



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
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Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on February 15th, 7:00 P.M., Conference Room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Anthony Saltalamacchia (Vice Chairman), Members Jessica Pearson, Martin Golan, Sean DiBartolo, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell (Alternate I), Walter Steinmann (Alternate II) and Michael Foley (Planning Board Liaison). Mayor Kevin Ryan, Town Manager Matt Cavallo and Verona Police Officer Bob Shafer.

Guests: Verona residents Frank Ceccacci (Rails to Trails) and Geordie Smith (Hilltop Conservancy). Carolyn Rubinfeld (NJWAP Watershed Ambassador), Jerome Eben (Pleasant Valley Civic Association) and West Orange Police Officer Kevin Bolen.

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order and reads the notice of Open Public Meetings Act. There is a quorum to go ahead and hold an official meeting.
2. Minutes from the January 18 meeting were approved by members.
3. Chairperson welcomes guests attending the presentation on Open Streets. Roz Bielski and Jerry Eben from Pleasant Valley Civic Association proposed to team up and host the first Verona/West Orange joint town Cyclovia in Pleasant Valley Way/Lakeside Avenue. This is a great way to engage communities in healthy exercise with the northern segment of Pleasant Valley Way being closed to motorists. West Orange Mayor Robert Parisi informed us a few days ago that he supports this initiative.

Jerry Eben is an architect, a member of the Pleasant Valley Civic Association and West Orange Planning Board. He explained that Cyclovias are sustainable programs where streets are temporarily opened to people and closed to cars to provide a safe space for pedestrians and cyclists to walk and ride. He added that people could also take advantage of Verona Park the day of the event. Jerry presented the video "The Rise of Open Streets":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MSsAG8DOzs&t=7s>

The video examines the open streets movement, how it began, how events are run and shape people's perceptions of their streets, and how creating car-free space, even temporarily, benefits people's lives. The video shows events in big cities like Los Angeles and New York as well as smaller ones like Fargo, Berkeley, and Lexington. Interviews include former NYC DOT Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan and former Chicago DOT Commissioner Gabe Klein. These events usually take place on Sunday mornings, when there is less vehicular traffic, during the Summer or Fall and are about 4 or 5 hours long. Cyclovia New Brunswick in New Jersey and Montclair Open Streets successfully closed their streets and brought people together. There are about a hundred similar programs in the United States.

Jerry talked about the importance of providing safe and convenient access for pedestrians and bicycling. He distributed a brochure on the topic. He talked about the health and environmental benefits of promoting non motorized active transportation, to prevent obesity and reduce pollution. He pointed out that it is crucial to provide infrastructure such as bike lanes, mid-block crosswalks, and traffic calming features, such as raised crossings and mid-block curb extensions. There are many strategies to achieve a transportation system in which walking and bicycling are routine, convenient, and secure.

Open Streets is a program to encourage active transportation and participants of all ages and abilities to enjoy physical activity and recreation in a safe and inclusive environment. The streets are temporarily closed to motor traffic to allow for people cycling, walking, jogging, rollerblading, skateboarding, using scooters, dancing...These are Community celebrations that usually add in classes, booths, and activities for kids and adults of all ages. People are invited to exercise and learn more about Active Transportation and Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety.

Tara Casella from Essex County Parks couldn't attend the meeting but informed Gloria that by County ordinance biking on paved pathways in County parks is prohibited. As far as the possible need for County sheriff officers, that would have to be made by formal request to the Essex County Sheriff.

Jessica asked to see the street route and Jerry showed the proposal on Google Maps :

Lakeside Ave. / Pleasant Valley Way closed to cars from Cunningham Dr. to Pease Ave., to allow for the Open Streets festival without blocking Our Lady of the Lake. This section is half a mile long. The rest of the ride with streets open to cars and police assistance, starting at the West Orange High School Parking lot and riding north to Confort Avenue, crossing Eagle Rock at the traffic light to continue north on Forest Avenue, turn left on Woodland Avenue and turn right on Pleasant Valley Way to continue north until reaching Lakeside Ave., ending at Pease Ave.

Police officers from Verona and West Orange were present. Lt. Bolen from West Orange stated that there is a fire station on Woodland Avenue and therefore that street could not be included in the event route.

