



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

## ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

### Regular Meeting

March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### 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 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026 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: Heath Hofmeister, Emilie Stander, Olga Metaxas, Ben Harris, Tony Sacino, Vince LoMedico, Chris Gussman, MLUB Liaison; Jacob Martinez, Council Liaison

Not in attendance: Juan Alvarez

3) Flag Salute

4) Approval of Minutes from January 15<sup>th</sup> and February 19<sup>th</sup>

The minutes from both meetings were approved with no revisions.

5) Report from Borough Council

Mr. Martinez relayed Borough Council's support for the Frelinghuysen seating and rain garden project proposal.

6) Report from Planning Board

- Raritan Mall redevelopment project: continuation of the presentation from the developer next Wednesday, Mar 25
- 57-59 LaGrange: final site plan approval is on the Wednesday, Mar 25 agenda
- Other?

7) Public Comment

Multiple members of the public attended. Comments and input included the following:

- Agway used to be a train property where industrial materials were offloaded. Then it was an agricultural operation. All of these uses could have resulted in environmental contamination. There has been no investigation by the Borough.
- Industrial hygienist:
  - Recommendation to require an industrial hygienist on site for each demolition project to protect health and safety of neighboring residents; the hygienist could be paid for by the developer.
  - A non-profit organization could be set up to hire an independent hygienist and LSRP so that these professionals are not working for the developer.
  - An ordinance could be proposed that requires the developer to put money into a fund that the borough can use to hire independent industrial hygienist and LSRP
- The LSRP was hired for 57 LaGrange because of the buried oil tank; the LSRP never investigated 59 LaGrange

## 8) Discussion Items

- Green Communities grant: Virtual visit from Ryan Bellinger, NJDEP Community Forestry program
  - Upcoming information session: webinar on Wed, Mar 25, 12pm.
  - Green Communities grant can be used for tree inventory and Community Forestry Management Plan (CFMP) development.
  - Grant supplies \$20K and requires a 25% match, which can be satisfied by employee or volunteer time at rate of \$33/hour.
  - Tree inventory – includes trees on public lands, can be sample based, and either be completed on a partial or complete basis; can sample different neighborhoods as a representative sample; partial – inventory one section of town in one plan, and then rotate different parts of town in future inventories (NJDEP likes this approach, it's cheap and effective)
  - Grant provides \$15K for the inventory and \$5K for plan development
  - CFMP typically conducted by a contractor; NJDEP has minimum data that goes in the RFP when seeking out the contractor
  - \$15K usually not enough to do a full inventory, although Raritan doesn't have that much public land
  - Borough would hire an urban forestry contractor; Mr. Bellinger can provide lists of appropriate professionals
  - CFMP: Mr. Bellinger has sample plans that he can share with us; plan is used to visualize where gaps are in the urban tree canopy, can see where the old trees are that need to be replaced with new plantings; there are sections of the plan that the borough should complete, the development of the plan is meant to encourage collaboration between the contractor and the municipality rather than having the contractor work independently without input and engagement from the borough
  - Work period is two years
  - Grant agreement is with the municipality, so need signature from Borough Administrator or CFO
  - Every town that wants a grant can get one, we just have to submit the paperwork through the NJDEP SAGE grant portal (blue version)
  - 3 main program requirements:
    - Tree inventory
    - CFMP: valid for 5 years following approval
    - Training requirement
      - CORE training held twice per year (Urban Forestry 101), in person in October, online in March/April; we can sign up mid-March next year
      - Need a volunteer and a municipal employee to be CORE trained, an elected official can count as either
      - Annual CEU requirement: can do online webinars, DPW trainings, need 8 CEU's across two people
    - Annual report: form to fill out, due every year in February
  - Benefits:
    - Liability protection; if a tree falls on a car, the borough isn't liable because CFMP implementation shows the borough is taking care of its trees; might lower JIF premiums (this has been the case for other municipalities)
    - Having an approved CFMP makes the borough eligible for other state grants; NJDEP coming out with a maintenance grant soon for pruning, etc.
  - Somerset county towns that are already doing this include: Somerville, Bernards, Franklin, N. Plainfield, Branchburg, Bound Brook
  - Mr. LoMedico will talk to colleagues in Somerville about their experience; he also mentioned that the borough should consider adopting an ordinance that requires developers to put money into a fund for three replacement trees for every tree that is

