



EWING TOWNSHIP NJ

MAYOR

Bert Steinmann

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Kevin Baxter

Jennifer Keyes- Maloney

David Schroth

Sarah Stewart

Kathy Wollert

2 Garzio Drive

Ewing, NJ 08628

Ph.: 609-883-2900



JOHNSON TROLLEY TRAIL

Respectfully submitted by members of the commission:

Lee Farnham, Chair; John Hoegl, Vice Chair;
Bruce Black, Dan Burke, Ann Farnham, Joe Mirabella,
Joanne Mullowney, Jeff Passe, Jo Ann Povia

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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EWING ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

COMMISSION MEMBERS

2015 began with two vacancies of nine positions, which soon became three with the departure of Ms. Arti Sahni, our secretary for several years. We were more than fortunate to add three really qualified new members:

Joanne Mullowney, a retired librarian specializing in IT, dedicated gardener and Co-Chair of the Ewing Green Team arrived and promised to create a website for us.

Bruce Black, PhD entomologist at FMC Corp., joined to add profound knowledge of the world of insects (his bug collection at COMFEST led to our first contact).

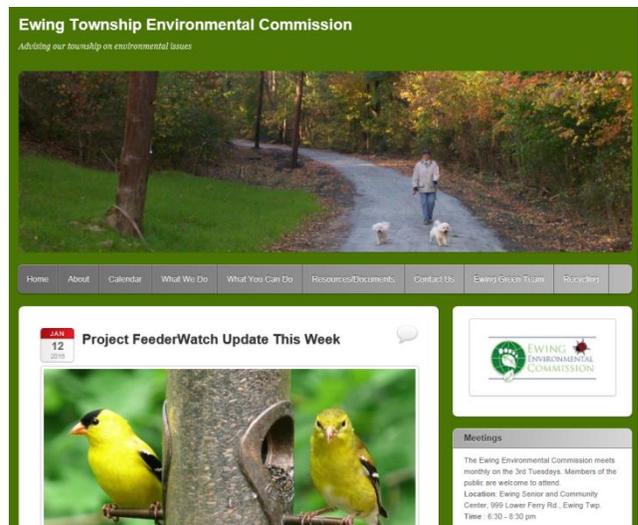
Jeff Passe, PhD, and Dean of the College of Education at TCNJ, also arrived thanks to a timely suggestion from Jennifer Keyes-Maloney of the Township Council. When in Maryland, he was a certified Chesapeake Bay Water Steward, much interested in water issues.

The Environmental Commission meets monthly at the Senior Center, 999 Lower Ferry Road, on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM. Meetings, open to the public, give updates on existing projects as well as select new ones for commission focus.

Although all activities are voluntary, Commission members also serve on Site Review (reviewing development plans), Planning Board (voting on acceptance [or not] of such plans), and outside environmentally focused organizations and projects. Volunteer hours served by commission members exceeded 1,000 in 2015.

IT AND EEC WEBSITE

Until Joanne Mullowney expressed interest in joining us early in 2015, we didn't have a website (we had tried to entice her earlier but her schedule was too packed...yet she remembered our offer and said she could begin in 2015)! And what a beginning she's had with this wonderful website, packed with information. The site was officially launched in late August and can be found on the web at ewingec.org. Take a look at what she's done, and know that this really gives us some prestige in our community and elsewhere.



Her posts have been picked up by ANJEC, and given state-wide mention in their publication, which led to NJSTF also mentioning one of our ongoing programs, *Tree of the Month*. We are really happy with her excellent management of this important resource.

JOHNSON TROLLEY TRAIL ACTIVITY IN 2015

This grant of \$24,200 from the Recreational Trails Program (administered by NJDEP, Parks and Forestry) will be over early next year. Since receiving it in 2012, the Ewing Environmental Commission has organized a number of trail clean-ups involving Key Club students from Ewing High School, and in 2015 EEC member Dan Burke, LLA with help from Ann Farnham, LLA also worked on landscape and planting plans for areas near the entrance at the Whitehead Road Extension, and at the north end where the Trail crosses the Shabakunk Creek and goes into Lawrence Township. The plan to plant trees and shrubs in the Early Fall of 2015 was scrubbed because forecasts of a brutal winter implied low survival rates, and DEP helpfully extended the contract to June 30, 2016. By that time the plantings will be complete, signage will have been made and the interior of the bridge will have been painted. The surface of the trail was redone in 2013, and it's nice to contemplate this section being opened to non-motorized traffic in 2016.

