

1.

Florence, New Jersey 08518
January 11, 2024

The reorganization meeting of the Florence Township Environmental Commission was held on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey. The meeting was called to order at 7:02 P.M. followed by a salute to the flag. The following statement was read: "I would like to announce that this meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been provided to the official newspapers and posted in the main hall of the Municipal Complex".

Upon roll call the following Commissioners were found to be present:

Melanie Mieczkowski	Talaya Loftin, Council Rep.
David Mudge	Deepa Patel
Michelle Ryan-Krzykalski	Dave Yansick, Alt. #1
Saphan Pickett, Alt. #2	

ABSENT: Paul Ordog, John Pagano

REAPPOINTED COMMISSIONERS

- Dave Yansick, Alternate #1 – expiration 12/31/2024
- Talaya Loftin, Township Council Representative – expiration 12/31/2024
- David Mudge, Member Ward 2 – expiration 12/31/26

The above were reappointed to the Commission.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2024

Motion was made by Ms. Patel, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to nominate David Mudge as Chairman. Motion for Mr. Mudge as Chairman was unanimously approved by all members present.

Motion was made by Mr. Yansick, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to nominate Deepa Patel as Vice Chairman. Seeing no other nominations, Motion was made by Mr. Mudge, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to close nominations. Motion for Ms. Patel as Vice Chair was unanimously approved by all members present.

Motion was made by Ms. Patel, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to nominate Michelle Ryan-Krzykalski as Secretary. Seeing no other nominations, Motion was made by Chairman Mudge, to close nominations. Motion for Ms. Ryan-Krzykalski as Secretary was unanimously approved by all members present.

Motion was made by Chairman Mudge, seconded by Ms. Patel to nominate Anne-Marie Hellmann as Clerk of the Commission. Motion for Ms. Hellmann as Clerk of the Commission was unanimously approved by all members present.

RESOLUTIONS

A. Resolution #2024-01 - Annual Schedule of Meetings

Motion was made by Chairman Mudge, seconded by Ms. Patel to adopt Resolution #2024-01. Motion unanimously approved by all members present.

2.

MINUTES

Motion was made by Ms. Mieczkowski, seconded by Vice Chair Patel to adopt the minutes from the December 7, 2023 meeting as submitted. Motion unanimously approved by all members present.

CORRESPONDENCE

OLD BUSINESS

Last month the Tree Ordinance was discussed. Ted Lovenduski, Coordinator of the Shade Tree Committee was present to discuss this Ordinance in more detail. It is not an ordinance coming from the Shade Tree Committee. It is coming from the DEP in regards to Stormwater compliance.

Chairman Mudge & Councilwoman Loftin want to go over the ordinance in more detail. Mr. Lovenduski explained that basically if a resident cuts down a tree, the resident has to replace the tree based on the size of the tree. Since the trees absorb water, when you cut down a tree it can cause issues with drainage since flat ground doesn't absorb water at the same rate a tree would. Chairman Mudge suggested that the ordinance interferes with the Right To Farm ordinances. Mr. Lovenduski added that the ordinance states that the replacement trees can be donated to the Township and then the Township would decide where to put them. The sample ordinance includes the minimum requirements to pass.

Mr. Lovenduski mentioned that recently a resident took down 3 large, healthy sycamores because the resident didn't want them. The tree company will receive a summons because the tree company is a licensed tree expert and should not have removed the trees. If we had this ordinance in place, the township could be getting 16 or 18 new trees out of this. But because the ordinance isn't in place yet, the company only gets a fine.

Councilwoman Loftin asked if there is room to make changes this ordinance through the DEP, but Mr. Lovenduski stated there is not, and this needs to be passed by June and if it isn't passed by then, the Township would not be in compliance with Stormwater regulations. Mr. Lovenduski thinks that maybe over time, the ordinance could get amended. He also pointed out that there is a caveat in the ordinance which allows for a tree to be inspected to deem it hazardous or unhealthy, which would allow it to be taken down without being penalized. Chairman Mudge said the ordinance does seem to make sense to prevent development. In a case like the property that was cleared on 7th Ave and Rt 130, Mr. Lovenduski said this ordinance would have been a great benefit as the town would have been given many trees. We do have a tree ordinance now, but it does not require replacement of the trees.

