

## **2010 Report of the Ewing Township Environmental Commission**

This report of the EEC's 2010 accomplishments is brief. When Ewing Township formed an Environmental Commission in 1974, it was as an advisory commission to the Mayor. Monthly meetings are held in the Council chambers on the third Tuesday at 7PM. The Commission is seven regular members and two alternates. Terms (one, two or three years) are staggered, with the Mayor appointing new members. The Mayor also appoints the Chair each year, but the members elect a Vice Chair and Secretary.

The Township allocates practically no money to the Environmental Commission (less than \$400 in 2010). That lack of financial support means that the Commission relies on employers who contribute funds if an employee volunteers hours, or on occasional grants which have no cash requirement. Commission members spend their own money to accomplish projects.

Lack of funds notwithstanding, under the administration of Mayor Jack Ball in 2010, the Environmental Commission was regularly given enthusiastic moral support for its projects. In fact, the Mayor's physical presence helped us get good newspaper coverage on several occasions.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE**

The year started as Scott Butterfield, longest serving member of the EEC (10 years) left. He was replaced by Jim Castelize. Helaine Liwacz then resigned as her school schedule precluded EEC attendance. She was replaced by Joseph Mirabella, former high school science teacher and a NJDEP employee specializing in hazardous waste management.

Lee Farnham (eight year member) was appointed Chair, John Hoegl was elected Vice Chair (he also heads the Green Team), and Harold Rapp, retired food industry executive, became Secretary, succeeding Scott Butterfield.

In setting an agenda for 2010 several areas were singled out for special attention (there was much emphasis on educating us more):

- a. ANJEC, the New Jersey Association of Environmental Commissions.
- b. EEC review of developer plans submitted to the Construction office.
- c. Outreach: Periodic visits to environmental commissions and planning board meetings, etc. in surrounding townships.
- d. The Johnson Trolley Trail project.
- e. Invasive species in Ewing Township
- f. Periodic tours of places of particular environmental interest to the EEC.
- g. The speaker program for monthly meetings invites speakers on subjects of interest to the EEC and the Township.
- h. Green Team
- i. Comfest 2010
- j. Giving back
- k. Quick hitters

## **ANJEC**

ANJEC is a lifeline for the EEC. Our \$380 annual membership fee for nine members allows us to attend any of their regional seminars free. In early spring, in Lawrenceville, their training on "What Environmental Commission members need to know," had all nine EEC members there. We use their website and staff for all manner of research and webinars. Three members attended the ANJEC Annual Meeting in October, 2010. ANJEC, further, provided several displays for us to use at COMFEST 2010.

## **Review of developer's plans**

One of the most important steps in 2010 was that the EEC was put on the distribution list for developer plans submitted to the Construction office for approval. That means that the EEC now has a chance, for the first time, to comment on those plans. The subcommittee reviewing the plans consists of Hal

Moeller, Planning Board representative, Ann Farnham, LLA and Van Cotter, PhD. Developers now have the benefit of getting expert advice from the Township because of EEC participation in the development process. When you sit in a Planning Board meeting and hear a developer thank the Township for the landscaping, plant selection, wetlands, existing tree preservation, tree protection and replacement, storm-water management, grading and aesthetic suggestions made in the review of their plan, you know that the EEC is being taken more seriously.

### **Outreach**

The outreach program was a revelation, as much a surprise to the commissions and planning boards visited as it was to us. EEC members went to like meetings in Bordentown, Princeton, Pennington, Hamilton, West Windsor, and Lawrenceville. We compared notes at each meeting and have made a host of contacts. One startled member elsewhere said "we rarely get visitors to our meetings, let alone someone from Ewing." The idea behind this was to see if a neighboring commission was doing something that we could do too: our current revolving secretary plan came from Pennington's Environmental Commission.

### **The Trolley Trail**

The Johnson Trolley Trail Project, under former Chair Pete Boughton, gained momentum during 2010. As part of the nationwide effort to convert old rail rights-of-way to recreational use ("Rails to Trails"), this trail, which ran from Trenton to Princeton until the late 1930s, has been partially restored on the Ewing portion. Our neighboring township, Lawrence, has used a succession of grants to upgrade their part of the trail, which is what we'd like to do too. An application for a \$25,000 DEP grant was made in mid-December to do just that, but results won't be known until late summer 2011. Meanwhile Pete Boughton, Jim Castelize, Joe Mirabella, Van Cotter, Harold Rapp and others spent time on the trail doing clean-up. Mid-June saw effort organized by the EEC, again under Pete, a local Boy Scout troop and Tom Elder (Township Director of Recycling), to rid the trail of tires and other flotsam. The debris haul, after four hours of hard work, was more than two

tons added to the dumpster! Important canine help was provided by Bridey (a greyhound rescue), and Maddie Mirabella, soon to be named EEC mascot.

