



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044

www.veronaec.org

December 11, 2025

Dear Mayor Tamburro, Verona Township Council Members, Township Manager O'Sullivan, and Deputy Township Manager Kraus

2025 Verona Environmental Commission Annual Report

2025 Roster: The VEC has seven members plus two alternates:

1. Jessica Pearson (Chairperson, Planning Board Liaison, Plan Review Committee, SV Liaison)
2. Sean DiBartolo (Vice-Chair, Webmaster, and Plan Review Committee)
3. Sarah Yauch O'Farrell (Social Media)
4. *Kelly Peña* (recently resigned)
5. Fuad Dahan
6. Walter Steinmann (Plan Review Committee)
7. Adam Bulger
8. Kelly DiGeronimo (Alternate 1)
9. Jean Deo (Alternate 2)

All members are Verona residents and serve without compensation. Mayor Tamburro is currently serving as our liaison through December 2025.

The following outlines our initiatives, ongoing programs as well as a compilation of policy recommendations we have made.

1) Cleanups and Events 2025: The VEC and its members remain committed to keeping Verona's open space, parks, and waterways free from debris and garbage. Barring weather related cancellations, the VEC ordinarily holds or participates annual cleanups and other sorts of events.

- A) April 2, 2025: VEC members joined with the Verona Public Library to sponsor a lecture entitled Creating a Deer Resistant Native Garden. The lecture was presented by Deborah Ellis of the New Jersey Native Plant Society. Deb is a Rutgers Steward, a Master Gardener, and the Founder of the Essex Chapter of the Native Plant Society. The presentation welcomed over 50 attendees who learned about beautiful flowering perennials and shrubs that are deer resistant and will successfully thrive in our gardens.
- B) February 3, 2025 to April 11, 2025: VEC members kicked off its inaugural Earth Day Native Plant Sale event. Partnering with the VEC, Hillcrest Farms Nursery offered 16 native perennial species and 10 native shrub species for sale at wholesale prices. Each of the plants were chosen based upon nativity, resilience, beauty and deer

resistance to educate our area on how easy it can be to convert a basic garden to a native one.

Sales totaling approximately \$16,000 were reflected by the purchase of over 1,300 plants by about 90 individual customers. VEC members physically grouped the plants on-site according to order number a few days in advance of the distribution date.

- C) April 26, 2025: the Commission held its Native Plant Sale Pick-up Event. The event, held at Hillcrest Farms, involved greeting and distributing the plants to residents, answering questions, and discussing the placement and care for each species. This sale was an overwhelming success in a push to educate our public about the importance of pollinators and native plantings for the health and future of our area. The VEC also had help from our local Scouting America organization and former Junior Commissioner Cece Manis from VHS.
- D) April 30, 2025: The VEC partnered with the Verona Public Library to screen the documentary: Plastic People The Hidden Crisis of Microplastics. This free screening, offered to us by ANJEC, investigated our society's addiction to plastic and how it negatively impacts our health, our bodies, and our future generations.
- E) June 1, 2025: VEC's Annual Peckman River / Trail Cleanup: The VEC changed up our annual cleanup this year. On June 1st, we went to Peckman Park, located between Commerce Court and Brookside Terrace. At this event, the VEC joined with Eagle Scout candidate James Waugh, and a number of other Scouting America scouts to help with the creation of a walking trail along this section of the Peckman River.

At the cleanup, volunteers helped retrieve the usual strewn garbage, commingled recycling materials, plastic bags, wrappers, bulk garbage, and the like. Volunteers also moved around larger fallen tree limbs and trunks to line the planned trail including the sawing those same large boughs to help with easier transport to the planned trail sections.

- F) August 31, 2025: Eagle Rock Reservation Study: VEC members joined the Climate Revolution Action Network for a walk through the Eagle Rock Reservation to discuss our typical tree and animal species, wetlands, and invasive species that are likely present on the 120-acre core forest involved in the application before the West Orange Planning Board.
- G) October 9, 2025: Walk and Roll to School Day: The VEC sent the Council, the Schools, and the VPD information regarding scheduling and safety precautions prior to the event. The event was a success, with a reported minimum of 400 Verona students walking to school on a sunny October morning. Members reportedly attended both Forest Avenue's and FN Brown's event. Next year the VEC will attempt to further involve Brookdale and Laning Avenue Schools.
- H) October 18, 2025: The Verona Park Conservancy Cleanup: VEC members joined members of the Verona Park Conservancy for their annual Fall Cleanup event. The two organizations are attempting to work together to create events that do not coincide, so that we can get the most volunteer participation. The event was well attended.
- I) The VEC continued to issue Service Certificates for all young volunteers as proof of their service. The certificates are emailed upon request to volunteers at cleanup events.

