ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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(Approved at July 3, 2025 Meeting)

Minutes of June 5, 2025 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vicky Binetti. Attending in person were Leon Lakritz, Eric Feerst, Jodi Smith, Chet Nawoyski, and Tyler Lamers; attending remotely were Anne Hastings, Rick Eckert, and Ava Henson. The minutes of our May 1, 2025 meeting were approved as corrected.

Treasurer's Report

Vicky Binetti gave the Treasurer's report since Chet Nawoyski would not be in attendance until later this evening. She reported that the balance in our budget is $3,986.24. Vicky also noted that our annual budget was approved for $5,300. We had some miscellaneous expenses recently relative to Super Saturday and Earth Month, our Zoom renewal, and balance due for presentations by Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge and New Jersey Audubon.

Old Business

Workshop Meeting

A workshop meeting was held in May to discuss two land developments projects/site plans, Washington Woods (Delsea Drive and Salina Road) and Township Walk (Fries Mill Road). Vicky Binetti indicated that she does not expect to call a workshop meeting in June unless there are new site plans to review.

Sustainable Jersey

The Green Team met on June 2, 2025. The guest speaker, Fire Chief Patrick Dolgos, was detained unexpectedly, but he rescheduled for the July 7th meeting. He will provide an overview of firefighting concerns as summer approaches. He also expressed interest in doing a presentation for the public on fire hazards, risk mitigation and preparedness. The Assistant Superintendent of the MUA provided an overview of the Township water system in March, and the Fire Chief's presentation will be a complementary follow-on, particularly as we approach wildfire season.

Vicky Binetti reported that the Creative Team is working on their next art exhibit in Washington Lake Park. The Plein Air art show at the Olde Stone House Village was held on May 31st. Despite the windy conditions, the show was quite successful. The Green Team is also exploring the possibility of having additional murals painted on buildings in town.

We were notified that the Community Energy Planning grant, awarded to the Township by the Board of Public Utilities, should get underway soon. There were issues with the State's electronic grant management system that have been resolved before we would be able to open the grant account.

ANJEC Grant/Poplar Trail

There was no new report.

Communications

Anne Hastings had no new report. Chet Nawoyski suggested uploading photos from the tree planting on the Thorn tract to communicate activity in our Township Re-Leaf campaign.

Monarch Rescue

Vicky Binetti shared some information from the Monarch Watch organization showing the decline in total acreage occupied by Monarch colonies at overwintering sites in Mexico. She also mentioned that the Library will be holding a celebration on Saturday, June 7th, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Friends of the Library, which will include a butterfly release.

Pollinator Garden

Vicky Binetti shared a photo of the pollinator garden as it appeared a couple of weeks ago. She pointed out in the photo the location of the new Purple Martin bird houses recently installed as well as new trees added at the rear of the garden. Vicky mentioned the wonderful job that Debbie and Ed McGuigan have done to maintain and enhance the garden.

Blue Bird Buddies, Purple Martin Pals

Vicky Binetti reported that the Blue Bird boxes in Washington Lake Park are doing well. Two new Blue Bird nesting boxes have been installed on the library property, and we have a volunteer to monitor those. Eric Feerst and Leon Lakritz moved a Blue Bird box on the Thorn tract to a new location which was quickly overtaken by tree swallows.

Super Saturday Recap/Review

Despite a windy day, Vicky Binetti said there was a good turnout, and overall it was a successful event. She asked members to give some thought to take the lead to organize this event next year.

Leon Lakritz brought up the possibility of restoring stream sampling with middle school students (water and macroinvertebrate sampling) to our annual events which was discontinued during covid. Ava Henson said she would be willing to participate and help organize the event.

Washington Township Re-Leaf

The first large tree planting (41 trees) of our Township Re-Leaf campaign took place recently on the Thorn Tract. This planting will be known as Rotary Woods and was very much a collaborative venture. It was jointly funded by the Rotary Club and the Township Tree Fund. Tyler Lamers, arborist with Bartlett Tree Services, contributed enormously to the project by selecting the trees, planting them, and he is now also watering them. Tom Drissel donated alligator bags and tree stakes, and Peach Country Tractor donated mulch. Vicky Binetti said the Rotary Board will be meeting next week to decide the next step for the Rotary Woods

Tree Protection Ordinance Revision

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) is requiring every municipality to have a tree removal and replacement ordinance as part of their storm water permit. The NJDEP mandates that all properties, both commercial and residential, are subject to the terms of the tree ordinance going forward. Vicky Binetti said that our current ordinance does not fully comply. Township professionals have put together a proposal, and they will consult with the State before presenting to Council.

D.R. Horton, Inc./Washington Woods (Block 16, Lots 4, 6, & 7)

At our May workshop meeting, the Commission reviewed the D.R. Horton, Inc./Washington Woods and Township Walk projects. Vicky Binetti distributed copies of our comment letters for each of these to the Commission. She noted that Township Walk hearing before the Planning Board was postponed until July. She reviewed our concerns and issues with the D.R. Horton project and noted the items in our comment letter that they agreed to address.

New Business

Tree Labeling in Washington Lake Park

Last year a tree inventory was done where 1500 trees were catalogued in areas that are most frequented by people. Vicky Binetti suggested we could start another project to label trees in these areas with the tree inventory as a guide. The project could be done in segments using relatively inexpensive labeling.

Committee Reports

Open Space Advisory Committee

The Gloucester County Farmland Preservation Program is exploring the enrollment of a parcel farm along Salina Road in the program.

The Community Garden is doing well so far this season. All plots have been spoken for except for two.

Leon Lakritz suggested that the remaining red oak and hemlock seedlings not distributed during our giveaway could be planted at the Thorn Tract.

Council Report

There was no report in Rich Bennett's absence.

Correspondence/Announcements

There were no correspondence or announcements.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Submitted by:

/s/*Dorothy Hunter*

Dorothy Hunter, Secretary
Washington Township Environmental Commission