### **Water Chestnuts (*Trapa Natans*)**

When Ann Farnham, LLA first got involved with invasive species in the Township, it was because the lake at the Katzenbach School was said to be clogged with Water Chestnuts (*Trapa Natans*). After a brief tour, she and Van Cotter, Pete Boughton and others inspected other areas of Gold Run, and found more evidence of invasion. Fortunately, a monster storm intervened, sufficient to break the dam at Katzenbach Lake, and almost all of the Water Chestnuts were washed away. Still, Ann organized several expeditions on Gold Run to pull out the remaining plants (with seeds attached), and was helped in that effort by Joe and Maddie Mirabella (now known as a Water Chestnut Retriever), Hal Moeller and others. The area between the Katzenbach Lake and the Delaware River was walked, foot by foot, and any Water Chestnuts found, removed. This is **not** a one year project, but will probably go on for ten years or more. Other township streams and ponds will be checked for signs of invasives in 2011.

### **Tours of the Westin Element Hotel and the Timberlane School in Pennington**

We did several tours of exceptional interest to environmentalists:

- a. Westin Element Hotel, Ewing, NJ is the **ONLY** silver LEED certified hotel in New Jersey. From its salt-water pool, to high use of recycled material in construction, to low emission lights and a much lighter carbon footprint, the Element was a revelation.
- b. Timberlane middle school, Pennington, NJ was a tour to see actual solar use and geothermal use in a nearby school. Timberlane has drawn national attention for its alternative energy use, which also includes innovative cleaning systems, special LED lighting and an exhaust heat recovery system. The school is a big part of Hopewell Valley's alternative energy approach, which saves the school district close to \$200,000 a year.

### **Monthly speakers at EEC meetings.**

Another way to increase knowledge is to invite speakers to monthly meetings. In 2010 we listened to Bill Erney, Director of the Ewing Township Construction Office; Bill Brash, Director of the Mercer County Soil Conservation District told us about their Community Forestry Program (and we applied for a \$3,000 DEP grant to help us plan a program for the Township), and, Beth Kerr and Ms. Roni Katz of The Victory Trail Organization, Pennington, told us about the issues surrounding the Jacobs Creek Bridge, which is slated for replacement.

### **Green Team**

Vice Chair John Hoegl heads the Green Team. Meeting on a regular basis, and considering ways in which the Green Team may get points from the Sustainable Jersey program, led to points for having an Environmental Commission, and will probably get more points for having an Environmental Resource Inventory. There is much that the Green Team and Environmental Commission may collaborate on, all to the betterment of the Township.

### **Comfest 2010**

John Hoegl headed up efforts to have a "Green Pavilion" at the Community Fest, 2010, and the first year efforts were rewarding. A number of exhibitors (Delaware Riverkeeper, Homosote, 4Best Solar, and The Township Recycling Department among them) responded, and interest will grow in coming years. The EEC booth sponsored an "Environmental IQ" contest, a quiz, with winners in the under 15 category being the Ewing High Environmental Club. The over-15 category was won by a science/environment/robotics teacher from Hopewell Schools and his wife. Each winner received a certificate signed by Mayor Ball, plus copies of "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson, and "Hot, Flat and Crowded," by Thomas Freidman.

### **Giving Back**

Volunteer hours working on Environmental Commission projects in 2010 were more than 850!! Check out the chart, but more than a third of those hours were in attending meetings of the Planning Board, Site Review, Zoning Board of Review, and

Township Council. Clean up of the Township (mostly trail and water chestnuts) took 165 hours (19%), while all educational efforts combined (ANJEC, tours, outreach) was another third.

### **Quick Hitters**

--The existence question of a vernal pool on airport property was finally resolved. In spite of much water accumulation in the spring, there was no evidence that what we saw qualified as a vernal pool under DEP guidelines.

--Van Cotter donated several new specimens to the New Jersey State Museum. The Water Chestnut (*Trapa Natans*), an Asian Clam Shell and a Chinese Mystery Clam Shell were among the treasures given over.

--Several EEC members attended a Sustainability Conference at Princeton University early in 2010. In fact, EEC members spent more than 95 man hours at seminars or in training in 2010, almost 11% of the total man hours of donated time.

--FMC Dollars for Doers contributed \$500 to the EEC's coffers during 2010; this gift came as a result of Van Cotters' volunteering more than 100 hours in 2010.