ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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(Approved at June 4, 2026 Meeting)

Minutes of May 7, 2026 Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vicky Binetti. Also attending in person were Leon Lakritz, Lisa Bertolini, Jodi Smith, Rick Eckert and guest Anna Alberici; joining via Zoom was Chet Nawoyski. The minutes of our April 2, 2026 were approved as presented.

Treasurer's Report

The current budget balance (based on a partial budget allocation) is $1,014. The Township budget was approved on May 6, 2026. The Environmental Commission was granted $5300 to fund our activities for 2026.

Old Business

Workshop Meeting

There was no workshop meeting in April, and Vicky Binetti does not expect to call a meeting in May.

Sustainable Jersey

Vicky Binetti noted that Sustainable Jersey is not reviewing certification applications this year, as they are performing a comprehensive refresh of the certification program.

The draft Community Energy Plan is still under review by the Administration before presentation to the Mayor.

The Plein Air art event took place on May 2nd at the Olde Stone House Village under the sponsorship of the Historic Preservation Commission, with some support by the Creative Team. Local artists create artwork outdoors directly from the landscape, architecture and atmosphere around them. The Creative Team contributed to the monetary artists' prizes. A non-profit organization has been established to offer more opportunity for funding for arts-related work.

ANJEC Grant/Poplar Trail

There is no progress to report, but signs for the Poplar Trail may soon be prepared for printing.

Communications

Anne Hastings posted many of the Earth Month activities on our Facebook page and has seen a number of new people sign on to follow us. Vicky Binetti mentioned that several people sent in photos of the trees they picked up at our tree giveaway and planted on their property.

Earth Month 2026 Review

Vicky Binetti spoke about the many activities we sponsored or hosted during Earth Month, and-Commissioners offered comment on the relative success of activities and offered suggestions for future Earth Month celebrations.

Potential coordination with Margaret E. Heggan Library regarding Sustainability

There was no new report.

New Jersey Salt Watch

The Environmental Commission initiated a new pilot project this year with the assistance of Anne Hastings, Eric Feerst, and Leon Lakritz. Water samples were collected at three sites on three different occasions over a seven-week period. Results indicated low concentrations of salt at two sites and moderate concentrations at one site. They plan to revisit these three locations next year for another analysis. Vicky Binetti suggested we make this a citizen science project and begin to line up volunteers in November to do the testing before the snow season starts to obtain a baseline.

Monarch Rescue

Milkweed and marigold plants were distributed on April 26th in Washington Lake Park to residents wishing to participate in our Monarch rescue project. Lisa Bertolini spearheaded the project this year and created a new information sheet on Monarchs. Several suggestions for raising awareness and subjects for future presentations were discussed.

Pollinator Garden

Additional native plants will be added to the garden in May to fill in some areas before mulching takes place.

Blue Bird Buddies, Purple Martin Pals

Nesting has taken place in the Bluebird boxes in Washington Lake Park with approximately 20 eggs observed. Activity has also been noticed in the boxes at the Thorn Tract, but they appear to be House Sparrow eggs. The new Purple Martin houses are awaiting the arrival of these birds in April, although to date no activity is evident.

Washington Township Re-Leaf

A tree seedling giveaway was held during Earth Month celebration to encourage residents to plant new trees as part of our Re-Leaf initiative. Trees will be selected for labeling from among those identified in the partial tree inventory completed in Washington Lake Park in 2024.

Data Centers

After considering the negative impact on energy, water and land resources in communities in which they have been built, Township Council adopted an ordinance prohibiting the building of data centers in Washington Township.

Super Saturday

The Environmental Commission and Green Team will host tables at the Super Saturday event scheduled for May 9, 2026. Vicky Binetti reminded Commission members of their assigned time period to be certain we have coverage the entire day. There will be a number of environmental-themed giveaways and exhibits for those attending.

Tote Bag Collection

This tote bag collection for Mother's Cupboard was tabled until we conclude our Earth Month activities and have more time to get this new project underway.

New Business

Environmental Resource Inventory Update (due 2027)

The Township's Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) prepared in 2017 is due to be updated in 2027. Vicky Binetti asked Commissioners to review the document to identify areas needing an update or revision, as this will be on our agenda next year.

Committee Reports

Open Space Advisory Committee

Leon Lakritz said final preparations are underway to open the Community Garden for the 2026 season. There are 24 plots, and applications have been sent out to last year's participants, and the availability of plots has been advertised. A temporary fence will enclose the garden, and access to water will be provided.

Council Report

There was no report.

Correspondence/Announcements

There was no new correspondence or announcements.

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

Submitted by:

/s/Dorothy Hunter

Dorothy Hunter, Secretary
Washington Township Environmental Commission