2) Policy Recommendations 2025: The VEC recommended that the Town Council pass ordinances or resolutions or take actions on the following:

- A) The VEC sent the Verona Town Council a memo in January 2025 regarding the [Recommended Planting List](#), in conjunction with Chapter 150, Article XI, Section 11.7: Plant Selection and placement. However, the VEC concluded that there were a few plants considered to be invasive and noted that the grasses and perennial categories were lacking in variety and choices. As a result, list was modified, discussed with the Administration, and was finally forwarded to the Council for adoption at their February 2, 2025 meeting. The VEC added these types of plantings to the list to offer residents more choices for their general landscaping projects.
- B) The VEC assembled a [sample planting list for rain gardens](#) based upon soil moisture and sun requirements. The list included three types of plant listings, (Grass, Shrubs, and Perennials) and separated each into three categories: those that thrive in wet, moist and/or in dryer conditions. The list was added to the Township's Stormwater page to provide guidance for any residents that are interested in constructing a small scale bioretention basin on their property, or for those that necessitate mitigation due to property improvements that trigger the minor development stormwater ordinance requirements.
- C) Chapter 493 Article II Tree Protection, Removal and Replacement: Ongoing discussions continue between the VEC, Manager O'Sullivan and Zoning Official Miesch to discuss potential updates for the Tree Ordinance. The existing issues included accurate recording and tracking, compliance, follow up with replacement trees, and certain revisions according to a mandatory State model ordinance. The discussions touch on potential revisions to the total amount of trees that could be removed within a 5-year period (five trees was proposed) rather than two trees within a 1-year period as well as Verona's general loss of overall tree cover and ways to appropriately mitigate this loss.
- D) RSIS Stormwater Issue: The DCA's SIAB (Site Improvement Advisory Board) continues to consider the passage of RSIS rules that would overrule Verona's more strict Stormwater rules, as they would apply to residential uses. The VEC continues to follow their meetings and any decisions that would hinder the application of Verona's stricter Stormwater Rules. The issue continues to be tabled.
- E) Everett Field Input: The VEC sent a review of the revised plans, submitted by Neglia Engineers for Everett Field to the Verona Town Council in March 2025. Among the many environmental issues that were identified was the lack of detail lent to the removal of many trees (including many from steep slopes), cutting into a steep slope, and suggesting native trees be used with a more heterogeneous placement schedule of those trees. The replanting schedule was also lacking details that the Commission felt should be solidified prior to actions being taken. Finally, the VEC is against the removal of any of the mature trees that line Bloomfield Avenue. The VEC has been following the updates on the plans throughout 2024-2025 closely and will continue their assessments as plan updates are presented and actions are taken.
- F) In May 2025, The VEC sent a recommendation for passage of a resolution relating to the development of a solid waste plan, which would enable certain food composting by municipalities to reduce food waste and reduce municipal waste sent to landfills and incinerators. On May 5, 2025, the Council unanimously passed [Resolution 2025-101](#).
- G) The VEC passed a [resolution](#) at its June 11 meeting urging West Orange to preserve 120 acres known as the West Essex Highlands, in perpetuity. Jessica presented and

read the resolution into the record at the West Orange Planning Board meeting July 30, 2025.

3) Presentations, Meetings, and Actions 2025:

- A) The VEC holds regular meetings generally on the 2nd Wednesday of each month, except for August. The VEC may hold Special meetings; these can be held when the VEC needs to convene during the intervening time between regular meetings to discuss specific topics that may be time-sensitive that cannot wait until the next regular meeting. They also may be held when members are not available to meet on a regularly scheduled date.

Members of the community are welcome to attend and are offered public comment periods at the beginning of each meeting. All meetings in 2025 were held via internet video conference and all approved meeting minutes were posted on both the VEC's and the Township's websites.