None of these activities would have been possible without the excellent support of Township employees, organized by Jim McManimon, Township Administrator. Each time we had a clean-up the Township provided bags, gloves and materials to make our job easier, and then carted away all the trash collected. It is a real community effort that will be repeated in coming years.

WATER CHESTNUT PATROL (INVASIVE SPECIES)



For several years the EEC has been patrolling Gold Run, from the Katzenbach School to the Delaware River, for invasive Water Chestnuts (trapa natans). This is an aquatic plant that cannot be allowed to gain a foothold, for it will take over....quickly. Our secret weapon in battle is Maddie Mirabella, the only known Water Chestnut Retriever in the state!

Here's how it works: We walk down Gold Run with Maddie leading the way. If she detects a water chestnut she stops and we pull it up. In 2015 when Joe Mirabella (her owner), and Ann and Lee Farnham followed her down Gold Run she found NO water chestnuts for the first time. However, because Gold Run goes around the third hole of the Trenton Country Club, she was able to locate 16 golf balls in the water; Joe is thinking of retraining her to work around golf courses in the future.

COMMUNITY FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PLAN (CFMP)

2015 was our fourth year with an approved CFMP; we need a new one for 2017.

Meanwhile, we've made no progress on our goal of improving the 27.4% tree canopy in the Township because no money has been available to fund grants for tree replacement. In 2013 we applied for a \$20,000 CSIP tree replacement grant to replace trees lost by the 2012 microburst and Hurricane Sandy, but didn't get it. DEP didn't fund the program in 2014 or 2015. It's possible that the Scudder Falls Bridge Project (a four year

widening of the bridge that I-95 uses over the Delaware River to nine from four lanes), will provide some money for tree replacement from the No Net Loss tree program, and it's also possible that DEP will have money for a 2016 CSIP program, and/or that some other organization will too. We maintain contact with Bill Brash, NJ State Forester, who has been central to our CFMP and CSIP efforts.

To increase awareness of the value of trees to the community, Ann Farnham, LLA continues to write her monthly column "Tree of the Month" for the Ewing Observer (circulation 18,000). This column has appeared since August, 2011 and seeks to educate readers about trees in New Jersey, primarily native, that they might use on their property. The Observer published ten of her submissions. Her column has recently expanded to have a position on the Environmental Commission website, but the focus there is on trees which SHOULD NOT be planted.

The Environmental Commission also participates in the New Jersey Shade Tree Federation (NJSTF), through a municipal membership. Three of the five members are on the EEC (Mirabella, Burke, Lee Farnham), while the other two are Township employees who deal with trees: Tom Elder and Kris Olsen. NJSTF requires members to generate 8 CEUs a year for their Township, but because Dan Burke and Ann Farnham both have LLA CEU requirements too, they end up providing the Township with at least 30 CEUs a year. John Hoegl was core-trained by NJSTF in 2015, joining Dan Burke and Joe Mirabella who'd done it previously.

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONS (ANJEC)

More than 250 NJ environmental commissions, plus associated members (planning boards, Green Teams) belong to ANJEC. ANJEC is a key part of environmental commission activities. Lee Farnham was elected to ANJEC's Board in 2011 and keeps the commission current on their initiatives, which include training for commissioners (seminars and webinars), Capitol Day in Trenton (where legislators talk about environmental issues), and an annual meeting to listen to leading speakers (former Gov. Tom Kean in October, 2015), and morning and afternoon break-out sessions on issues critical to environmental commissions including, storm water regulations, DEP initiatives, and how to be a more effective local force. ANJEC's research center is an excellent resource for us as it has sample ordinances as well as the latest information on how environmental commissions around the state are addressing issues of most concern such as open space, changes at DEP, hazard planning for catastrophic weather events and many others. Our membership in ANJEC allows us to go to any of their workshops at no charge, something we will always take full advantage of.

In mid-September, the EEC sponsored an ANJEC Roadshow for surrounding environmental commission members, and 25 turned up! Jennifer Coffey, ANJEC's Executive Director, and Julie Lange Groth their IT expert came to Ewing and educated environmental commission members from various communities in how to use social media, and in some of the legislative and political issues facing the environment in 2015.

