



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044
VeronaEC.org

Minutes of the Verona Environmental Commission Regular Meeting on September 20th, 7:00 P.M.,
Conference Room, Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Members Anthony Saltalamacchia, Jessica Pearson, Sarah Yauch O'Farrell, Walter Steinmann (Alternate I), Frank Ceccacci (Alternate II). Guest: Julia Bresnan (NJWAP Watershed Ambassador).

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order and reads the notice of Open Public Meetings Act. There is a quorum to go ahead and hold an official meeting.
2. Minutes from the July 19 Meeting and September 14 Special Meeting were approved by members.
3. Gloria sent the VEC poster contest announcement for Walk and Bike to School Day to all public schools' principals. Sean printed flyers, Frank distributed them to schools. The VEC will pick up entries on Oct. 4.

4. The township received an estimate from the Land Conservancy to create a new Natural Resource Inventory, and is expecting to receive more from a few other vendors. Gloria proposed to draft a letter of recommendation. Jessica drafted this letter with members' input during the meeting:

Dear Mr. Cavallo, Mayor Ryan, Deputy Mayor Nochimson, Councilman Roman, Councilman McEvoy and Councilman Giblin,

The Verona Environmental Commission strongly recommends that the Township of Verona hire the services of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey to create the new Natural Resource Inventory for Verona. The Land Conservancy is an award winning organization with unmatched professional qualifications, experience, and accuracy. The Land Conservancy is highly regarded and well respected throughout the State of New Jersey. For more information on their credentials, please visit:

<http://tlc-nj.org/>

Tony made a motion to approve submitting the letter, Sarah seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

More updates: The grant for the bike racks and the community garden is being prepared by Verona Township. The street sweeper will not be alternative fuel but the town is researching CNG stations and EVs for administrative vehicles for future purchases.

5. West Essex Trail: Frank update. After visiting the site twice over the last few days, it's obvious that Mr. Tripod has not cleaned up the Essex County-owned area between the parking lot and the trail as he committed to do by 8/23/17. Therefore Frank filed a report with the sheriff who visited the site and said there is no action needed. Frank also used the new app to report illegal dumping in public lands in New Jersey: <http://stopdumping.nj.gov>

6. Gloria submitted the VEC Position Paper to the Municipal Clerk for distribution to Town Council on Sep. 15. The letter, approved by VEC members during the Sep. 14 special meeting, recommends Essex County to reduce impervious area wherever possible, and proposes using Green Infrastructure such as Permeable Pavement, instead of impervious materials, if a parking lot will be installed in Verona Park, or in other future projects. Gloria, Martin and Walter attended a meeting at 5pm on Sept 20, at the Verona Park boathouse to present the letter to Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo and County Parks Director Dan Salvante. Verona Town Manager Matt Cavallo, Councilman Jack McEvoy and County Liaison Jay Coltre attended too.

Gloria encouraged the County to preserve green open space and existing trees, and recommended to use a sustainable design and green infrastructure (permeable pavement, rain gardens, trees) if the County is going ahead with the 52-space parking lot. Porous pavement and other Green Infrastructure help repair our waterways, improve water quality and reduce flooding. Gloria mentioned that parking is only one issue in Verona and we should look at the big picture: pollution, storm water runoff, flooding, loss of open green space, pedestrian safety, etc.

The parking lot design was done in house to reduce costs. Gloria offered to send the plans to Christopher Perez (from Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program) and ask for suggestions. DiVincenzo agreed and asked where he could see porous pavement already installed. Gloria recommended visiting a site in South Orange and the EPA's testing site in Edison Environmental Center. After the meeting Gloria received Mr. Perez recommendations and shared them with Mr. Salvante. Mr. Perez highlighted the areas where porous asphalt makes the most sense, based on the proposed grading/catch basin locations for Verona Park project, and advised that Green Infrastructure can be worked into the plans; bioretention (rain gardens, trees) in the striped 'islands', curb cuts to rain gardens, etc. He also introduced Amy Rowe who serves as the Environmental County Agent with Essex County Cooperative Extension. Sarah mentioned that she is not happy with the amount of pavement installed in parks like the new one in Cedar Grove. Frank added that it is important to educate authorities about the benefits of using Green Infrastructure.

7. Verona Wetlands: The VEC and neighbors of the 111 Mount Prospect Ave and 25 Commerce Court properties, received a letter from South Orange developer Roger Kruvant stating that he is asking the NJ DEP to establish the boundaries of wetlands on them. Jessica gave a presentation, last Monday night the Town Council announced that developers are considering affordable housing on four sites: the former Poekel Travel Bureau office, the former Children's Institute site on Sunset Avenue, 25 Commerce Court (currently used as Verona leaf dump), and the wooded lot on Mount Prospect Avenue by Eagle Rock Reservation.

Lower income units are required to be built with a mix of regular housing (1 to 5 ratio). Additional construction could burden services and infrastructure. Many years ago the town of Mount Laurel in Philadelphia, was sued for blocking construction of low-income housing. The court decision obligated NJ towns to allow affordable housing. Verona met twice its obligations with 100 Hillwood Terrace and two years ago received immunity from builder's remedy lawsuits, which will expire in a few months. Decisions on affordable housing had been made by the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). Gov. Christie declined to fill its vacant seats. COAH doesn't operate any longer which leaves municipalities with no standard for the number of affordable housing required. An expert said Verona needs 20 additional low-income units, another said 120, and an affordable-housing advocacy group asked for 327 units.

Members indicated that trout placed in Verona Park's lake for fishing, sometimes escape and survive in local streams and the Peckman River. Walter mentioned that strict laws protect waters classified as Trout Production water. Wetland boundaries demarcation controls the required buffer zone around the wetlands. The VEC will consult with ANJEC before submitting comments to the DEP.

6. Recycling initiatives: Tony mentioned that in Long Island communities have "Swap Stations" where you can drop and pick up used items. It's a good idea but needs supervision. Storage space will be an issue too. Perhaps it's better to promote other programs that are already in place like FreeCycle.

7. New Business. Gloria proposed a Fall Cleanup at Grove Park, members agreed to have one on October 14 from 9 am to 12 noon. The two recently planted Viburnums were cut down to the ground, the five which-hazels died. DPW mulched under benches and signage. Plaques are installed on the benches. Gloria met Anne Stires at the park, took her photo at the bench and they did a small cleanup.

8. Public Participation: Julia mentioned that perhaps makes more sense adding Green Infrastructure now than after the parking lot is built, which would be more expensive.

Adjournment – Next Meeting October 18th, 2017.