

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board  
Meeting March 6<sup>th</sup> , 2024 at the Canale Training Center**

In attendance:

**Officers Present** - Stephen Fiedler, Co-Chairperson Alex Perri, Co-Chairperson

**Members Present** - Dick Colby, Dan Crum, Belinda Chester, Lisa March

**Members Absent** - Mike Hogan, Emma Witt, Ken Sooy

**Commissioner Representative** - Andrew Parker -present

**County Staff** - Greg Brookins, D.H.P.W. - present

**Secretary** - Eric Husta, D.D.P.R. – present

**Guests:** Melanie Thorn, Americorp Watershed Ambassador assigned to WMA 14, Ruth Carll, Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Susan Lazarchick, Hamilton SustainabiliTEAM, Nancy Jarrin, Rutgers Master Gardener

**Old Business:** None

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM and a flag salute was conducted.

**Presentations:**

Melanie Thorn, the AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassador for Watershed Management Area 14, presented the group with an overview of the program. There are 20 WMAs across New Jersey with her focus being on the Mullica River basin along with portions of the Great Egg Harbor River (15) as well due to a staff shortage in that WMA.

Melanie's duration of service is 10 months and consists of various service projects including invasive species identification and removal, stream assessments and a variety of presentations. She is headquartered in the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve (JC NERR). There are several public programs offered there with the Lunch N' Learn series noted as a highly recommended one to attend.

Belinda Chester of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Atlantic County also made a presentation which provided a comprehensive overview of the resources her agency offers. She highlighted the Master Gardener program and the education, demonstration, and assistance offered for homeowners. Belinda also talked about the local demonstration gardens at several county libraries and the on-going work to renovate them.

Assistance is also offered to local agricultural agents with an impressive array of subject matter. Belinda also noted the agency's extensive native and invasive plant curriculum. Discussion was had on ways the Cooperative Extension could aid the group. She ended her presentation by introducing Ruth Carll of the Cooperative Extension State Office in New Brunswick. Ruth is an

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Assistant Professor and Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent III working on a tick analysis program in the vector disease laboratory. Her group is building a database of tick analyses which offers a comprehensive look at what diseases are found in which ticks and the frequency of their presence. Citizens can send in their ticks for analysis and expect a result within roughly 7 days. More information can be found at <https://ticks.rutgers.edu> or searching for NJ Ticks 4 Science.

Ruth's presentation concluded with discussion regarding the possibility of adding a new employee to the agency and the future role they would fill.

**General Discussion topics:**

Steve Fiedler updated the group on the upcoming Rutgers Forestry Program and noted Doug Tallamy's upcoming talk in Atlantic City has already filled up with pre-registrations.

Commissioner Parker updated the group on recent funding acquisitions for a traffic study to be completed at the Shore Mall entrance. The study will investigate the feasibility of realigning the traffic signal closer to the existing rail right-of-way adjacent to Bennett Chevrolet site.

Dan Crum presented the group with 4 years of statistics regarding rabies cases in New Jersey. He noted that none of the cases were found in dogs as they are required to be vaccinated. Dan was highlighting the effectiveness of vaccines in light of a recent surge in pet owners to avoid pet vaccinations.

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 PM.

**Our next meeting is currently scheduled for April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024 at 7PM at the Canale Training Center in EHT.**

cc: Dennis Levinson, County Executive  
Jerry DelRosso, County Administrator  
Diana Rutala, Deputy County Administrator  
Maureen Kern, Chairperson - Board of County Commissioners  
Andrew Parker, Board of County Commissioners – PEAB Representative  
Greg Brookins, Department Head Public Works  
All Advisory Board Members