

5.

Florence, New Jersey 08518
March 7, 2024

The regular meeting of the Florence Township Environmental Commission was held on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey. The meeting was called to order at 7:07 P.M. followed by a salute to the flag. The following statement was read: "I would like to announce that this meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been provided to the official newspapers and posted in the main hall of the Municipal Complex".

Upon roll call the following Commissioners were found to be present:

Melanie Mieczkowski	Saphan Pickett
Paul Ordog	Talaya Loftin
Michelle Ryan-Krzykalski	John Pagano
Deepa Patel	

ABSENT: Dave Yansick, David Mudge

MINUTES

A Motion was made by Ms. Patel, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to adopt the minutes from the February 5, 2024 meeting as submitted. Motion unanimously approved by all members present. Mr. Pagano abstained

OLD BUSINESS

A. Grant & Community Garden Updates

Last month, the Commission was still working on the draft of the Grant applications for Sustainable New Jersey. The Commission has applied for grants—the \$20,000 grant for the Community Garden, the \$2,000 grant for the pollinator garden. They are due to hear back about the grants in April or May. There is a third grant that was applied for through the Rutgers Cooperative Extension for the actual plants and this one they will find out about at the end of April.

Ms. Pickett stated that she talked to Marty Eckert from the Township and he wants to do multiple community awareness days in different locations. But before that, it is important for the plants to arrive and have an "orientation" about how the community garden works.

Council Representative Loftin has some questions about how the Community Gardens are managed. It sounds like Frank Baldorossi & Marty Eckert are in charge of the management of the Roebling Garden. There might be a system in place where there is a manager at the garden site, but in Florence there is no system right now. The idea is to have a central standardized system in place for both. The Commission also wants to get the word out about the gardens since it seems like a lot of people don't know the town has them. Ms. Pickett stated that she has experience in running community gardens so she can volunteer for the Florence Garden if Mr. Baldorossi is already handling the Roebling Garden.

6.

Ms. Pickett talked to a retired nursery inspector named Steve and he managed a garden near Willingboro on Route 130. He has a very organized system for that garden program.

The soil screening was done at the Roebling Garden with the Rutgers Extension office & the National Conservation Resource Service. They did an XRPF scan for trace elements which did show arsenic & lead in the soil. The garden beds were fine but the barrier under the beds isn't the correct one. Along with organizing systems, the beds need to be fixed. It is possible to replace with the correct kind of plastic under the beds to remedy the situation, while still using the same wood that is there. The soil results for the Florence site are still pending, but the site of a possible fruit orchard is an issue and the site will be revisited for additional testing on March 27. Mr. Ordog stated that there used to be garages where the Roebling Garden is now that were part of the steel mill.

The Rutgers Cooperative Extension also offered to set up a table at community events, and let residents bring soil from their own yards for testing. A good date for something like this would be around Earth Day in April and hold an event in the Roebling Community Center. Or the other idea is during the Steel Mill Street Fair on May 18. This is also a good time to educate residents about the Community Gardens and answer questions about that.

The Commission is also considering starting a social media account to spread the word about an Earth Day event as well as helping get information out about the Community Gardens. Part of keeping the Sustainable NJ certification is posting on social media about once a month, and posting to our website doesn't count towards that. Also, a member of the Commission needs to attend the County paper shredding events to get points for the Sustainable NJ Certification.

Ms. Pickett wants to mark specific dates for when composting and other things will be happening in March & April. Ms. Patel said if we get the grant, the first thing to be done is garden installation and begin garden bed preparation, soil amendment and purchase necessary materials. This would also require volunteers. Ms. Loftin said that the garden in Florence needs to be completely fixed. The wood needs to be replaced at the Florence site because of termites and it is actually a safety hazard.

The supplies would need to be purchased in May as well as forming a committee. Ms. Loftin suggested asking the Township to pay for the new wood needed since May is too late to wait on the results of the grant. Ms. Patel spoke with Mr. Eckert from the Township about purchasing supplies before receiving the grant. Ms. Loftin said she would follow up on that. If the Commission doesn't receive the grant that would purchase the plants, there is a plan to reach out to a nursery and ask for some donated plants.

The next step after getting the Gardens set up is educational programs and workshops on sustainable gardening. There also needs to be some materials delivered to the schools and residents. There also needs to be community engagement activities scheduled, and arrange to host community planting days, and implement a volunteer program for ongoing maintenance.

If the Commission does receive the grant, they are required to do a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Sustainable NJ which would need to be planned if the grant is received. There also needs to be outreach events planned throughout the year such as garden tours, talks & demonstrations, partner with local businesses for sponsorships, and school collaborations.

7.

Ms. Loftin thinks the Commission should invite a representative from the schools to a Commission meeting to see what the needs of the schools would be. Mr. Ordog said that years ago, there used to be a liaison from the Environmental Club at the high school who would attend the Environmental Commission meetings.

Ms. Patel said that she is going to speak to Mr. Eckert from the Township to find out about funds for replacing the wood & soil at the Florence Garden as well as the Earth Day event, and the posts on social media.

Ms. Mieczkowski asked about putting signage at the Florence Garden to let residents know that it is not ready yet. Ms. Pickett said she would handle the sign.

Ms. Loftin asked if we are alerting residents about the soil findings. The report was sent to the township. The Commission recommended that Ms. Loftin report on this at the next Council Meeting. Ms. Loftin said she will also speak to Council about the funds needed for renovating some of the garden. The Commission is going to wait for the current soil reports to be available before posting any signs at the gardens.

CORRESPONDENCE

OTHER BUSINESS/PLAN REVIEW

Ms. Pickett brought up a warehouse on Front Street near water + sewer that has a retention pond that never drains. It is unclear if it is supposed to drain.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no members of the public in attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

It was the Motion of Mr. Ordog seconded by Ms. Loftin to adjourn the meeting at 8:01PM Motion unanimously approved by all members present.

MRK/amh

Michelle Ryan-Krzykalski, Secretary