



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

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

July 17th, 2025

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 July 17th, 2025. 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: Olga Metaxas; Emilie Stander; Tony Sacino; Christopher Gussman; Heath Hofmeister; Ben Harris; Adam Armahizer, Council Liaison
- Not in attendance: Juan Alvarez

3) Flag Salute

4) Approval of Minutes from May 15th

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

5) Report from Borough Council

The major conversation right now is the borough's plans for how it will meet the state-mandated affordable housing requirements over the next 10 years, which looks like building about 600 new housing units total. The report from the affordable housing attorney is available on the Planning Board website, and Mr. Colvin can also provide it to us as needed. We're not expecting new development beyond what's in this plan. Borough Council did approve the 4th round of affordable housing requirements set by the state. Raritan's population is up 54% since 2000, due in part to working hard to meet the affordable housing requirements. Borough Council has approved the attorney's plan; now the Planning Board has to review it.

Some new townhomes will be going in near the tennis courts (21 Tilman St); there are potentially some concerns around the previous industrial junkyard use. It sounds like the county has some plans for the area involving a mini-soccer field/pitch that might make the community garden a poor fit for that spot; the EC may want to look at the Cardinal Woods site again or think of a different location altogether. It sounds like the county may take full ownership of the property.

Orlando Drive – a bike lane will be added and the speed limit reduced to 25 mph.

The splash park at JFK is installed and in operation.

The borough is now saying the new municipal building will open in September.

6) Report from Planning Board

The affordable housing attorney gave a presentation to the Board about his report. It sounds like the borough will be in good shape if the plan gets passed in terms of complying with state mandates; there is time to actually build the units.

7) Public Comment

There were no members of the public present.

8) Discussion Items

- Update on grant proposals
 - Green Communities (Adam)
 - There is no update at this time. Mr. Armahizer was expecting a report from the grantwriting group already, but it has not yet arrived. If the proposal is successful, that will be an influx of \$20K per year.
- Updating impervious cover assessment conducted by Rutgers Cooperative Extension (Emilie)
 - Technical assistance program
 - No update at this time.
- Community garden
 - Update from DPW/Council on plans for site?
 - The group discussed potential interest in the Cardinal Woods location now that the tennis court area is no longer in the equation. Mr. Gussman raised the issue of the lack of apartment buildings in that area, meaning likely less demand for communal garden space. The group discussed the small park parcel on the north side of Orlando Drive. The area is quite shady; perhaps a microforest (or pocket forest) would be a better fit for that spot. It might be possible to use some urban heat island and/or green communities funding for a project like that. A rain garden could also make sense there.
 - We will keep thinking about potential locations for a community garden. It would make sense to build it into some of the new apartment complexes that will be constructed in the future. Plus Duke Farms could be a great potential partner since they have a lot of experience in operating a large community garden.
- Climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessment
 - Status of borough master planning process? (Adam)
 - There is no update on the master planning process at this time.
- Update and status of proposed revision of bylaws
 - Did the previous lawyer hand off the revised bylaws to the new lawyer? (Adam)
 - The new lawyer has the proposed revised bylaws. Mr. Armahizer will suggest the lawyer review them and send them to Council, and if he has questions he can meet with the EC.
- Ordinance review planning (Emilie)
 - Other than the bulk pickup ordinance, Mr. Armahizer hasn't seen any other environmental ordinances come before Borough Council.
 - Ms. Stander will contact Ms. Knowles to find out what ordinance review has already been completed by Van Cleef. There wasn't much interest in reviving Sustainable Jersey efforts with Ms. Knowles at this time.
- Social media update and planning (Heath)
 - Handoff to Mr. Harris
 - Mr. Harris is working on following other organizations and increasing engagement, which has been up measurably since the first quarter.
 - Everyone can send photos to Mr. Harris to post.
- Brownfields technical assistance from NJIT (Emilie and Chris)
 - Begin brainstorming questions for Planning Board to ask owner
 - Ms. Stander suggested asking about additional sampling for benzene, since the remediation in 2003 only addressed the TCE issues in a particular hotspot, while benzene had previously been found in multiple locations. She also suggested requesting testing for PFAS. There is also an open question of what additional monitoring and remediation needs to be conducted for landfill methane emissions.
 - Identify timing for a call with NJIT: Ms. Stander will reach out to Cailyn Bruno at NJIT to see if she is available for a Zoom meeting on Mon or Tues, July 28 or 29, in the evening.

