



BERKELEY HEIGHTS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2019 ANNUAL REPORT ***BERKELEY HEIGHTS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION***

The Commission met 25 times to review plans and conduct environmental business. Comments were submitted on 51 applications to the Board of Adjustment or the Planning Board.

Volunteers for the Environmental Commission gave more than 2,250 hours of their time for meetings, work in the community, awards and grant proposal writing, producing such events as the Berkeley Heights Vegan Fest, partnering on projects with other community groups and township committees, and bringing the Community Garden to fruition.

In 2019 the Environmental Commission also:

1. Continued Sustainable Jersey Bronze Certification. Maintaining Sustainable Jersey certification enables the township to apply for grants.
2. Completed the Community Garden at the Littell-Lord farmstead. With the help of grants, a fence was built around the garden and an irrigation system was installed. Twenty-nine plots were assigned to gardeners, who built their own beds. One plot is dedicated to supply crops to a local food bank. An eagle scout built a shed for the garden. A garden committee comprising environmental commission members and gardeners will run the garden. The garden budget is set up to be self-sustaining through annual membership fees.
3. Continued to collect thin-film plastics as part of Trex's Thin-Film Plastics Challenge. The EC has partnered with the Recreation Commission, Sandy Hook Promise, seven Girl Scout Troops, The Rotary Club, the Township Council, the Township staff, Church of the Little Flower, and other local business owners for collections at the Trex bins placed around town. The Master Gardeners of Union County are now collecting as well. Our residents' participation has been enthusiastic, resulting in more than 10,000 pounds of thin film plastics being collected through the end of the year.
4. Organized a three-day long Vegan Fest. This event featured three events: (1) an outdoor yoga and Tai Chi sessions in The Grove Park at the Connell Center, focused on exercise and mindfulness; (2) two educational panels – one on health impacts of eating a more vegan-like diet and the other on

- how a vegan diet positively impacts the supply chain and helps reduce global warming by decreasing demand for meat and dairy products; and (3) a vegan cook-off that over 100 people attended and for which over several hundred dollars-worth of prizes from local vendors were awarded, demonstrating to the public that plant-based food can be healthy and taste delicious. ANJEC recognized the Environmental Commission for this effort at the annual conference in October with its 2019 Environmental Achievement Award.
5. Co-sponsored with Val's Valiants (a high school student) 10 litter clean up areas next to streams in the township. Other organizations including Girl Scout Troop 40822, Cub Scouts and Scouts from Pack 368 participated in one or more of these events. Collectively, as a result of these litter clean-ups with these volunteers, we have collected over 1,000 pounds of trash and recyclables. .
 6. Drafted an ordinance to restrict the use of plastic bags, plastic straws, and polystyrene containers and submitted to the Township Council. Delivered a presentation on this ordinance to the Township Council in December 2019
 7. Met with the Township Administrator, Township Engineer and Treasurer to coordinate environmental issues.
 8. Submitted comments for the township master plan.
 9. Distributed some 200 saplings to all fourth graders in the Township in connection with Arbor Day.
 10. Planted a river birch at William Woodruff School and participated in the school's Arbor Day Celebration.
 11. Coordinated with the tree inspector to plant trees along the Township rights of way.
 12. Continued with volunteers to weed and mulch mostly native plants at the eastern end of Peppertown Park.
 13. Worked with the tree inspector to evaluate trees on residential property in the township.
 14. Assisted Governor Livingston High School students to weed the rain garden at Columbia Middle School.
 15. Updated the EC website with the support of the Communications Committee.
 16. Integrated its website into the Berkeley Heights website.

17. Contributed articles to the monthly newsletter from the Township
18. Continued support of Green Infrastructure in the Township's redevelopment plans.
19. Promoted the planting of trees along the ROW by asking residents to contact the Township if they wanted trees.
20. Continued membership in the Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub, which consists of green teams, including environmental commissions, from various Union County towns. This group looks for and discusses Sustainable Jersey opportunities.
21. Hosted a Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub meeting on stormwater management and green infrastructure in September. Dr. Christopher Obropta, Rutgers Water Resources, made the presentation on the topic.
22. Continued a Facebook page for the EC

Members also attended the Rutgers Water Resources Conferences on green infrastructure and the annual ANJEC Congress.

Major Goals for 2020:

- Continue our mission to review applications for the Planning and Zoning Boards
- Achieve Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification
- Continue to support the passage of the ordinance to restrict the use of plastic bags, plastic straws, and polystyrene containers
- Launch various campaigns to inform residents of how to reduce their use of plastics
- Revise the tree ordinance in cooperation with the tree inspector
- Raise awareness of Green Infrastructure
- Revise the stormwater ordinance, especially for minor site development, to include impervious surface mitigation
- Improve communications with community and gain input from residents
- Try to increase number of grants obtained.

Commission members were :

Richard Leister, Chair
Angus Chen
Renee Ciesla
Kim Diamond
Mitchell Gayer (stepped down mid-year)
Kevin Hall, Planning Board Liaison
David Harris
John Leo

Kinan Tadmori
Chris Scelara (joined mid-year)

BOE liaison Helen Kirsch
Township Council liaison Alvaro Medeiros

Submitted by Richard Leister, February 10, 2020