Verona Town Manager Matt Cavallo mentioned that the important request from Verona was to allow Our Lady of the Lake Church goers to access the church entrance for Sunday mass.

Also, the west side of Pleasant Valley Way (southbound traffic) from Eagle Rock to Cunningham Dr. can't be closed to vehicles since there are several housing developments with only one exit / entrance on Pleasant Valley Way. Attendees discussed the possibility of closing the north lane of Woodland and east lane of Pleasant Valley Way from Woodland towards the north, there is a traffic light there.

Lt. Bolen said that a similar route for a fundraiser run was proposed recently and for safety reasons it wasn't approved. Gloria showed the 2016 Tour of Montclair flyer with 6 and 12 mile routes , during the event only a few streets (a section of Glenridge Avenue) were closed to cars to host the festival. She participated in the family ride with other 300 people:
<http://bikewalkmontclair.org/events/tour-de-montclair-2016/>

Lt. Bolen said that Pleasant Valley Way is a very busy road where there are senior housing that can't be blocked. People proposed to close the northbound lane and keep open the

southbound lane for cars to access those developments. Lt. Bolen said that they couldn't do that and they would need to close Eagle Rock, and Pleasant Valley Way (not just one side of the road) from West Orange to Verona to have this event, which is not possible.

Open street's experts recommend to use a busy commercial street such as Bloomfield Ave. as the main street closed to cars to attract more foot traffic to business. Jerry mentioned that the Pleasant Valley Civic Association recommends to host the event on a Sunday, instead of Saturday, to allow the Orthodox Jewish community to attend. Jessica agreed. Having the Cyclovia on a Sunday but only closing Lakeside Ave./Pleasant Valley Way from the south corner of Pease to the north corner of Cunningham Dr. doesn't block Our Lady of the Lake, and has a total of six street blocks in Verona and two in West Orange.

Lt. Bolen disagreed and suggested to do it on a Saturday to go all the way from Cunningham Dr. to Bloomfield Ave. in Verona and therefore allow participants to reach the business district. VEC members didn't agree.

Sean suggested to do it on Labor Day, Monday September 4, so both groups could participate, but perhaps this will increase police overtime hours and some business could be closed. Lt. Bolen added that we couldn't do it on July 2, or early September because they have other events and will not have enough officers available. Some VEC members suggested to host it on the same day of other Verona Park events, like the Bocce Bash on Sunday July 9, but others suggested that Essex County will not allow to close the road on that day since many people drive to that event and park on Lakeside Ave.

Gloria mentioned that it would be nice to have at least one small section of Verona Park open to kids on tricycles, bikes or scooters, to provide a safe space for little ones to ride. They do this in Edgemont Memorial Park in Montclair. Edgemont's paths are a lot more narrow than Verona Park's paths. She added that she lives one block from Verona Park but has to drive her kids to Montclair to use rollerblades or ride a bike in a safe park.

Verona Town Manager reminded everybody that Verona Township has not jurisdiction over Verona Park. Verona Mayor mentioned that he asked for the "no biking signs" to be reinstalled in Verona Park. Martin Golan agreed.

Members asked where people will park for the event, Mr. Cavallo offered the municipal parking lot to be available for free. Lt. Bolen said that they could allow parking on Pleasant Valley Way, south from Cunningham Dr. and mentioned that we'll need to close the road hours before the event to set up tents and food trucks.

Gloria explained that this is not a street fair, if tents are needed the VEC could request authorization to set them up in Verona Park. Partners for Health Foundation could be a source of funding and New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition is an excellent resource.

Lt. Bolen said that for the fundraiser run a similar proposed route on Pleasant Valley Way wasn't authorized. People recommended Jerry to do it in West Orange's Main Street. Verona representatives thanked the guests from West Orange for attending and Lt Bolen and Mr. Eben left.

VEC members expressed frustration realizing that it will be very hard to coordinate this event, not only with Essex County but also with West Orange, even though the route only includes 2 street blocks in West Orange.

Mr. Cavallo suggested to simplify things and host the open streets festival in Verona, on Fairview Avenue. VEC members liked the idea. Mr. Cavallo explained that it is easier to close Fairview Ave. without creating any gridlock on Sunday morning during the summer, and if needed he could modify the pool hours for the day of the event. Sunday July 2nd of 2017 is a possible date.

