottom asphalt loop in the new Essex County Cedar Grove Park. People are already walking between the 2 trails, but it is through mud. She suggested to put some gravel down there to connect the paths. That would be an

absolute win-win for the paths of the 2 parks, it's county park land next to county park land. VEC members agreed to propose this idea to Essex County Parks Department.

Mayor Ryan asked Gloria to please confirm with Mara that Cedar Grove governing body approved this joint cleanup. Members also suggested to work with the Essex County Parks Department to post signs announcing the cleanup a few weeks before the event, to attract more volunteers and give proper notification to those who use the trail.

6. Upcoming 2017 initiatives:

- NJ Tree Foundation free trees to be planted: applications due January 30. Gloria contacted Theresa Trapp from the Hilltop Conservancy to see if she wanted to share the tree saplings, before we decide to order them. The minimum order is 500 saplings that must be planted, not given away. And we would need Shade Tree Commission approval.

Theresa said they won't have any time to plant anything like that this year. She suggested to offer saplings to the Verona Park Conservancy. Gloria contacted Sandra Mahoney, she'll talk with Jim McGregor, and let us know.

- NJ Tree Recovery Campaign: free trees for distribution. If we do not order from the NJ Tree Foundation, we could participate again in the NJ Tree Recovery Campaign and distribute their saplings at Grove Park, like we did last year. Alexander McCartney from NJ State Forestry Services will send the application to the VEC once they are ready. The VEC could host a cleanup in the park during the giveaway event like last year.

- Tree-killing Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Verona preparation. Gloria spoke with Bob Dickison, Chairman of the Shade Tree Commission at the last Sustainable Verona meeting and the one before about EAB. Bob and Gloria are preparing a press release to inform residents. Gloria suggested to include the new information received from Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Director, Office of Local Government Assistance at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

“We are writing to advise you that the tree-killing emerald ash borer (EAB) has been detected in New Jersey. We strongly recommend that you initiate action as described in the enclosed to protect the ash trees in your community and your residents. As this pest spreads, it kills 99 percent of all ash trees. Select ash trees can be saved through insecticide treatments, but all other ash trees will succumb after EAB infestation.

Ash trees are in 24% of the forests in New Jersey and are a common landscape tree along roads and in parks and yards. Depending on the number of ash trees in your municipality, you could end up with hundreds or thousands of dead trees, which will pose a hazard to residents and infrastructure. In addition, the cost to remove and replace these trees will impact your tree care budget.

NJ State Forest Service has put together an “EAB Action Kit” to help plan, assess, and take action on susceptible trees on municipal lands. The kit also includes materials to help educate residents on this pest. More information at www.emeraldashborer.nj.gov

Gloria contacted Rosa Yoo Regional Forester NJ State Forest Service (who was one of the contacts listed on Pflugh's email). Mrs. Yoo said: “Being that Verona is so close to Montclair, at this time, I would recommend your efforts be concentrated on ash management, not detection. Any pesticide treatments to save ash trees from EAB should be done sooner than

later, as treatments are most effective prior to EAB infestation, or in the very early stages of infestation. Otherwise, ash trees not selected for treatment that are in high use areas, should be scheduled for removal, as they will succumb to EAB in the next few years, depending on EAB populations. It is recommended that ash are removed when still alive, as the wood becomes brittle within a year or two after tree mortality, causing large branches to become weak and break. Unfortunately, EAB is a highly destructive pest that will undoubtedly affect your communities ash trees, but taking measures to reduce the risk of hazardous ash tree situations and protecting ash trees through pesticide treatments is something that can be done now.

Last month the VEC posted on social media and website info with listing of Certified Tree Experts in our area and a key to services.

<https://www.veronanj.org/home-news/emerald-ash-borer-confirmed-in-essex-county>

The VEC will continue posting EAB information. The Mayor announced it at the last Town Council meeting.

- Bat houses, Life Scout and VEC project.

Tony met with Matthew Siegel, a Life Scout in Troop 2 working towards his Eagle Scout Rank. He must conduct a project that benefits the community and would like to complete a project involving the Verona Environmental Commission. Matthew is not sure about building and installing bat houses in municipal properties. Essex County installed two large bat houses in Verona Park; one is near Bloomfield Ave. facing the lake.