- removed during development; the EC could tap this fund for tree plantings
  - Mr. LoMedico has offered to do a walk through of the Basilone Park riparian area to identify areas for tree plantings and to reduce mowing accordingly
- Rain garden presentation to Borough Council on Tues, Mar 24
  - Mr. LoMedico's DPW crew can install the seating area and shade covering; they can also create the curb cut.
  - Mr. Harris suggested added a framing of economic benefits from adding green infrastructure, what are the savings associated with a project like this.
  - Ms. Stander agreed to add more photos on the slides that have a lot of text.
- Event planning and logistics
  - Meditation workshop, new date Sat, Apr 25
    - Collaboration with Recreation
    - The date was moved to avoid conflicting with Easter weekend.
    - Ms. Stander noted that there are two incorrect entries on the Borough calendar for this event.
    - Ms. Stander will look into getting an updated flyer to put on Instagram.
    - It's an all ages event.
  - Spring clean up, Apr 18
    - The registration link is up on the RHA website. Borough Recreation is asking people to register through the Borough's Community Pass system. Recreation is organizing team leaders to take out crews to various neighborhoods. DPW will provide gloves, bags, and ponchos through Clean Communities. Crews should leave bags anywhere along streets where trucks can get to them; don't leave them by the river.
    - Ms. Stander will send the updated flyer to Mr. Harris to post on Instagram.
  - Spring tree planting and remembrance for Michael DeCicco?
    - This item was tabled until next month.
  - Rain barrel workshop?
    - This item was tabled until next month.
  - Hydration station installation?
    - This item was tabled until next month.
  - Others?
- Ongoing redevelopment projects with environmental concerns
  - 57-59 LaGrange: review questions for Planning Board
    - Ms. Stander relayed the comments from Mr. Gara about the AC units in the back of the units being condensers, they don't pull in outside air at that location.
    - Mr. Harris suggested getting recommendations for industrial hygienists from NJIT
    - Mr. Gussman suggested reaching out to the Somerset County Board of Health to investigate the potential cancer cluster.
    - Can the Planning Board ask the owner to produce the chain of custody forms for the removal of the 55 gallon drums and unlabeled chemical storage containers on site at 59 LaGrange before demolition (as noted in Mr. Brosnan's technical report)? The EC can also submit an OPRA request to NJDEP for this documentation.
  - Raritan Mall: site plan review, prepare comments for Planning Board
    - Mr. LoMedico will contact the Raritan Mall owner to get the 55 gallon drums removed from behind the Stop & Shop building. He suspects they contain used cooking grease, but the owner should confirm that and get them removed.
  - Busky Lane
    - This item was tabled until next month.
- Air quality issues associated with NJ Transit railyard
  - Councilman Martinez relayed that Council is planning to set up a new committee to work on the NJ Transit issues

- Collaboration with RVCC students on communication about flooding
  - Ms. Stander has set a Zoom meeting with the RVCC students for next Wed, Mar 25 at 4pm. She will send around a Zoom link so that others can join. We will want to give the students guidance on what kinds of messages to include on a communication about flooding with the general public.
- Social media update and planning
  - This item was tabled until next month.
- Plans for upcoming visits to EC meetings
  - Angela Knowles, ordinance review consultant: set time for special meeting
  - Borough engineer, Joseph Brosnan

9) New Business

- Future of Green Team/Sustainable Jersey efforts
  - This item was tabled until next month.

10) Adjournment

The group adjourned at 9:14pm.