

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of May 7, 2025
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Laurel Kornfeld, Mark Lesko, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams

Guests: Craige Ambroch, Josephine O'Grady, Meliha Shiu

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:02 PM.
2. The minutes of the April 2, 2025 meeting were approved.
3. Josephine O'Grady, who is interested in joining the Commission, introduced herself. She is a student at Rutgers University's Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and works for the state DEP as a grant coordinator for the state brownfields grant fund.
4. Site Plans: None
5. Correspondence: None
6. Old Business
 - a) Meadows Update. The volunteers worked this past Sunday, cutting invasive vines. They also started building a small drainage ditch at the Meadows entrance. Craige met with Mike at DPW to discuss buying a new shed. He recommended buying a fully assembled wooden shed and dropping it at the site. The ideal new shed will be 10 feet by ten feet with a six-foot door. It will be jointly paid for with the Environmental Commission budget and with a gift from Councilman Philip George. Barrier piping will be cemented into the ground around the shed to prevent people from backing into it with their cars.
 - b) Neonicotinoids. Nothing new.
 - c) Riverfront Greenway. Matt will try to get the consultant to do a presentation for the Commission. We noted several trees in the path up to Raritan Avenue have been marked, but we don't know why. This could be due to work being done on the water and sewer lines. Karen will look into this and let us know if the trees will be taken down.
 - d) Website. Craige will provide pictures of the Meadows.
 - e) Leaf Blower Ordinance. Two more public meetings will be held about this, which will focus on outreach to landscapers and owners of large properties. The first of the two will be on Zoom while the second will be in person. So far, over 230 people responded to the survey about leaf blowers. The task force will have another survey for landscapers. Flyers about both meetings will be put up around town, and notice of them will be provided in the borough's Take 5 email newsletter. The task force is also trying to reach out to the schools about this. Meliha advises the high school environmental club and is also a member of Sustainable Highland Park (SHP) and its liaison to the Board of Education (BOE). She will work on outreach to the schools.
 - f) Community Solar. Community Solar had a table at the Street Fair.
 - g) Cleanups. Seven volunteers took part in a cleanup the day before the Street Fair, and removed 18.5 pounds of trash. Cleanups are scheduled for the first Saturday and third

Sunday of each month. Locations have been set through August. The next cleanup, on May 18, will be at South Adelaide Avenue and the Valley Trail. After that, a June 7 cleanup will be done at Karsey Park. The last three cleanups of the summer will be done at the schools. Several new people signed up at the Street Fair to volunteer. SHP now has a QR code for people to sign up for emails and projects.

- h) Invasive Species Act. One vendor at the Street Fair sold bamboo among other plants. Karen noted they were probably selling indoor rather than outdoor bamboo. Edison and Sayreville have passed ordinances banning outdoor bamboo. Allan sent Matt and Commission members copies of both ordinances to review.
- i) Parking at Environmental Education Center (EEC). The chain blocking the area has been taken down.
- j) Budget. We now have our full budget and will pay the bills for ANJEC membership and our website URL in the next few weeks.

7. New Business

- a) Park Partners Grant. The grant is for \$2,000 and we don't know if anyone has applied under the environmental category. Mark plans to write up an application for maintaining the borough's rain gardens. The deadline is May 13, and voting is on May 18. DPW was supposed to do contract work on these rain gardens, but so far, nothing has been done. Cement in the rain gardens is causing water to flow down the streets instead of into the rain gardens. Josephine reported her office has remedial grants for conservation and to repair caps and recommended we pursue these. She will follow up with Matt.
- b) Liaison with the Schools. Meliha reported the high school offers two environmental science classes and could use the EEC for educational purposes. Both the borough and the school district need a liaison for climate issues. Meliha noted climate change resilience and environmental issues are never brought up at BOE meetings.
- c) Middlesex County Landfill Open House. Allan attended the open house, which was held last Saturday.
- d) Brownfields Inventory. The Environmental Commission has been maintaining this list for five years. The borough has 11 brownfields that need to be redeveloped.
- e) South Third Avenue Plaza. Matt previously agreed to send us a copy of the concept plan.
- f) New Environmental Commission Members. We have three open spots.
- g) Recycling. Middlesex County is expanding recycling to any plastics under one gallon. All numbers can now be recycled, as well as aluminum tins. We need to do public outreach to get this message out. The borough page currently says we recycle only numbers one and two. We need to determine the relationship between the county and the borough's private recycler. We will consult with Frank Troy, the borough's recycling coordinator and ask him to upload a document stating the current regulations to the borough website. This information should also be put into the borough's Take 5 emails. Mike will disseminate an electronic copy of the new regulations.

- 8. The meeting adjourned at 9:36 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, June 4, 2025, on Google Meets.