

WWT ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

January 12, 2023

The January 2023 meeting of the WWT Environmental Commission was held on Thursday, January 12, 2023 via Zoom with Ephraim Buhks calling the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Pursuant to the Sunshine Law, a notice of this meeting's date, time, place and agenda was mailed to the news media, posted on the Township bulletin board, and filed with the Municipal Clerk.

ROLL CALL

Members: E. Buhks; E. Gordon; S. Parratt; H. Shankar; L. Katz;
Staff Liaison: J. Taylor, WWT Assistant Engineer Council Liaison: S. Gawas
Guests: Andrea Mandel, WWT Council Member; Lisa, resident
Eleni Litt, Rutgers Steward

REORGANIZATION: E. Buhks appointed Chair by Mayor; E. Gordon motioned by L. Katz and voted in to continue as Vice-Chair; A Baig appointed as PB representative by Mayor.

PUBLIC COMMENT – none

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 9, 2022 L. Katz motioned; S. Parratt seconded;
Minutes were approved as presented.

CONTINUING BUSINESS: Project Review/Update 2022 Projects:

Community Park Pollinator and Rain Garden – S. Parratt, Rutgers Master Gardener and WWT resident, gave a brief update on the Rain and Pollinator Gardens. Inventory has been taken for plants that will be replaced as well as routine maintenance which will take place in the spring. Information will be shared with EC members as the schedule is determined.

Habitat Restoration Collaborative Group – S. Parratt provided a brief description and overview of his current project for developing a standing collaborative group, consisting of volunteers from various organizations such as Boy/Girl Scouts, Rutgers Master Gardeners, Environmental stewards, local residents, and groups from surrounding towns, who would meet once a month and report back to EC periodically. The focus of the group would be on Habitat Restoration, for example, routine maintenance of various existing rain and pollinator gardens, removal of invasive species throughout WWT, and new projects such as the installation of a meadow within Community Park to reduce mowable surface. This proposal is still in the planning stage and he will provide a presentation at a future meeting as details are finalized. Several EC members offered suggestions on various groups who may be interested in being included as volunteers.

Sustainable Jersey Recertification – S. Parratt reported he will be exploring opportunities to focus on, plan and implement more Green Infrastructure projects to be included within the Sustainable Jersey Recertification process for the next renewal period in 2025. He will be attending an Environmental Stewards course on Green Infrastructure which is specifically designed to provide guidance and assistance in meeting the requirements of the Green Infrastructure portion of the Sustainable Jersey certification process. He also plans to explore and work on the Water Story portion of the application to increase WWT's potential to reach gold-level status, if possible.

Solar Energy – H. Shankar introduced herself and provided an update on the solar project she has been working on which consisted of the potential inclusion of solar lighting located in various areas throughout WWT. She has continued to contact several companies to gather additional information and details such as status updates on supply issues, timelines, and any other pertinent information. J. Taylor, WWT Assistant Engineer, offered to collaborate with H Shankar as he is currently involved with the WWT project to install solar lighting at Dey Forest Park.

E. Gordon stated he will continue taking and sharing photographs of current EC projects to be incorporated on the website and various presentations as well as provide assistance for future projects. E. Buhks thanked him for his continued efforts and the vital contribution his photography has become in ensuring the public is aware of and has visual access to EC projects.

E. Buhks introduced D. Parris, WWT resident and New Jersey State Museum's natural history curator, who reported on his ongoing work at the Environmental Educational Center located at the Scheck Farmstead. He will be focusing on native animals and the various aspects which can be improved and incorporated into the next Sustainable Jersey Recertification process. One specific native species he has been observing recently is the Redbelly Turtle which is the largest basking turtle in our area. Our area is the northernmost habitat of the Redbelly Turtle and does face threats from invasive species which are more prominent as well as reports of lesions in other counties in the state. He will continue to make observations and study the impact this could have on the future of the species.

Township Council Update – E. Buhks introduced the new TC liaison, Sonia Gawas. S. Gawas reported the TC had their reorganization meeting. A. Mandel is the Council President and M. Stevens is the Vice-President. The municipal building renovations have not been completed yet therefore the building is not open to the public at this time. Once the renovations have been officially approved and completed, a grand reopening will be scheduled for the public to be able to tour the facility. This information will be shared as soon as it becomes available.

Planning Board – A. Baig was unable to attend the meeting. S. Gawas reported that two parcels located off Cranbury Road had requested the township preserve the land for farmland use only. As the school board has removed its interest in these two parcels, the township is reviewing and considering the preserved farmland request.

I. Singh reported he has made observations of several items included in recycling bins placed out for collection which are not acceptable items and would like to explore options to provide educational outreach to community residents to ensure only acceptable items are being placed in these bins. S. Gawas responded that several Girl Scout initiatives have been conducted to provide education as well as ongoing outreach at multiple community events and unfortunately, the practice of including unacceptable items still continues. E. Buhks suggested updating our website to provide additional guidance and raise awareness. J. Taylor responded that one suggestion has been to send out an annual notice that includes stormwater management, scheduling of leaf and brush pickup and recycling educational information to continue raising awareness for all community residents. S. Gawas recommended promoting the Recycle Coach app as an additional source of information. After some additional discussion, I. Singh volunteered to continue working on this as a project for this year.

E. Litt, Environmental Steward, provided an overview on a Nature Journaling class she taught at the Art Council in the fall of 2022. She will be completing her report in the spring for the Environmental Steward program. The previous class was successful and she has chosen to run it again with EC member, L. Katz, attending as a student.

NEW BUSINESS: Discussion – In-Person Meetings: Renovation and construction at the municipal building is being finalized and the potential to resume in-person meetings was discussed for February. It was confirmed a hybrid option is not available. E. Buhks requested members to provide him with their opinions and feedback. After some discussion regarding the room and available technology, it was determined that S. Gawas will gather information to address the concerns and questions as soon as possible.

Motion to adjourn by L. Katz, seconded by S. Parratt. Meeting was adjourned at 9:26pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Tomaro, Administrative Secretary
WWT Environmental Commission