ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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(Approved at November 6, 2025 Meeting)

Minutes of September 18, 2025

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vicky Binetti. Also attending in person were Leon Lakritz, Eric Feerst, and Jodi Smith; joining via Zoom were Chet Nawoyski and Rick Eckert. The minutes of our July 3, 2025 meeting were approved as presented. *(No regular meeting was held in August 2025.)*

Treasurer's Report

The balance in our budget is $3,307.96. Vicky Binetti added that we still have outstanding expenditures before the end of the year that include ANJEC dues, supplies for Super Saturday 2026, and last quarter secretarial services. Vicky also asked members to suggest items that we may need to purchase for our activities next year.

Old Business

Workshop Meeting

A workshop meeting was held in August to discuss the site plan for CarMax Auto Superstores, Inc.

Sustainable Jersey

Vicky Binetti reported that three meetings were held with Blue Sky Power, the group assisting the Township in the development of a Community Energy Plan. We went through the Plan template and evaluated a number of preliminary initiatives that Sustainable Jersey and the Board of Public Utilities identified that a municipality could do to advance the State's energy master plan. Vicky provided a list of 14 potential initiatives, their priority ranked as either low, medium or high. Vicky explained the process and said the group would meet again in late October or early November to review what has been drafted. Public input will be solicited before a final plan is presented to Council for approval.

ANJEC Grant/Poplar Trail

There was no new report.

Communications – Web Page, Facebook, Other, etc.

Anne Hastings will feature our upcoming activities our Facebook page.

Monarch Rescue

Vicky Binetti informed the Commission that Lisa Bertolini has volunteered to lead our Monarch Rescue project next year. Jim McCann of Public Works suggested reducing the number of milkweed plants grown in the Township greenhouse as we have had more than needed for the plant giveaway.

Pollinator Garden

The Pollinator Garden did very well this year. Vicky Binetti thanked the McGuigan's for a job well done. Their dedication to maintain the garden and to keep the plants and foliage flourishing is very much appreciated.

Blue Bird Buddies, Purple Martin Pals

The Bluebird nesting boxes have been closed out for this season, and Marie Hageman has completed her monitoring of a number of boxes outside Washington Lake Park. The new

Purple Martin houses have been installed in the Park and ready for their nesting season, which begins in the Spring.

Upcoming Events – Bird Walk, Trail Walk

The Environmental Commission, in partnership the Gloucester County Nature Club, will be sponsoring a Bird Walk on Saturday, October 4, 2025, in Washington Lake Park. The walk will be led by Marie Hageman and Lloyd Shaw who also guided last year's walk.

A nature trail walk will be held on October 25, 2025 in the Park. Leon Lairitz announced that the route has been changed this year. The walk will begin at the dog park, down the Sassafras and Coughlin trails, across the bridge at Cedar Pond, past the Butterfly Garden and ending at Cedar Lake.

Washington Township Re-Leaf

The Rotary Woods project, located near the Grenloch Early Childhood Center, is still ongoing. A few of the trees need to be replaced due to the extreme heat this past summer and wind damage. This project is a joint venture with the costs being shared between the Environmental Commission and the Rotary Club. Tyler Lamers, who has been a great help securing and planting the trees in Rotary Woods, is looking into pricing. Jodi Smith offered to provide the additional mulch. We expect a new planting will take place in late October or early November.

Vicky Binetti noted that we will also have to replace a sugar maple at the Library and a redbud and dogwood at the pollinator garden that also did not survive the summer.

We are looking for suitable and affordable labels for the trees in Washington Lake Park. The ones we have been using fade in time. An inexpensive engraver has been purchased to see if this will do the job.

Tree Protection Ordinance Revision

As Vicky Binetti discussed at a previous Environmental Commission meeting, the State now requires that, in addition to commercial properties, residential ones are also subject to the tree removal ordinance. The revised tree ordinance for Washington Township now addresses trees on homeowners' properties. Vicky noted that there is an allowance for residents to remove up to four trees within a five-year period. She believes a permit will still be required, but homeowners will not be responsible for replanting. The State has mandated that no category of lands is exempt; however, Washington Township still has a construction zone where only trees that are 10" or more are subject to the replacement requirement. Vicky said she will put our comments in writing and share with the Commission in the event anyone wishes to attend the Council meeting where this matter will be on the agenda.

US Homes/Township Walk (Fries Mill Road) (Block 115, Lot 6)

Vicky Binetti reported that this project was approved at the last Planning Board meeting. It is expected that the name will be changed. Applicant is planting trees in addition to those that they are required to do for buffer and landscape, in an amount that exceeds their compensation requirement.

Carmax Auto Superstores, Inc. (Block 115.02, Lots 9,01,16 & 16.01)

This project was scheduled to be heard by the Planning Board on September 4, 2025 but was postponed. It may be on the agenda on October 7th. A letter was sent to the Planning Board with our comments in August, and at that time, we did not have a tree plan or a Phase I site assessment. Vicky noted that as far as their tree removal and replanting is concerned, we did calculate the tree compensation requirement at 633 trees, having a 2-1/2" diameter. Applicant indicates that the landscape plan includes compensatory trees; however, they have not clearly identified the compensation trees on their landscape plan which makes it difficult to verify. They also did not provide a tree removal permit, and we asked them to identify EVSE ready parking spaces.

New Business

Holman Automotive Group, LLC (Block 115, Lot 22)

This project is located in the Wal-Mart shopping center next to Staples on the Black Horse Pike and is an amended site plan application. The applicant is looking to expand vehicle storage and service areas and is seeking exemption from a Phase I Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Statement, and tree plan. Vicky Binetti reminded the Commission that we looked at the original site plan in 2023. According to NJDEP mapping, there are wetlands on the site. Vicky is unsure when Applicant will appear again before the Planning Board. At this time, she will not be preparing a letter but will pass our comments along to the Planning Board Professionals.

Vicky Binetti took some time to bring the Commission up to date on the following new proposed projects, but noted that we will not be involved or make any comments; Brute's Roots, a cannabis store where Fat Jack's BBQ was located; Wedgewood Country Club is making some interior renovations; Canine Pet Resort in Kohl's shopping center; JPC Real Estate, on Blackwood-Barnsboro Road, will build a Butler structure to house equipment, with no change in use.

Next Meeting

Due to scheduling conflicts, there will be no meeting in October. Our next regular meeting will be held on November 6, 2025.

Committee Reports

Open Space Advisory Committee

Leon Lakritz did not give a report at this time because he covered his topics earlier in the meeting.

Council Report

There was no Council report tonight.

Correspondence/Announcements

Vicky Binetti reminded members that ANJEC will hold its annual Environmental Congress on October 10, 2025 in New Brunswick. If anyone is interested to attend, please let her know. Vicky also mentioned that Keith Ludwig has been appointed as Planning Board liaison to the Environmental Commission; a representative from Council has not been officially named as yet.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Submitted by:

Dorothy Hunter

Dorothy Hunter, Secretary
Washington Township Environmental Commission