The Verona Environmental Commission is already collaborating with the Cedar Grove Environmental Commission organizing the West Essex Trail Cleanup, and Mr. Cavallo added that it's easy to work with Cedar Grove police. Geordie Smith from the Hilltop Conservancy was also present at the meeting and expressed support for the idea. Members agreed.

Verona is researching the idea to propose installing bike lanes on Fairview Ave., from Bloomfield Ave. in Verona all the way to Pompton Ave. in Cedar Grove. The VEC contacted Cedar Grove Environmental Commission to see if they will support this initiative, and they contacted their Town Council and proposed to discuss it farther with Verona's governing body. Both towns will need to get approval from Essex County.

Verona High School, the entrance of the West Essex Trail, the Hilltop Reservation and the new Cedar Grove Community Center are all located on Fairview Ave. and therefore bike lanes make a lot of sense there.

For the open streets event Verona will have to request Essex County to authorize closing Fairview Ave. to motorists from Franklin Street to Read Avenue (0.8 miles - 4 min. bike ride). <https://tinyurl.com/h2rra7t>

If Cedar Grove is interested in participating, the route could be extended to Skytop Rd. (1.2 miles total - 6 min. bike ride) or farther, depending on Cedar Grove's feedback. <https://tinyurl.com/jq9fmn5>

Potential Partners: Cedar Grove and Verona Township, Verona and Cedar Grove Environmental Commissions, Sustainable Verona and Sustainable Cedar Grove, NJ Bike & Walk Coalition, NJ Interscholastic Cycling League, NICA Essex Offroad, Hilltop Conservancy, Partners for Health Foundation.

Professionals recommend to "go easy" with the first ciclovía. The goal is to promote active transportation. Members agreed.

4. Updates:

NJ Tree Recovery Application due February 28, 2017 to receive up to 2,000 free tree seedlings, to provide NJ residents 5 free trees each to plant on their property. Our Seedling Pick-up date is Friday April 21, 9am to 3pm at the Essex County Environmental Center like last year - 621 Eagle Rock Road, Roseland.

Last year the VEC distributed 150 trees in less than two hours. Members agreed to order 300 seedlings and distribute them at Grove Park on Saturday, April 22 from 8 am to 12 noon.

Mayor Ryan asked if we needed advise from the Shade Tree Commission regarding tree species. Gloria stated that we'll know the assigned tree species the day before the event and showed the 2017 list of potentially available trees. The State Forest Nursery selects the species best suited for our area from more than 30 different tree species. They don't take requests for species. This program is a joint effort between Arbor Day Foundation and the

State of New Jersey. Mr. Cavallo approved the VEC to participate in the program and submit the application.

The West Essex Trail Cleanup will be on Saturday April 1st; from 9 am to 12 noon (Rain Date is Sunday April 2nd). The VEC created a flyer and started advertising and inviting residents and local organizations to participate. We obtained approval from Aqua Products Inc. to use their parking lot located at 280 Grove Ave. in Cedar Grove to do the cleanup. That will be our meeting point. The Cedar Grove Environmental Commission's contact there is Peter Tripod, the Head of Human Resources.

The VEC filled out the Essex County Parks Community Clean-Up Request Form, Cedar Grove and Verona Town Manager approved it and it was submitted to the Superintendent of Maintenance and Parks Department Director for approval. Tara Casella informed the VEC that Essex County Parks Department is supportive of the Verona/Cedar Grove's proposed West Essex Trail clean-up; however, they need to see what resources they have available to offer and in what capacity they can assist.

Mr. Cavallo asked for the list of equipment that was requested and Gloria gave him a copy. We requested from Essex County a truck to cart away large items such as tires, a staff member to help with the cleanup, 40 work gloves, garbage bags, recycling bins, several rakes and shovels, 3 wheelbarrows, a hand-truck and a plastic folding table (so volunteers can fill out liability forms and we can place water containers and snacks). Mr. Cavallo said that Verona will provide a truck with two staff members for 4 hours and he'll contact Cedar Grove and Essex County to request the same and see if the equipment can be donated to us.

