



Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

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2021 Annual Report

Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

The Commission met 24 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 1,010 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, the schools, 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, community clean ups and the tree survey.

In addition to affecting in-person meetings of the Commission, the pandemic continued to affect 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 2021 the Environmental Commission also:

1. Continued Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification. Maintaining Sustainable Jersey certification highlights best practices and 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
- bb) 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. This year the garden added bee hives and members trained in maintaining the hives.
- 3.
4. Initiated the Adopt-a-Drain program. By the end of the year 82 participants adopted 157 drains and reported collecting nearly 670 pounds of debris.
5. Guided an Eagle Scout candidate in the installation of a rain garden at Mountain Park School. There are also rain gardens at Columbia Middle School, Governor Livingston High School, and Hughes Elementary School.
6. Supported the stormwater management communication campaign required by the MS4 permit from the State of NJ.
7. Worked with township engineer and administrator on developing a stormwater ordinance, a project that is still in progress. Richard Leister attended 10 two-hour Green Infrastructure presentations and was awarded a Green Infrastructure Champion certificate.
8. Worked with township tree inspector to develop a new tree protection ordinance.
9. Participated in the Winter Walk with a booth that offered free reusable bags, featured the community garden and encouraged visitors to sign up for rain barrels, rain gardens, and saplings.
10. Explored FEMA Grant Funding Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities.
11. Researched the status of Chemtrade's AOI remediation plan. Apparently a plan has not yet been submitted to the State of NJ.
12. Explored the possibility of LED lamps for street lights.
13. Applied for LED light bulbs to donate to low income / elderly households.
14. Worked with Watershed Ambassador on offering rain barrels to residents.
15. Explored possible leaf blower ordinance in coordination with other environmental commissions.
16. Developed an EV charging ordinance. When the township learned a similar state EV ordinance was being written, it held off on passing a local ordinance.
17. Continued to maintain Community Forestry Management Program by attending relevant training. In addition, David Harris attended Core Training.
18. Continued treating certain ash trees through the Tree Trust Fund as part of the long-term plan to treat them for emerald ash borer.
19. Worked with the county to extend the Passaic River Park trail system to western border.

20. In May organized clean up of the Passaic River County Park west of Summit Avenue and in November a clean up of Lower Columbia and Snyder parks and other public spaces. Approximately 100 township residents participated in these events and approximately 1000 lbs trash collected.
21. Applied for and received an AARP grant to develop trail maps and map kiosks at trail heads; successfully completed the installation of the kiosks and design of the trail map by year-end.
22. Continued to collect thin-film plastics as part of Trex's Thin-Film Plastics Challenge. Nearly 25,000 pounds were collected in 2021.
23. Worked with the Mayor's Youth Council, whose representatives expressed a strong interest in environmental matters.
24. Applied for and received an ANJEC Grant for Lower Columbia Park
25. Met with the township administrator, township engineer and treasurer to coordinate environmental issues.
26. Submitted comments for the Township Master Plan.
27. Distributed some 200 saplings to all fourth graders in the township in connection with Arbor Day.
28. Organized, promoted and distributed nearly 1,000 saplings to township residents as part of the state Tree Recovery Campaign.
29. Planted saplings along the riparian zone of the Passaic river.
30. Coordinated with the tree inspector and planted 25 trees with tree protectors along the township rights of way by providing the names and addresses of residents who wanted trees to the township.
31. Worked with the tree inspector to evaluate trees on residential property in the township.
32. Updated the EC pages on the township website with the support of the Communications Committee.
33. Contributed environmental articles to the monthly township newsletter, including such topics as spotted lanternfly, composting, mulching leaves, salting sidewalks.
34. Continued support of Green Infrastructure in the township's redevelopment plans.
35. Researched and submitted to the township CFO documentation for the Tree Trust Fund (dedication by rider).
36. Continued membership in the Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub, which consists of green teams and environmental commissions from various Union County towns. This group looks for and discusses Sustainable Jersey opportunities.
37. Continued a Facebook page for the EC.
38. Members also attended the webinars, including Rutgers Water Resources Conferences on green infrastructure and the annual ANJEC Congress.

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. Many homes continue to direct stormwater and sump pump runoff into the street. Furthermore, homeowners are removing trees, which take up stormwater, protect the soil, control air pollution and provide habitat for wildlife, reducing the overall tree canopy and exacerbating heat island effects.

Major Goals for 2022:

- 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.
- Plant trees along township streets and on township property.
- 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.
- Revise the stormwater ordinance, especially for minor site development, to include impervious surface mitigation.
- Improve the stormwater management education content and availability to residents
- Increase awareness of green infrastructure and green solutions to mitigate stormwater issues
- Improve communications with community and gain input from residents.
- Try to increase number of grants obtained.
- Continue to drive the development & improvement of the Passaic River Park trail system, leveraging where possible the redevelopment of the Berkeley Plaza property.
- Continue to organize trash cleanups in and around the Township to remove trash from the environment and raise community awareness of the impact of littering.

Commission members were :

Richard Leister, Chair

Angus Chen

Renee Ciesla

Kim Diamond

Kevin Hall, representative to Planning Board

David Harris

John Leo

Chris Scalera (resigned mid-year)

Chris Scotti (from mid-year to the end of the year)

Submitted by Richard Leister, January 2022