



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

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

January 18th, 2024

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 January 18th, 2024. 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

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

3) Flag Salute

4) Approval of Minutes from November 16th

Mr. Gussman made a motion to approve the minutes; Mr. Bellinger seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with no revisions.

5) Report from Borough Council

January reorganization meeting: Mayor Carra and Councilmen Patente, Tozzi, and Agrawal were all sworn in.

Board of Ed (Michael Pepe) is interested in collaborating with us. A community garden or similar could be a nice project to do with the schools. Ms. Stander also reminded the group about the NJDEP tree planting grant for schools. Mr. Hofmeister had reached out to the principal of JFK last year and there was mutual interest in pursuing a grant during the next funding cycle.

The Borough is rehabilitating the Anderson St firehouse to be a historical property/museum. There are four offices in the back that are also being rehabbed and could be used by committees. Councilman Armahizer would like to see the EC get some space in the building. Council is looking into relocating the Fire Department (3-5 year plan). Currently the department is spread out across multiple locations; Council would like to consolidate into one larger location. This might require property acquisition. The new municipal building will likely be ready in the summer. A new elevator has to be constructed, so that is slowing things down.

The Elizabeth Ave park rehabilitation project is back on (repaving, new basketball hoop, etc.), as of the last Borough Council meeting this month.

The Borough has hired a grant writer, so the EC can take advantage of those services.

Mr. Armahizer noted that the Borough does have a Shade Tree Commission on the books but hasn't appointed anyone to that group in many years. Some of the EC members may be interested in volunteering.

6) Report from Planning Board

No one attended the last Planning Board meeting.

7) Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

8) Discussion Items

- Approve schedule of meetings for 2024
Ms. Metaxas made a motion to approve the proposed schedule of meetings for 2024. All members voted to approve the schedule.
- Clean Communities event planning for April
The group settled on Sat, April 27 for the date of the first clean up. Ms. Stander shared that ANJEC said the Clean Communities funding can be used to install hydration stations in parks starting this year. We would need to coordinate with DPW and potentially the Planning Board to implement this. Ms. Stander will get more information from ANJEC about the process for using these funds for this purpose. Mr. Alvarez will reach out to the Assistant Borough Engineer and invite him to our next meeting to discuss further.
- Social media update and planning: looking for volunteers to develop content for Mr. Bellinger to post, can also find existing content to re-post
Mr. Hofmeister posted about stenciling. All members should think about some content to post in the future. We should aim to get out two or so posts per month.
- Storm drain stenciling update and planning
Mr. Sacino and Mr. Hofmeister were not present to share an update. Other members have not yet begun stenciling.
- Latest version of tree removal ordinance
NJDEP has released a revised model ordinance. The group briefly discussed some of the requirements of the ordinance. The borough will need to adopt some version of this ordinance by May 1, 2024; the borough's version should contain a fee structure and information about preferred species to plant. Ms. Stander will send the group the document for everyone to review before our next meeting.
- Potential funding source for Environmental Resource Inventory update
Ms. Stander found out from ANJEC that we can use any leftover Tier A stormwater funding to pay a consultant to update our ERI. We can also ask the Assistant Borough Engineer if this would fall under the existing Van Clef contract. Mr. Armahizer will look into this.
- Revision of bylaws
Ms. Stander amended Hamilton's EC bylaws to be applicable to Raritan Borough and presented them to the group as a proposal. The objective is to generate bylaws that are more substantive regarding the scope and authority of the EC. We could also add in a vice-chair position and associate members. Ms. Stander will send all the members the proposed bylaws, and we'll plan to discuss it again at our next meeting.
- Status of invitation to Eugene DeStefano to attend RBEC meeting
The group agreed that it would be great to bring Mr. DeStefano in as an associate (i.e., non-voting) member. We will invite him to a future meeting and plan to bring him on formally once the bylaws are amended.

9) New Business

- Ms. Metaxas, Ms. Stander, and Mr. Bellinger were sworn in by Mayor Carra for their new terms. Mr. Sacino and Mr. Hofmeister will need to be sworn in. They can contact Alyssa Cornella to do this.
- Debrief from ANJEC Central Jersey Regional meet up, fall 2023
 - Mission statement
We might consider drafting a mission statement for ourselves to better explain to Council and the public the purpose of our group.

- Bylaws (see relevant discussion item above)
- ERI update (see relevant discussion item above)
- Site plan review process
Morris Township shared their site plan review process, which follows ANJEC's guidance closely. When a new site plan comes in, it is assigned to one of the EC members. That member, along with other volunteers and possibly a Planning Board member, conduct a site visit. Then they generate a short report which they then present to the Planning Board. The objective is to support the Planning Board in their own review and to provide our expertise and analysis as a service to the Board.
- Somerville EC's social marketing expertise: We agree to invite the marketing professional from the Somerville EC to an upcoming meeting (March or similar).

- Community Forestry

Mr. Bellinger shared ideas to develop a Community Forestry Management Plan and get certified, which would make us eligible for stewardship grants up to \$150K. We could also aim for Tree City USA certification. There is an urban forestry grant program that we can apply for. Mr. Bellinger is already providing this expertise to support other municipalities as part of his job.

10) Green Team

- a) Report out from ongoing efforts and planning future activities

11) Adjournment

Mr. Alvarez made a motion to adjourn at 8:10pm; Ms. Metaxas seconded the motion.