Following Verona Mayor recommendations, Gloria contacted Cedar Grove Environmental Commission Chairperson Mara Silgailis, she confirmed that Cedar Grove approves this event. Cedar Grove Councilman Michael Maffucci said that they approved the joint clean up with Verona. Their DPW will not work on Saturday. However, if we leave filled bags along the trail they will pick up during regular workdays. As for any large items, simply identify the location and they will take care of them, he added.

The VEC invited Montclair University clubs and organizations to participate, as well as VHS students. Ms. Paula Ramos Santiago (VHS Biology Teacher) will pass on the information to her students and let us know if they would like to participate. Frank Ceccacci offered to help getting things ready for the event. The VEC will need to coordinate with Essex County Parks to provide proper notification to trail goers.

Volunteer Night was January 24 and it was a success for the VEC, 14 volunteers signed up to help at our events. We had displays about the role of the Commission, local cleanups, the treasured tree program and Grove Park, and we took a group photo with the new polo shirts.

Rain Gardens/ANJEC Grant due April 7th. We are waiting to receive the plans from Rutgers to put together a proposal to apply for the ANJEC \$1500 grant. Depending on the sizes, we could install 2 rain gardens with that money (one at the VCC and one at the new fields). Mr. Cavallo asked for the exact location. Carolyn showed the locations in Google Map, near the main entrance at VCC and by the playground at the new fields.

We are 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 Green Infrastructure in Verona. The group visited several locations .

Yesterday – Hollie Dimuro said that they have a concept design complete for the rain gardens at Liberty field and in front of the community center. They are working on a rendering for the rain garden up at Liberty field. They are still completing a Reduction Action Plan for Verona and doing a final review for the Impervious Cover Assessment. They might have the documents complete by our March meeting.

The Three Rivers Rain Garden Alliance from Pennsylvania has an online rain garden calculator. The size of the garden is determined by the conditions of your yard (such as soil type and yard slope), while others are determined by you (such as amount of roof top to be addressed or rainfall to prepare for). When you enter your surface area, downspouts, soil type, and slope, you can see how rainfall capacity influences the size and cost of your garden. For example, for 3 inches rain fall, 64 sq feet garden size, 28 plants, \$220. Jan 30- according to Hollie the information is correct. She estimates a cost of \$5 per square foot if you are able to dig it out with volunteers and the town's DPW. And it gets more expensive if a contractor comes in to build it.

Organic community garden: Mr Cavallo said that the two proposed locations, HBW and Verona Community Center by the old playground are not available for a community garden.

He proposed a new site located on BOE property in Verona High School by the entrance of the parking lot. Basically the township can propose to the BOE to lease the property to install a community garden. Mr. Cavallo suggested to test the soil and asked Sean to please prepare the site sketch for the proposed new location. Sean agreed, he prepared the last two sketches for the previously proposed sites.

The American Community Garden Association has guidelines for launching a successful community garden. They list 10 main steps starting with "Organize a Meeting Of Interested People" and "Form a Planning Committee". This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the organic garden and have the time to devote to it.

Resident Diane Ceccacci offered to serve on the planning committee and, if needed, her husband Frank Ceccacci also offered to serve. Diane is planning to attend the Community Garden Conference presented by the Friends of The Frelinghuysen Arboretum and Rutgers Cooperative Extension on Sunday, March 5. Mr. Cavallo said that he welcomes advisers but he plans to run the garden through the Recreation Department, so a garden committee will not be needed.

Mr. Cavallo also explained that the township will adopt an ordinance to officially create the Sustainable Verona Green Team and appoint its members. In 2014 the VEC recommended Verona Township to join Sustainable Jersey and to form a Green team and they did, but it was not officially established. Mr. Cavallo asked members to choose a representative from the VEC to serve in the Green Team. Gloria has been fulfilling this role since 2014. Jessica proposed Gloria to continue doing so, she accepted. Jessica moved the motion and Martin Golan seconded the motion.

Jessica mentioned during the meeting that Virginia is planning to leave the Commission and recommended Frank Ceccacci to consider joining the VEC. Frank has been attending VEC meetings since October of 2016 and he suggested doing the West Essex Trail Cleanup.

Adjournment – Next Meeting March 15, 2017.