Chairman Mudge asked if the ordinance states that the replacement trees need to be indigenous as to not plant anything invasive. Mr. Lovenduski said that it does not need to be. Chairman Mudge added that it would also be beneficial to the wildlife to have native trees replanted.

Chairman Mudge requested that a copy of the ordinance be emailed to the Commission and asked that everyone read it through and he will collect everyone's questions and comments to generate a letter to add for review to next month's meeting.

Chairman Mudge also wanted to go over the grants for Sustainable NJ and the idea for the pollinator garden. He would like to form a sub-committee of 1 or 2 other members to start

3.

working towards applying for the grants for this. Ms. Patel added that the grant has three levels - \$2,000; \$3,000; and \$20,000. The recommendation is to apply for something that is \$20,000 and if that isn't awarded, they look to offer the lower amounts. One of the items needed is irrigation for the pollinator garden. Chairman Mudge wants to look into the high school property for a location for the pollinator garden. There are other possible locations to look into such as Wilkie Park and places in Roebing.

Vice Chair Patel asked if the lighting ordinance that the Commission saw last year was approved. Mr. Lovenduski said it was approved. The residential portions of the lighting ordinance were removed, that was the only change.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

OTHER BUSINESS/PLAN REVIEW

Vice Chair Patel received a proposal about a Florence Township Youth and Community Gardening program. She went on to read the Program Concept: To educate and encourage residents of the benefits and enjoyment of gardening. Create gathering sessions inviting youth and/or adults in the community to participate and seed container giveaways; learning sessions about growing seasons; soil and care for plants and flowers. Developing planting areas in town and volunteering to maintain (wildflowers, planter boxes, etc.)

She also read the section Support and Sponsorship: As a township, we would create a guide to how, when and where to host sessions convenient to residents. Multiple locations on varying weekends or weeknights would offer opportunities for participants but volunteers are an important piece to make this work....

The idea is to create a club and the questions are if the Commission is interested in this idea, will this will be a township sponsored club, or maybe a sub-group of the Environmental Commission. Also wondering if there is interest from the Girl Scouts or high school students.

Councilwoman Loftin is the one who came up with this idea for the Gardening Program because one of the issues with the garden downtown is that everyone grows the same things. She also noticed as the season goes on, the interest in maintaining the garden starts to dwindle. She feels if we partner with another group, that it would help teach kids about growing their own food, to provide opportunities for community service hours, provide kids with things to do if they are not involved in sports or other activities. She wants to figure out if this is something that would fall under a recreational club or something that would fall under the Environmental Commission and how can we take our community gardens and make them bigger.

Mr. Lovenduski added that Roebing has a garden club; Florence used to have one that managed the pots around town. Now the Shade Tree commission handles that as well as the plantings outside the municipal building, the Community Center, the eagle statue and the flower pots. Shade Tree just started maintaining the park on Union Street as well. Roebing Garden Club handles the circle in Roebing and the library area. The Roebing Historical Society handles the two Historical signs in town. Chairman Mudge stated that one of the issues with the school is that most gardening takes place in the summer when school is out.

Ms. Pickett also added that there are funds out there for schools called Farm to School program and there are actual farmers that come into schools with their products. There is also funding for

4.

a farmer to come into the school and help establish a community garden. She can get in contact with the representative from Rutgers so the Commission can look into this. Chairman Mudge added that students would probably benefit more from community service hours in the summer as opposed to during the busy school year. Mr. Lovenduski said there is a pollinator garden in Roebling near the Roebling Community Garden that the Girl Scouts put together.

Mr. Lovenduski suggested that the Commission start preparing a list of items needed for the pollinator garden and they can look to the Township for some of these supplies. The hard part is getting the volunteers. Vice Chair Patel suggested putting this idea out to the schools and it could be interesting to the students.

Chairman Mudge asked that the Commission talk about the best way to spearhead a concept and figure out how the Commission can help pull this information all together. Chairman Mudge thinks it's better that the Commission oversees and facilitates the gardens and the volunteer process. The Commission would like to invite the different groups like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Garden Clubs to a meeting to brainstorm some ideas. Mr. Lovenduski suggested looking into some locations as the first step and explained that the tax map on the website is a good source to see which properties are owned by the township.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no members of the public in attendance.

ADJOURNMENT

It was the Motion of Ms. Patel, seconded by Ms. Mieczkowski to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m. Motion unanimously approved by all members present.

MRK/ah

Michelle Ryan-Krzykalski, Secretary