

**Minutes of the Parks & Environment Advisory Board
Meeting March 1st, 2023 at the Canale Training Center**

In attendance:

Officers Present - Mike Hogan, Chairperson, Stephen Fiedler, Vice-Chairperson

Members Present - Lisa March, Dick Colby, Belinda Chester, Dan Crum, Ken Sooy, Alex Perri, Emma Witt

Members Absent - none

Commissioner Representative - Andrew Parker -present

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

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

Guests- Cheryl Reardon, Project Director for ANJEC, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM and a flag salute was conducted. The minutes from our February meeting were approved also.

Guest Presentation:

Ms. Cheryl Reardon, Project Director for ANJEC

Ms. Reardon provided a brief overview of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) noting its formation in 1968. The nonprofit group's headquarters is in Morris County although they work with Green Teams and Environmental Commissions all over the state. Currently, many projects revolve around utilizing monies from the William Penn Foundation to protect water and habitat as well educating the public on the MS-4 permit, which Ms. Reardon explained, requires 100% capture and treatment of potential runoff from sites 2 acres or more in size.

The annual cost for an ANJEC membership is \$400 per year. Discussion was had regarding the process by which environmental commissions are formed and it was noted counties can form their own. Approximately 8 municipalities in Atlantic County currently have environmental commissions that are members of ANJEC. Cheryl provided an overview of the 15-20 grants awarded each year to provide seed money for successful organizations. The presentation concluded with varied discussion on rain gardens, the access plan for Wharton State Forest, and the reporting/recording process associated with William Penn Foundation grants.

Roundtable Discussion topics:

Dan Crum reported on the first positive rabies case of 2023 in Absecon.

Ken Sooy updated the group on various development applications in Galloway including a 60-bed rehabilitation hospital, a Dollar General, and a possible Wendys.

Belinda Chester reported on a full calendar of upcoming events. Public talks include topics such as soil compaction (two dates including 3/28 and 4/4 at the Galloway Library) and water conservation on 6/9 at the Mays Landing Library.

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Eric Husta discussed the expansion underway at Estell Manor park and the ongoing renovation work at the Nature Center. He also reported that fish ladder was opened on 3/1 and updated the group on the bike trail work being done in the Galloway East property.

Steve Fiedler updated the group on the invasive species management at the Glen By the Bay property in Galloway. He also mentioned moving forward on new interpretative trails, pollinator gardens and 3 different habitat sites.

Alex Perri has been working to actively remove invasive species from the Glen By the Bay property in Galloway with Steve. He also reported making progress on the formation of an Absecon Green Team with the proposition being on the March agenda at town committee. Mention was also made of his work on habitat restoration and community gardens.

Commissioner Parker made mention of Erin Crean no longer working for Hamilton Township. He is hoping to see continued progress on the grant for Bikeway West. He also updated the group on the McKee City Betterment Park and a grand opening on 4/29 from 8am – 12pm with a rain date of 4/30. Further discussion was had regarding park development.

Lisa March mentioned coyotes were sighted in EHT and they were likely responsible for the loss of chickens in the area. A neighbor also reported hearing unauthorized shooting in the area.

Mike Hogan mentioned an upcoming walk in Estell Manor Park and a Threatened and Endangered Species talk being given by Rebecca Klee of the NJDEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The evening concluded with considerable discussion regarding the possible connection between the recent seismic surveys conducted for offshore wind turbines and several whales washing ashore along the southern beaches of New Jersey. Some members expressed their uncertainty but agreed the development should be halted for a period of time so more investigation could take place. Other members felt there was no connection and the deaths could be attributed to other environmental conditions such as warming ocean currents and shifts in fish migrations, upon which the whales depend.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Our next meeting is currently scheduled for Wednesday, April 5th, 2023, at 7 PM at the Canale Training Center.

cc: Dennis Levinson, County Executive
Jerry DeRosso, County Administrator
Diana Rutala, Deputy County Administrator
John W. Risley Jr., Chairperson - Board of County Commissioners
Andrew Parker, Board of County Commissioners – PEAB Representative
Greg Brookins, Department Head Public Works
All Advisory Board Members