ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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(Approved at March 5, 2026 Meeting)

Minutes of February 5, 2026 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vicky Binetti. Attending in person were Leon Lakritz, Jodi Smith, Rick Eckert, and Eric Feerst; joining remotely were Chet Nawoyski, Lisa Bertolini, and Anne Hastings. The minutes of the Reorganization Meeting of January 8, 2026 were approved as amended.

Treasurer's Report

Vicky Binetti estimated that there was an unspent balance of approximately $200 in our 2025 budget. The 2026 budget will likely be finalized in June, but we can expect some incremental additions to cover expenses until then.

Old Business

Workshop Meeting

There was no workshop meeting in January 2026.

Sustainable Washington Township

The Green Team met February 2nd via Zoom. The Township received a draft of the Community Energy Plan (CEP) from Blue Sky Power, our contractor who is facilitating the

process. The purpose of the CEP is to identify initiatives that would reduce energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions and cost for both the municipal government and residents. Once the draft is finalized, we will seek public input.

Another separate initiative is our local government energy audit. This study determines energy consumption by a municipality, building by building, and identifies opportunities for improved energy efficiency. Energy use and cost data is being sent to our contractor who will use the baseline information and visit buildings to determine ways to reduce our energy footprint.

ANJEC Grant/Poplar Trail

There was no report.

Communications

Vicky Binetti mentioned that the Township has offered to help us promote our activities and events by using the Township website and social media. The Commission needs to work on content to generate public interest. Lisa Bertolini has collected photographs which can serve as a starting point for messaging.

Earth Month 2026 Planning

Vicky Binetti shared a preliminary calendar of events for Earth Month (April). She indicated that some of the activities are new and some are repeated from previous years. The Margaret E. Heggan Library will again host a live animal presentation by the Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge, and co-sponsor with the Creative Team a solicitation for poems for the Poetry Walk in Washington Lake Park. Other activities include a tree seedling giveaway, and a Bird Walk. Vicky also asked members to offer suggestions for a theme for this year's exhibit in the library.

Potential Coordination with Margaret E. Heggan Library Regarding Sustainability

This subject will become a regular topic on our meeting agenda.

New Jersey Salt Watch

This is a pilot project to measure the impact of road salt in our waterways; Leon Lakritz and Anne Hastings are co-leads. The Commission has purchased three testing kits which will be used at three different locations to measure the chloride content in selected ponds, lakes and streams. Several locations were discussed as possible test sites (Bambi Pond, Grenloch Lake, Bethel Lake and Mantua Creek at Fishpond Road). The testing must be completed by the end of April, and each site must be tested four times.

Monarch Rescue

Lisa Bertolini will be responsible for our Monarch Rescue program in 2026.

Pollinator Garden

There was no report.

Blue Bird Buddies, Purple Martin Pals

There was no new report; nesting season for these birds begins in late February (bluebirds) and late March/early April (purple martins).

Washington Township Re-Leaf

The trees in Rotary Woods that were lost to extreme weather were recently replaced.

To promote our Re-Leaf campaign, a tree seedling giveaway will be held during Earth Month on May 2, 2026. Residents wishing to participate can pick up the seedlings in Washington Lake Park, Parking Lot J. (The location is subject to change.)

Tree Protection Ordinance Revision

Vicky Binetti had no new report but indicated that the Planning and Zoning Departments are developing guidelines so that residents will know what is required under the new tree ordinance regarding their responsibility to apply for tree removal permits and to replace trees removed from their property.

CarMax Auto Superstores, Inc. (Block 115.02, Lots 9.01, 16, and 16.01 – Site Plan

There was no update on this project; the Planning Board hearing had been postponed several times.

Nexus Watson Drive (Block 115, Lot 7); 301 Watson Drive – Preliminary Subdivision and Site Plan

This project was scheduled for February 3, 2026, but because of the snow, it was postponed until February 17th.

New Business

Activity Proposals for 2026

Vicky Binetti asked if anyone would like to manage a new project to collect new or gently used clean reuseable totes for Mother's Cupboard. The effort includes assuring the bags are clean and that the collection container, which would be located in the Municipal Building lobby, is emptied periodically.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) Data Centers

Rick Eckert has done some research on the topic. He reported that these new AI Data Centers are greatly impacting communities because of their need for a tremendous amount of water and energy. These data centers are as large as 1 to 1.5 million square feet and run 24 x 7, 365 days a year. The data centers present noise nuisances, with a constant buzzing sound. They also have back-up diesel generators in case of a power outage. Towns typically do not have zoning provisions that address these data centers, and presently they are proposed as warehouses. To mitigate or control some of the issues, communities are are developing subsections for data centers under warehouses or specific zoning chapters within their code. There is currently a data center under development in Vineland, New Jersey. It is reported that another data center is proposed in Williamstown. Rick has collected a couple of sample ordinances to use as a guide to draft one for Washington Township. Vicky Binetti will seek an appointment with Township officials to present an overview and raise our concerns.

Smyle, LLC (Block 51.01, Lot 1.02; Parke Place Boulevard at Delsea Drive – Site Plan

A dental office is proposed for this site, which is currently an open field. Applicant proposes to take down two trees. It is scheduled to be heard by the Planning Board on February 17, 2026.

Committee Reports

Open Space Advisory Committee

Leon Lakritz announced that the new location of the community garden will be ~~located~~ behind the greenhouse, near Green Tree Road. The garden will be slightly smaller and will be shielded and not visible from the road.

Council Report

There was no Council report.

Correspondence

There was no correspondence

Announcements

ANJEC is holding a seminar entitled "2026 Fundamentals for Effective Environmental Commissions." There will be virtual sessions held on March 25, March 26, and March 27, all starting at 7:00 P.M. Registration is required. This comprehensive training is designed to equip environmental commissioners with essential knowledge and practical tools to effectively serve their communities.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Submitted by:

/s/Dorothy Hunter

Dorothy Hunter, Secretary
Washington Township Environmental Commission