- B) Ongoing commitment to Sustainable Verona. VEC member Jessica served as the liaison to Sustainable Verona (SV), and updates both groups with the actions that each are taking.
- C) January 2025: The VEC hosted its second Junior Environmental Commissioner Program (JEC) for the 2025 calendar year. Two students were chosen to participate; however, one exited the program due to time and scheduling constraints. The program fits neatly into the Board of Education's Strategic Plan and seeks to engage High School Students to engage with the community to forge a more sustainable future. Junior Commissioners are expected to attend VEC meetings and to participate in VEC events and projects throughout the year. The students will not only learn more about the environment, Verona's issues, and best sustainable practices, but will also hone skills in public speaking and presentation, project management, and critical thinking.
- D) January 2025: The VEC sent the Verona elementary school 4th grade teachers the requirements for participation in the 2025 Poster and Sustainability Contest. The contest is a digital poster contest for the 4th graders and focuses upon reducing plastic from our waste stream, anti-idling practices and celebrating Verona's open space parks and properties. Participants were asked to submit all entries by March 21, 2025 so VEC members could choose the winning submissions and plan for the Town Council awards ceremony in honor of Earth Day, in April or May.
- E) January 2025: The VEC sent out its quarterly newsletter, "Winter 2025" that recapped the achievements throughout the 2024 calendar year.
- F) January 14, and January 28, 2025: VEC members attended a two-part ANJEC webinar on "Local Climate Action". The first on featured NJDEP's Chief Resilience Officer, Nick Angerone, two climate adaptation and resilience planners from Arcadis and the Chair of Princeton's Environmental Commission, Anne Soos. The first of the series focused upon climate change impacts and the essential needs for municipalities to adapt new policies to meet the many challenges to protect life and property. The January 28, 2025 webinar, presented by Arcadis, focused on the need to assess risk, and importantly, how to effectively communicate risk to the community. Communication and a notable increase in public awareness has proven to affect community and resident action to reduce the risks on properties, thereby reducing the overall risks within each community and municipality.

- G) March 2025: VEC prepared and distributed its “Spring 2025” quarterly newsletter. The Spring Edition focused upon garden planning, emphasized the VEC’s upcoming Earth Day Native Plant Sale. Additionally, JEC member Trey Steinmann and Commissioner Adam Bulger created a story on Verona’s Peckman River. Verona’s PIO, Elisa Northrop, distributed the newsletter through the Verona Township’s email system.
- H) April 16, 2025: “Back to Grass Webinar” sponsored by The Sierra Club, ANJEC, The Pinelands Preservation Alliance, and Beyond Plastics. Keith Fisher, a Natural Grass Sport’s Field Expert with over 20 years of experience working and managing natural grass fields at such places as Yankee’s Stadium, among many others, presented this educational discussion. He focused upon the training for maintenance of these grass fields, as well as the longevity and cost savings involved with installing grass fields
- I) April 29, 2025: “Municipal Food Waste Recycling Webinar”. The webinar featured programs in effect in Milburn, NJ and engaged discussions with special guests Jairo Gonzalez, President, and Matt Wasserman, Vice President of the NJ Composting Council and Priya Patel, of the Milburn Environmental Commission. One focus was that current State laws are very restrictive and make it pricey for municipalities that would like to explore composting options to reduce township waste. New legislation is being proposed that could allow for better conditions for our towns to invest in township wide composting. The VEC requested that a model Resolution in support of composting at community gardens and the formation of regional plans for food waste reduction be passed by the Town Council. This resolution was passed on May 5, 2025.
- J) May 5, 2025: The VEC Award Ceremony for the Annual Sustainable Poster Contest took place at the Verona Town Council meeting. The theme of the contest was reducing plastic use, recycling and no idling. Mayor Tamburro presented certificates to the four winning submissions: Tessa Flores, Eddie Koenigsfest, Julia Passero, Liam Rogers. Those students also received a \$50 gift card.
- K) June 23, 2025: “Using Stormwater Resources for Water Quality Improvement”. This ANJEC-sponsored webinar featured Dr. Steve Souza, a professional resource for Rutgers University, the DEP, and ANJEC. The webinar discussed Harmful Algae Blooms (HABs) and how they relate to the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit. The key to HABs seems to be excessive phosphorus, which can be introduced to a lake system in many different ways; but most of which is transported via stormwater runoff. Ironically, this problem increases when development exceeds 15 to 20% impervious coverage; and Verona’s allowances are set from 35 to 40%, not to mention the overages that exist on hundreds of properties. Also ironic is that multiple small storms do more damage, and on a more regular basis, than the monster storms. Adherence and enforcement of the Stormwater Management Rules is extremely important. Also featured was due dates for upcoming requirements and reporting to stay in compliance with Verona’s MS4 Permit.
- L) June 2025: The Township distributed the VEC’s 2025 Summer Newsletter, which featured our Poster Contest Winners, James Waugh’s planned walking path through Peckman Park, Our Earth Day Native Plant Sale, and a call to residents to send us their pics of backyard wildlife.
- M) Summer Season 2025: Jessica and Sarah walked multiple trail sites in Verona to assess trash, erosion, and native versus invasive plant growth. The West Essex Trail head in Verona contained little waste, no notable erosion but excessive invasive plant growth. The small parkland at the end of Park Place was rife with trash and plastic, showed continued signs of erosion leading down to the river, and also had excessive