GREEN TEAM AND SUSTAINABLE JERSEY

Joanne Mallowney, new Ewing Environmental Commission member in 2015, was also Co-Chair of the Green Team and managed its IT outreach. John Hoegl and Joe Mirabella, of the EC, are also long-term appointees.



In accordance with the updated EGT resolution, Mayor Steinmann selected the Sustainable Ewing Green Team members for 2015, several of whom were reappointed from 2014. Members are now appointed for staggered three year terms, adding stability to ongoing activities.

The Green Team undertook numerous activities in 2015. Most significantly, the Green Team finalized its first strategic plan, laying out a clear vision and mission for the coming years. As a result of the participation of engaged and interested Ewing residents, the Green Team's plan reflects the concerns of a broad swath of Ewing and is tailored to address the priorities of all of Ewing. They have begun implementing the recommended actions in their activities throughout the year, and the strategic plan will guide their efforts in the coming years.

The Ewing Green Team has sought out partnerships with other organizations to be able to meet the goals of the strategic plan. This includes an even stronger partnership with its organizational parent, the Ewing Environmental Commission, as well as the Ewing Arts Commission, the Ewing Historic Preservation Society. They regularly partner with the Ewing Township Council and administration to achieve shared goals.

Beyond Ewing, they are active participants in regional sustainability efforts, in particular the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition. This county-wide coalition aims to address environmental concerns that span municipal borders, and Ewing has been a central figure in the formation and institutionalization of the organization. The Living Local Expo is the most prominent event of this organization, and it will again be a collaboratively organized event in 2016.

Now annual activities and support for sustainable activities include the Ewing Community Gardens, a second annual Scarecrow Contest, a first annual bike tour to promote healthy lifestyles and bike safety, the Ewing Fall Spin was held, educational outreach efforts included three public presentations on relevant and controversial sustainability topics, a publicly available recycling website and map, posters communicating the outcomes of the strategic plan, and energy education for businesses. Finally, in an effort to add to the already existing beauty of Ewing, the Ewing Green Team initiated a beautify Ewing campaign and worked with Township staff on the installation of appropriate and mostly local plantings outside the municipal building.

SITE REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE



Ann Farnham, LLA, continued the site review practice of reviewing proposed plans by applicants before the plans were presented to the Planning or Zoning Boards. The plans varied greatly in scope and complexity from a simple installation of a solar panel array to a major commercial development.

At the time formal plans are presented to the township for review by the professional engineer and planner, a copy of the plans is routinely forwarded to the EEC. In each instance EEC's review offered comments which were forwarded to the construction office, which in turn were forwarded to the

applicant, the township engineer and the township planner for consideration. A copy of the EEC's comments was also included in the packet which accompanied the application to the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Review.

The review of plans is an exhausting procedure as two or more hours is spent per plan prior to the twice monthly meetings. If you figure that meetings last an average of 1.5 hours, and there's 6 hours preparation work per meeting, that's more than 150 hours of time donated per year! Part of the reason for such long preparation is that many of the applicants abuse the Township ordinance's wording which calls for "professional" review without specifying that if it's landscape plans it must be a landscape professional, or if it's a flower garden it should be a horticulturist...so you often have engineers doing landscape and flower garden plans, something for which they're not professionally prepared. All Ewing Township is trying to do is improve the quality of design and construction in our Township....to the betterment of all. It is hoped that Township ordinances will soon be modified to specify a professional in the particular discipline(s) being presented.

BOARD RETREAT

On Saturday, December 5, 2015 the Ewing Environmental Commission (EEC) held a half-day retreat. The meeting, at the Ewing Senior Center from 8:45 am until 1:00 PM, featured refreshments, snacks, bottled water and meeting materials all donated by attending members.

The main purpose of the retreat was to create efficiencies within the group. We did this by: reviewing the core mission of the EEC, as per state statute; evaluating current EEC methods used to achieve that mission in relation to Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) best practices; and strategizing ways to complete current and future projects. In addition, we discussed ways to better communicate the Board's core mission and activities to stakeholders, such as the Mayor, members of Council and residents.

Before ending we made three large sheets of paper for our projects. One was titled "Must do/in progress," the next was titled "Should do this coming year," and the final sheet was "Nice to do if we have time." We'll leave it to management experts to tell us why most of the projects ended up on the first list, with few on the last. Regardless, it was a good way to recap what we'd accomplished in 2015, and to set a path for 2016.