

## **Pennington Borough Environmental Commission**

### **Agenda for April 21, 2025 – 7:30 PM**

*Zoom Virtual Meeting*

**Notetaker:** Andrew Seeder

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#### **1. Call to Order / Roll Call**

Present: Kieran John (Chair), Andy Jackson, Joann Held, Nell Haughton, Emily Broeg, Jim Fuger, Andrew Seeder, Dan Rubenstein (Council liaison)

Absent: Nancy Fishman, Brian Friedlich

#### **2. Approval of Minutes from March 17, 2025**

- Correction: The two trees planted in the Arboretum will be red buds.
- Correction: Last sentence under “community conversations” should read, “green scaping, rainwater, and wildlife.”
- Motion to approve as Amended by: Jim; Second by: Nell
- Aye 6 Nay \_\_\_\_\_ ABS 2

#### **3. Public Comment**

#### **4. Administrative Items**

- Announcements
  - Kieran is directing the EC to focus on agenda items which need collective input.
- Key Events in April & May
  - Public Redevelopment Committee meeting on April 30<sup>th</sup> at 7pm over Zoom. There will be discussion around the Wells Fargo property, the Blackwell property, and the landfill site. Would be worth it for EC members to listen to the meeting and contribute as needs be. It's a public meeting.
  - Committee Chairs meeting on May 8<sup>th</sup>. Kieran will join and will emphasize the importance of posting meetings and agendas. We want to have our EC meeting Zoom links posted somewhere so people can join if they want. Kieran will also raise the issue of posting to social media. Kieran will report back to the EC.
  - Mercer County Library is hosting a “How to Create a Pollinator Garden for Beginners.” April 26<sup>th</sup> at 10:30am.

- Counts for our professional development points!
- Another Green Gathering is being planned for May 29<sup>th</sup>.

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## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **5. Collaboration with Pennington School Collaboration – Update (Kieran, Margo)**

- *NEW PROJECT: Reimagining the “Hell Strip” – A Pennington School Student-led Environmental Demonstration*
  - Margo is hoping to get this project off the ground before the end of the semester. Kieran met with Mayor Davy, Rick Smith, GP, and Margo and developed a project brief.
- Discussion led by Kieran John who reviewed the project brief (shared as a pre-read) for input & feedback.
  - The pilot project is completely student-led. They want to plant native on hell strips to show what other designs can accomplish. They will include information about the benefits of planting deep-rooted natives on hell strips (eg storm water runoff management). They plan to measure how well the plants absorb stormwater runoff. Will need a hypothesis, a way to measure rainfall coming in, absorption at different depths, etc. Could use watering cans to show how much rainfall their section can absorb before running off. There may be scientific literature the students can lean on. Pennington School will fund the project. Rick consulted where the pilot would be located. It is near a narrow section of West Delaware, so we want to emphasize safety for the students. Students will maintain during the academic year, while the homeowner will maintain when students are away. There was already debate about location. Both Joann and Nell have an interest in learning which plants are best. We hope the students share their learnings widely.
- Update on potential future projects planned with Pennington School environmental science students

### **6. Community Conversations – Our Next Event (Kieran, Jim, Nell)**

- Overview of next Community Conversations topic: *“Greenscaping: Planting with Purpose – native plants, lawn alternatives, pollinators, water conservation”*
- Discussion on next steps: speakers, timing, other considerations

- Nell followed up with Andy's suggestion for a local nursery, Nectars. Our idea is to invite them to come and speak to educate us as a commission on the topic and potentially help as a partner for future EC programs on this topic. Nell spoke with a local nursery called "Nectars" but was not able to arrange a suitable meeting.
- Master Gardeners will be at the Rosedale Equestrian Center this May. Could source a speaker from them.
- In terms of stormwater, the Borough signed an agreement with the Watershed Institute. Late fall would be a good time to connect with them.
- In terms of timing for the Greenscaping talk, June would work best.
- FOHVOS fielded a survey a couple of months ago. Jen Rogers or Mike van Cleef may be a good connection.
- Andrew Plunkett is also a potentially good speaker.

## **7. NWF Community Habitat Program – Update & Outreach (Emily)**

- An update on community certification progress and outreach plans
  - Adding Hopewell Valley Gardens for Wildlife logo to the NWF signs. Aiming to launch before Pennington Day.
- Discussion on certifying the new Arboretum in time for Grand Opening
  - Need to shore up payment, but that's in process.
  - Potential future events? Pollinator Gardens / Native Gardens for renters.
  - How might we partner with new, large developments to ensure that their landscaping is native.
  - Arboretum opens June 7<sup>th</sup>. Would be great to have the space certified by then.

## **8. NEW PROJECT: Bald Eagle Conservation in Pennington (Emily, Kieran)**

- Emily provided us with a brief educational overview about the importance of bald eagle conservation in NJ (key data & facts). Emily and Kieran have had discussions with conservation experts, nonprofits, and the homeowner nearest to the eagles.
  - 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act is passed
  - 1940 Bald and Gold Eagle Protection Act passed
  - 1968 NJ bans DDT
  - 1972 Federal ban of DDT
  - Due to state-wide conservation efforts, NJ eagles went from one active nest in 1982 to 264 active nests in 2024. But 34 eagle losses this year.
  - White House signed executive order to direct fish and wildlife services to sunset provisions into their regulations.