- RVCC tree/forest health communication materials (Emilie)
 - Mr. Alvarez printed out the forest health poster that Ms. Stander's students designed.
 - Ms. Stander will send a PDF of the poster to Mr. Harris so he can post it on our social media accounts. He will remove the students' names in Adobe.
 - Ms. Stander will look into updating the QR code.
 - Mr. Hofmeister suggested posting some in a few places around town, and then we'll have the rest available for outreach events.
- Planning new outreach events
 - Composting workshop
 - Could teach attendees a couple of ways to compost, but a worm bin would make the most sense. We could invite attendees to bring an old storage bin, or obtain one from us. Mr. Harris could bring worms and explain how to operate the bin. Fall would be a good time; people could add fallen leaves from their yard, perhaps late September.
 - The EC would need to purchase bins and cheap silicone spoons or hand rakes from a thrift store.
 - Tentative date: Sat, Oct 4 at Frelinghuysen, Mr. Hofmeister will contact Recreation to find out if the park is available.
 - We would advertise the event for families and kids. Mr. Hofmeister will reach out to Principal Russo at JFK and Scout Troop 90 to get the word out.
 - Cleanup: Sept 27/28, following Basilone Parade on Sun, Sept 21. Ms. Stander and Mr. Harris are not available that weekend.
 - Tree planting at Elizabeth Ave park
 - Mr. Gussman has planted one tree already.
 - Mr. Armahizer thinks there is still money remaining in the shade tree budget. Mr. Hofmeister will reach out to Mr. LoMedico to get details.
 - Mr. Alvarez found a new source of rain barrels through an apiary in Perth Amboy. Mr. Hofmeister went and picked up seven barrels that used to contain pimentos. The barrels were free to anyone who would come and pick them up. They are now at DPW. Mr. Hofmeister added one more barrel from his own collection, so we have eight barrels to work with for future workshops.
- Plans for upcoming visits to EC meetings
 - Ed Carrington (Duke Farms): Mr. Harris will see if he can attend our Aug 21 meeting.
 - Borough engineer: Mr. Gussman said Mr. Brosnan is interested in attending a future meeting; he was unable to attend this month.
 - Outreach to scouts: Troop 84 was the group that interacted with Mr. Armahizer. Mr. Armahizer also suggested reaching out to Joe Kempe to connect with Scouts.

9) New Business

- Community solar and automatic enrollment program (Emilie)
 - NJ is now allowing municipalities to automatically enroll low and moderate income (LMI) residents into community solar programs so that they can benefit from savings on their electricity bills. Municipalities would need to do outreach to LMI residents and give them the ability to opt out. Municipalities could either do this work themselves or contract it out. The solar developer would pay costs associated with a contract.
 - Somerville EC is currently exploring this option. Raritan could potentially enter into a shared contract with Somerville to hire a firm to do the outreach to LMI residents in both towns.
 - The group struggled to think about how to pitch the idea to Borough Council. We will watch how things go in Somerville and continue to think about it.
- C-PACE
 - Ms. Stander will forward information about this organization, which provides a

mechanism for businesses to finance clean energy upgrades through loans tied to property tax assessment. This would mean that if a business owner left the location before the loan was paid off, the remaining loan payments would be transferred to the new property owner. This way a business owner can still invest in clean energy upgrades even if they aren't sure how long they will remain in that location.

- Hydration station
 - The group discussed using Clean Communities funding to install additional hydration stations in the borough. Mr. Armahizer continues to hear positive feedback about the one installed at Frelinghuysen Park. Mr. Hofmeister will look into JFK splash park and Nevius St bridge as potential locations.

10) Adjournment

Ms. Metaxas made a motion to adjourn at 8:50pm; Mr. Harris seconded the motion.