



2020 Annual Report

Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

The Commission met 25 times to review plans and conduct environmental business. Comments and recommendations were submitted on 55 applications to the Board of Adjustment or the Planning Board.

Environmental commissioners gave more than 1,130 hours of their time for meetings, work in the community, awards and grant proposal writing, producing such events as 1,000 trees, partnering on projects with other community groups and township committees, and supporting the Community Garden. These hours do not include the time other residents and employees gave in support of Sustainable Jersey certification and the tree survey.

In addition to affecting in-person meetings of the Commission, the pandemic affected programs such as the collection of thin-film plastics, distribution of trees saplings, clean ups, Government Energy Aggregation, Passaic River Park trails, Climate Action Plan Survey.

In 2020 the Environmental Commission also:

1. Achieved Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification. Maintaining Sustainable Jersey certification enables the township to apply for Sustainable Jersey grants. The Township earned certification for the following actions:
 - a) Create Green Team
 - b) Community Education and Outreach
 - c) Heat Island Assessment
 - d) Emergency Communications Planning
 - e) Energy Tracking and Management
 - f) Community Gardens
 - g) Create Green Development Checklist
 - h) Anti-idling Education and Enforcement
 - i) Building Healthier Communities (includes Mayor's Wellness Campaign)
 - j) Safe Routes to School
 - k) Innovative Project: Planting 1,000 Seedlings
 - l) Green Business Recognition

- m) Buy Local Campaign
- n) Environmental Commission
- o) Environmental Commission Site Plan Review
- p) Easement Inventory and Outreach
- q) Easement Inspections and Evaluations
- r) Tree Protection Ordinance
- s) Community Forestry Management Plan
- t) Tree Hazard Inventory
- u) Tree Maintenance Programs
- v) Municipal Communications Strategy
- w) Improve Public Engagement in Municipal Government
- x) Improve Public Engagement in Planning and Zoning
- y) Digitizing Public Information
- z) Non-mandated Materials Recycling
- aa) Grass, Cut it and Leave it
- ab) Materials Reuse Program

2. Supervised the Berkeley Heights Community Garden with two Environmental Commissioners serving on the Garden Committee. The garden budget is set up to be self-sustaining through annual membership fees.
3. Worked on the Mayor's Recycling Task Force.
4. Supported the Stormwater management communication campaign required by the State of NJ.
5. Explored FEMA Grant Funding Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities.
6. Worked with Township Administrator to explore options for soil at the Municipal Complex.
7. Explored township-wide composting options.
8. Drafted and proposed a local ordinance to restrict plastic bags, plastic straws, and polystyrene containers. Ordinance was passed by Township Council.
9. Funded treating certain ash trees as part of the long-term plan to treat them for emerald ash borer.
10. Explored possible trail to extend the Passaic River Park trail system to western border.
11. Continued to collect thin-film plastics as part of Trex's Thin-Film Plastics Challenge until the program was suspended due to COVID 19 restrictions. At the end of the year the program resumed with Taylor Rental, the

Wharton School and Mary Kay McMillan are now collecting. Approximately 14,000 lb of thin-film plastics have been collected since the program began.

12. Began working with the Mayor's Youth Council, whose representatives expressed a strong interest in environmental matters.
13. Supported Girl Scout efforts to make upcycle t-shirts to become more sustainable in BH.
14. Applied for and received ANJEC grant to support Recreation Dept. project at Lower Columbia Park.
15. Met with the Township Administrator, Township Engineer and Treasurer to coordinate environmental issues.
16. Submitted comments for the Township Master Plan.
17. Distributed some 200 saplings to all fourth graders in the Township in connection with Arbor Day.
18. Organized, promoted and distributed 1,000 saplings to Township residents.
19. Coordinated with the tree inspector to plant trees along the Township rights of way by providing the names and addresses of residents who wanted trees to the Township.
20. Worked with the tree inspector to evaluate trees on residential property in the township.
21. Updated the EC pages on the Township website with the support of the Communications Committee.
22. Contributed environmental articles to the monthly newsletter from the Township.
23. Continued support of Green Infrastructure in the Township's redevelopment plans.
24. Researched and submitted to the Township CFO documentation for the Tree Trust Fund (dedication by rider).
25. 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.
26. Continued a Facebook page for the EC.

Concerns:

The Environmental Commission is concerned about the flooding issues of the Township. The Commission notes that many applications to the Zoning and Planning Boards include variances that increase the impervious coverage beyond the maximum allowed. And many homes direct stormwater and sump pump runoff into the street. What's more, homeowners are removing trees, which take up stormwater, protect the soil, control air pollution and provide habitat for wildlife.

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

Major Goals for 2021:

- Continue our mission to review applications for the Planning and Zoning Boards.
- Maintain Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification.
- Conditions permitting, organize a combination Green and Vegan Fest in September.
- Distribute saplings to the schools and possibly also the residents for Arbor Day.
- Work with Watershed Ambassador to analyze streams.
- Promote rain barrels and cisterns.
- Continue the campaign to collect thin-film plastics and 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.
- Implement stormwater management education program.
- 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
Kevin Hall, Planning Board Liaison
David Harris
John Leo
Kinan Tadmori
Chris Scalera

BOE liaison Helen Kirsch
Township Council liaison Alvaro Medeiros

Submitted by Richard Leister, January 2021