Research shows bats prefer larger bat houses. Bats help control mosquitoes and potentially could fight the spread of Zika Virus (and Emerald Ash Borer). Many golf clubs install bat houses for this reason. 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. New Jersey supports 6 year-round resident bat species. The most popular are big brown bats and little brown bats. Both species prefer to roost in man-made structures. The VEC could contribute some money to this project.

Matthew is in 8th Grade and perhaps he is too young for the bat houses project. Carolyn proposed pollinator shelters, “bug hotels”. Mayor Ryan mentioned that an Eagle Scout named Sean built the Verona Park kiosk last year. Tony will revisit this idea with Matthew and talk about other projects.

Carolyn talked about the white-nose fungus that is affecting the bat populations. White-nose syndrome is the result of a fungus that invades and ingests the skin of hibernating bats, including their wings. There is a 99% chance that the little brown bat will be regionally extinct within the next 20 years. The northern long-eared bat has declined at rates of 99 percent or greater in several eastern states, and its entire 37-state range in the United States is now almost entirely encompassed within the zone of white-nose syndrome. Seven species (including three on the federal endangered species list) have been affected by the disease.

Gloria mentioned that the Commission would like to talk to Michael Foley about the Sustainable Verona plans to propose adopting a Green Design Resolution that will probably include the Verona Environmental Commission's Low Impact Checklist on Construction and Planning. Gloria asked the Mayor if Michael is planning to stay in the VEC as Planning Board Liaison, if needed, another VEC member such as Jessica Pearson could be interested to fill

this position. The Mayor will talk to Michael and said that he thinks that he wants to keep serving in the Planning Board and Environmental Commission.

7. New Business. The Center for Biological Diversity's Endangered Species Mural Project teams up with artists, activists and scientists to bring endangered wildlife onto the streets of cities and towns around the country. Members talked about the possibility of doing this in Verona with local artists.

This is basically street art raising awareness of endangered wildlife. Sarah mentioned that people would love to take pictures in front of a mural, like they take wedding pictures at Verona Park. Members suggested to look for available walls around town and reach out to property owners and local artists.

There are currently 23,000 endangered species across the world. Endangered species in New Jersey include the Indiana Bat, Bobcat, Bog Turtle, Bald Eagle, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Eastern Tiger Salamander and Treefrog.
<http://www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/tandespp.htm>

The Center for Biological Diversity's initiative has created nine murals so far: the mountain caribou in Sandpoint, Idaho; the Arctic grayling in Butte, Montana; the monarch butterfly in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the watercress darter in Birmingham, Alabama; the humpback whale and the yellow-billed cuckoo in Los Angeles; the jaguar in Tucson, Arizona; the pink mucket pearly mussel in Knoxville, Tennessee; the white fringeless orchid in Berea, Kentucky; and the Dakota skipper in Standing Rock, North Dakota. If additional funding is available, the Center hopes to continue to work with more local artists and communities and expand the project to even more cities nationwide.
http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/about/creative_media/endangered_species_mural_project/

8. Public Participation: Resident Frank Ceccacci expressed his strong support for the Fairview Avenue bicycle lane initiative. Mayor Ryan said that it is being discussed and he asked Gloria if she could contact Cedar Grove Environmental Commission Chair and ask if Cedar Grove would support this initiative. He attended a meeting regarding traffic safety in Essex County and mentioned that the traffic light system in Bloomfield Avenue is not computerized, so we need a better system since every time somebody pushes the button to cross the street the system freezes. Members asked if a sidewalk across VHS will be added. Mayor Ryan explained that it is needed in order to add a traffic light in that intersection, and probably Verona will install it and get reimbursed later, since Fairview Ave. is a county road. Members support the idea of installing bike lanes and other infrastructure to encourage sustainable transportation and recreation. This bike lane would connect Bloomfield Ave. with VHS, the West Essex Trail, Verona pool and the new Cedar Grove Community Center. The Mayor added that it will also serve the new 400 houses that are being built in Cedar Grove.

9. Adjournment – Next Meeting February 15th, 2017, VCC Conference Room.