- We then reviewed a NEW proposed EC project: *"Bald Eagle Conservation in Pennington: Engaging Our Community in Wildlife Conservation"* (shared as pre-read)
  - Add signage near the Pennington Connector.
  - Nest cam!
  - Elevating the eagles and their importance might lead to other benefits over multiple years.
- Discussion including EC feedback and next steps
  - Would be great to have a nest cam so that we know when to hike over to the Lawrence Hopewell Trail!
  - Discussed the equipment and logistics of having a nest cam. There are many different types. The Duke Farm nest cam is right in the nest, which is considered intrusive. A camera from the nearest property is probably best, since we don't want to disturb the birds.
  - Might be worth asking if we can get permission for cars to park by the Sewage Treatment Plant.
  - Logos, contests for naming the birds. Lots of ways for this work to expand.
  - Hopewell Valley Gardens for Wildlife used to have Eagle Days, where people stand by the sign on the LHT and provide binoculars for people to bird watch.
  - Will continue to explore this idea.

## 9. Pennington Day 2025 – Planning Discussion (Kieran/all)

- Topics / areas of focus for the EC
  - Energy, Wildlife, and Habitats
  - Community Energy Plan. It's time to educate folk about the Plan.
  - Arboretum and native plants. There's a story to tell about the EC and the community.
  - Pennington School "Hell Strip" project.
  - NWF Community Program. Great way to bring awareness to the community.
  - Pennington Eagles!
- Logistics: ANJEC materials to borrow, updated Q&A from Jim, and other planning needs
  - Poster of the watershed would be great to show.
  - Trivia game. Could use questions around three themes (Energy, Wildlife, Habitat) for the wheel. Joann and Jim will collaborate on the game. Offer a checklist about what you need to get NWF certification. Poll about which eagle names to choose. Questions about cutting your carbon footprint.
  - Bountiful Gardens offered to loan us their "Native NJ Plants" display.

- Kieran in conversation with Rick and Kitt to get tent and tables.
  - Offer people an opportunity to sign-up to volunteer with us, potentially in an advisory capacity.
  - Kieran to send out a sign-up sheet for times for EC members to volunteer at Pennington Day.
  - Joann and Emily to help streamline the decision-making process.
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## **STRATEGIC PROJECTS**

### **10. 2024 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report – Draft Review (Andy, CNWG)**

- We discussed the draft report (shared as a pre-read). Andy will share any NEW updates on the data & findings.
  - Our data shows that our energy usage has stagnated over the last few years. Need to get the Council and the Borough staff more engaged. Look closely at the new Capital Plan to identify places to cut our greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. generator behind Borough Hall).
  - Grant to depreciate 3 diesel trucks and then buy 3 electric vehicles as replacements.
  - Municipalities are ideal buyers for solar, because we are able to enter into 20-year contracts.
  - Could organize community members who want to move off PSG&E and then bundle with Borough contract. We tried in the past
  - Residents use 100x more energy than the Borough.
- The Carbon Neutral Working Group (CNWG) has recommendations to evolve the current report format for Council & Public

### **11. Carbon Neutral Workgroup – Update on CEP Grant Workstream (Brian, CNWG)**

- An update on workstream progress, consultant engagement, and next steps
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## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **12. EC Communications update (Emily, Nancy, Kieran)**

- NWF Community Habitat communications series
- Earth Day 2025 (April 22<sup>nd</sup>) community outreach
- Social Media: a recap of Borough Admin meeting with GP, latest Facebook engagement, and new EC graphics

### **13. Other Ongoing Projects & Workstreams (only if time permitting):**

- There was not time to discuss the Arboretum QR Code and Signage Project: Update on collaboration with Arboretum Committee, development of QR coding, and woodworking signage (**Joann, Kieran**)
- There was not time to discuss the Environmental Commission's Checklist for Site Planning Reviews: Update from Andrew Seeder on progress to date (**Andrew; Andy**)

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## GENERAL UPDATES

### 13. Updates from Committees & Boards

- Borough Council updates (Dan Rubenstein)
  - Blackwell Property is 9ft too low. It's in a flood zone. The property on 31 also has issues.
- Planning/Zoning Board updates (Andy Jackson)
  - Andy working on a report for the Redevelopment Authority. There are 3 large developments coming and they should be redeveloped in an environmentally smart way. Andy researching where rainfall from Hurricane Ida. Identified the diverting tunnel under Broemel as a critical bottleneck. County is planning to fix Green Street Bridge and the tunnel on Eglantine. Andy recommends that we create basins on Blackwell Property and the landfill.
  - Discussion about how applications get to the Environmental Commission, which will be routed through the engineer. Will add things to the engineer's checklist. At that point, we can use our own checklist.
    - What should the EC do when we receive an application? Brian Friedlich may have ideas. Andrew and Andy to touch base with Brian to discuss a proposed checklist.

### 14. Adjournment: 9:06 PM

Moved: Nell; Seconded: Joann

**Next Meeting: May 19, 2025 at 7:30 PM**