amounts of invasive plant growth, including thickets of Japanese knotweed, strangling amounts of bittersweet and multiple tree of heavens. Compilation of this data enables the VEC to schedule events with a focus on the issues presented.

- N) Summer Season 2025: Walter Steinmann raised the rate of recycling at the Verona Pool by ensuring that there were well-marked receptacles for recycled materials in convenient locations. He and JEC Trey also self-transported those collections to the Verona Recycling Center. Walter requested that the VEC set up tables at the pool early in the 2026 season to raise awareness for continued success.
- O) Walter and Sarah set up a short tour at the Verona Pool to invite members to learn more about which types of plants are growing at our Pool.
- P) VEC members Jessica and Sarah attended the WeCare NJ and Climate Revolution Action Network press conference on September 26, 2025 held on Howell Terrace on the border of Verona and West Orange. The event was attended by environmental groups from throughout NJ, including Environment NJ, The Sierra Club, The NJ Conservation Foundation, New Jersey Highlands Coalition, Chief Vincent Mann; Acting Chief of the Ramapough Lenape Nation, and many more. The VEC was asked to join the list of speakers to present at the event, which ended with the submission of a letter being delivered to the Mayor of West Orange (Susan McCartney), members of the West Orange Town Council, and members of the West Orange Planning Board. The VEC is grateful that the Verona Town Council is in lockstep with the general adversity being conveyed to West Orange on this application.
- Q) October 2025: The Township distributed the VEC's 2025 Fall Newsletter, which focused upon The West Essex Highlands land use application being heard at the West Orange Planning Board. It highlighted member Sarah O'Farrell and her contribution to the VEC and showcased wildlife photos sent to us from Verona residents.
- R) November 10, 2025: Members attended an ANJEC webinar titled, "From Runoff to Renewal: Rolling Out a Stormwater Utility." This session introduced Maplewood's Mayor Nancy Adams, who has overseen the successful introduction of such a utility in her Township. General Funds and private property owners contribute to the fund. All collected monies must be dedicated to stormwater projects. Maplewood's engineer, Paul Kittner discussed a slide deck created to give an overview of how fair rate structures are established.

Maplewood uses a combination model that considers the percentage or amount of impervious surface on each lot and created an "equivalent residential unit", ERU, or the average area of a single-family residential parcel. Maplewood's 2025 rate structure is based on \$70 per year per ERU with every parcel billed out in increments of 0.5 ERUs. Maplewood does not include leaf removal, street sweeping, or inlet cleaning into their needs, as those are already capital fund items. Stormwater Utility bills were included with regular sewer bills in Maplewood at the beginning of this year.

- S) November 20, 2025: Members joined an Essex County Office of Public Health webinar focused upon various health risks associated with gasoline car idling and noted proper recycling practices.
- T) November 2025: The VEC rolled out the requirements for the Junior Environmental Commissioner Program (JEC), in its third year. A VEC member and the VHS science teacher Kelly DiGeronimo presented the application forms to the students. The VEC simplified the program description. Applications were due in early December so that

new Juniors could start the program in January 2026. The VEC received five applications for the 2026 calendar year.

