



B O R O U G H O F R A R I T A N

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

March 16th, 2023

MINUTES

1) Open Public Meetings Statement:

In accordance with Section 5 of the Open Public Meeting Act, Chapter 231, Public Law 1975, be advised that adequate notice of this Meeting of the Environmental Commission of the Borough of Raritan, County of Somerset was made by posting on the Raritan Borough website indicating that this Meeting would take place at the Raritan Municipal Building at 7:00 p.m. on March 16th, 2023. In addition, a copy of this notice is and has been available to the public and is on file in the Office of the Municipal Clerk.

2) Roll Call

- In attendance: Juan Alvarez; Olga Metaxas; Emilie Stander; Tony Sacino; Christopher Gussman; Heath Hofmeister; Adam Armahizer, Council Liaison
- Not in attendance: Michael DeCicco; Denise Carra, Planning Board Liaison

3) Flag Salute

4) Approval of Minutes from February 16th

Mr. Hofmeister made a motion to approve the minutes; Ms. Metaxas seconded the motion. All members approved the minutes without revision.

5) Report from Borough Council

Councilman Armahizer reported that DPW purchased a new dump truck and the police department purchased a new vehicle. The borough is considering acquiring the PNC bank building on Somerset St and are thinking about moving borough hall to that location. The current borough hall would be repurposed for solely police functions.

February 28 was the annual budget meeting. The EC got the green light to begin spending against the proposed budget, with the understanding that the proposed budget will be approved in May.

The next Council meeting will be Monday, March 20.

6) Report from Planning Board

Mr. Alvarez attended the most recent Planning Board meeting, which went until 9pm. The first item was related to Char wanting to expand its outdoor space; that proposal moved forward quickly. The second item was Valley Wellness dispensary's requested variance to the parking ordinance. The solution was that Valley Wellness will be allowed to only provide 24 parking spaces and will have to lease 10 spaces from one of the large malls (the one on the circle or the Raritan Mall on 206); the leased spaces will be used by employees. The employees will be shuttled to and from the dispensary. Currently the lease is only for six months. In the end the Planning Board approved it, with the caveat that the owner will need to maintain the lease or find another location to lease parking spots if the current lease can't be renewed.

The group discussed upcoming redevelopment properties and plans in the borough. Ultimately if residents want to have a voice in what these redevelopment projects look like, they need to advocate for changes to borough ordinances about what kinds of land uses are allowed. The EC could undertake a review of the relevant ordinances, but we also know that it is a slow process, as demonstrated by our proposal to modify the stormwater ordinance.

The group also discussed what benefits the borough is getting from these redevelopment projects, particularly when developers are getting tax breaks and lengthy deferments.

7) Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

8) Discussion Items

- Event planning and discussion of budget items and ordering materials for upcoming events
 - Mr. Alvarez got the PO request form and the EC's account number from the borough administration. Home Depot is one of the approved vendors, so Mr. Alvarez put in the request for 12 rain barrel diverter kits (\$40 each). The next challenge is to locate a vendor for the barrels. We need to identify screw-top or clip-top food grade barrels. 55 gallon pickle drums are the gold standard. We may be able to request that the borough add a new vendor. Ms. Stander will ask her contacts at the county agricultural extension office to share any vendor information they might have. Home Depot does sell already constructed rain barrels for \$100 each, so that's a potential back up plan. We can also invite workshop participants to purchase their own barrels.
 - Mr. Alvarez put forward a resolution to approve the purchase of the diverter kits. Mr. Gussman moved to approve the resolution; Mr. Hofmeister seconded the motion. All of the members were in favor.
 - Mr. Alvarez asked the group to begin searching on Amazon (also an approved vendor) to begin pricing out freebie items, such as renewable bags, silicone straws, etc. to give away at Discover Raritan in July.
- Social media update and planning
 - Ms. Stander will ask Mr. Bellinger to make one more grammatical edit to the initial Facebook/Instagram post. Mr. Alvarez does have administration access to the Facebook account. Ms. Stander will check with Mr. Bellinger that we can upgrade to a Facebook Business account without any cost and then add a linked Instagram account.
 - Mr. Armahizer reminded the group to be mindful of the language we use in our social media posts, particularly given the borough's recent issue related to noncompliance with state rules around gender inclusive language on marriage license applications.
- Status of recommendation to adopt enhanced stormwater ordinance
 - Councilman Armahizer has been in touch with Joseph Brosnan, who is an assistant to the borough engineer and our contact for Sustainable Jersey at Van Clef.
 - Because NJ is promulgating new stormwater (MS4) rules, the borough engineer and borough administrator are reviewing our stormwater programs and looking into grant opportunities.

9) New Business

- Mr. Armahizer asked the group if we want to recommend the mayor appoint Ryan Bellinger to a term on the EC. The group asked Mr. Armahizer to confirm that there is an open term.
- Mr. Alvarez asked Mr. Armahizer to invite the chair of the Economic Development Committee to attend one of our upcoming meetings to discuss possible collaborations. One idea would be to install trees in planters on Somerset St. and ask businesses to adopt the planters and take care of them.

10) Green Team

- a) Green Team items were tabled until a future meeting.

11) Adjournment

Ms. Metaxas made a motion to adjourn at 8:31; Mr. Gussman seconded the motion.