- U) Our social media influencer, Sarah, led VEC efforts to educate the public on upcoming meetings, forums, fairs, and lectures as well as important health and environmental issues. These issues included information on local issues like anti-Idling, local flooding, tree diseases and insects, tips for gardening, recycling, composting, as well as all upcoming cleanup dates for a wide array of Verona's many volunteer agencies including Sustainable Verona, the Hilltop Conservancy, and the Verona Park Conservancy. Of note, some of Sarah's posts/reels have received millions of views.
- V) Throughout 2025, the VEC reviewed about 13 Land Use Board applications in Verona. Many of the applications did not require site plan review since they were found to not have issues related to the environment, whether they were for adding privacy fencing, a 2nd-story addition, or adding HVAC equipment. The VEC does not typically reply to proposals for necessities like air conditioning system installations or emergency equipment like generator installations. The VEC provided comments to Verona Land Use Boards in eight memoranda.

Each plan that the VEC reviews requires our Plan Review Committee (PRC) to research the plans and draft comments and recommendations for the land review boards that hear the applications. The PRC members are Jessica, Sean, and Walter. Sean is a licensed engineer, who has proven to be extremely beneficial in our review process. Walter, a lifelong Verona resident has a deep understanding of Verona's historic landcover, geology and waterways. The PRC also cross references the properties to check for flood and riparian zones that correspond to the property in question. The PRC may meet virtually, via phone or in-person to review more complex major site plans.

- W) Supported continued efforts to educate the public on the water and energy conservation, native species, removal of invasive and destructive plant and insect species, composting, recycling, tree conservation, and stormwater management.
- X) Supported the production of educational materials and videos related to proper residential recycling practices, harm-free mosquito control, trees, local wildlife and so much more, mainly through our social media accounts and our website

4) Installations 2025 and ongoing maintenance:

- A) The Grove Park Perennial Garden: The garden is weeded and maintained by Sarah, Jessica, and Hilltop Conservancy Treasurer and VP of Restoration, Theresa Trapp. The garden has filled out extremely well. However, this year, we noted an excessive amount of aphids that kept certain of the plantings from fully blooming. Theresa has installed a rain barrel on the site for watering during drought periods. Some of the new, deer-resistant plants added include liatris, swamp milkweed, butterfly weed, hellebore, allium, joe pye weed, and sneezeweed.
- B) Treasured Tree Program: The Treasured Tree Program is alive and well and continues to supplement our inventory with grand and unusual trees. The Program is always interested in new nominations. More [Treasured Tree](#) information can be found on our website.
- C) The Verona Environmental Commission's Website: The VEC's website features a concentrated, one-stop view of environmental rules and regulations, best practices on

any number of issues included recycling, donating used items, water conservation, gardening, yard care, tree and plant selection and educational information related to our yearly programs. During 2025, the site gained monthly visitors and views. In 2025, the VEC website received nearly 7,900 views, an increase of 36% from 2024, and had 5,200 visitors, a 14% increase from 2024 to date. Social media and our newsletters have been integral in driving traffic to this rich, and informative resource. Also found on this site are the VEC's agendas, meeting minutes, and access to educational videos on subjects such as stormwater management, storm drain maintenance, etc., and a convenient catalog of Verona's parklands, environmental regulations, and recycling information.

- D) Sean DiBartolo maintains the VEC's Geocaching on-line account that was created in 2015 to track two VEC-owned geocaches. Since its hiding in 2016, the geocache title, "[The Grove](#)," has been logged by 204 visitors to the park. Maintenance was performed on VEC's geocache titled, "[Scouting About with Verona Pack 31](#)," located in the Hilltop Reservation, which was logged by 64 visitors since it was placed in late December 2021. Finally, there is consideration to hide a third VEC-sponsored geocache at the Verona Community Garden.

We would like to thank Verona residents and the Township for supporting our programs and helping make Verona a more sustainable community this year. For more information, please visit www.Veronaec.org or contact us by email at VEC@VeronaNJ.org.

Regards,

Jessica Pearson



Chair, Verona Environmental Commission
December 11, 2025