

**MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
BOROUGH OF EMERSON
May 22, 2019**

This meeting of the Emerson Environmental Commission was held in the Municipal Building. Chairwoman Stephanie Clark opened the meeting at 7:35 PM. In compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act, the Clerk notified The Record and The Ridgewood News of this meeting and notice was posted in the Municipal Building.

Roll call was taken:

Chairwoman Stephanie Clark	Present
Margaret Boyce	Absent
Michael Casey	Absent
Pat DiNallo	Present
Kevin Leeds	Absent
Michael Guarriello	Present
Walter Romanski	Present
Kate Stutzel	Absent
Councilman Ken Hoffman	Present
Kathryn Haight, Student Liaison	Absent

Chairwoman Clark asked if there were any comments or corrections on the minutes of April 24. Since there were none, Ms. DiNallo made a motion to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Mr. Romanski, all were in favor.

BOARD BUSINESS:

Chairwoman Clark opened the meeting with a review of the Emerson Community Garden. She shared that the “plot share” approach has been well received; and those who have not started their plots would receive a polite reminder via email. For reference, Chairwoman Clark also noted that since the last Commission meeting there was an issue with the water valve in the Garden, but it was quickly fixed.

She continued that Ms. Stutzel, who is spearheading the Community Garden, will lead plans for an informal “Planting Party” meet and greet for mid-summer. This event will mirror the Planting Party held during Earth Week, while also delivering an emphasis on Garden guidelines and Composting 101.

The discussion then moved to summarize the successful clean-up of the Emerson Woods Preserve (EWP). Mr. Guarriello stated that we had approximately fewer than 15 volunteers, which ended up being a great, manageable amount. He said it was a sociable group, full of energy and they worked within the property lines for about two hours, teaming up into groups of two to ensure both picking up and proper sorting of trash/debris.

Chairwoman Clark brought up the subject of needing to reinforce the rule of having dogs within EWP be on leashes. Ms. Shust noted that a few websites, despite on-site signage, note the EWP as a place where dogs can roam unleashed. Both Chairwoman Clark and Councilman Hoffman had previously been in contact with the site, but have not had success.

Mr. Guarriello thought the Emerson Junior-Senior High School served as a great place for volunteers to meet up before walking to the EWP. Chairwoman Clark accredited and thanked Emerson’s Liberty Subaru for their donation of clean-up bags, with a sufficient amount leftover for another cleanup later in the year. Councilman Hoffman asked if the next clean-up would focus on EWP, and the team answered no, due to tick season. During the summer months, if scheduled, that Clean-up would be for main areas of the Borough, and we could revisit the EWP in the fall, if needed.

Moving on from Earth Week recap, Chairwoman Clark went on to discuss how to best educate residents on proper waste disposal for pet owners. One initial idea would be to become a better liaison with the

health department, where we could provide informative literature as part of pet license renewal. No immediate action, but the Commission aims to launch an education initiative within 2019. Chairwoman Clark asked the members to think of some fun/interactive ideas to engage residents to bring to the table in the fall.

The Commission then revisited the idea to host a “Mind Your Curb” campaign, inspired by Natalie Rehak of Park Ridge (who previously commented during a Public Comment section of a EEC meeting) and her town’s initiative of the same name. She said Ms. Rehak would be willing to come back and discuss the program further, to share best practices, etc. Mr. Guarriello and Ms. DiNallo both agreed it would be great to get the residents/businesses engaged in this way, making it easy to help keep Emerson clean on a regular basis, not just during Earth Week.

“Walk to School Day” was then revisited, with Chairwoman Clark stating that the pilot event as part of Earth Week was a success, thanks to forming a partnership with the Principal. National Walk to School Day is scheduled for October 2, 2019, so the EEC will explore how to have Emerson participate by reaching back out to Mr. Gatens to discuss.

Chairwoman Clark stated that since Ms. Boyce was not present, she would like to table the Emerson Woods issues and pending action plan until a future meeting, for when all members are present. Councilman Hoffman mentioned an Ordinance that transferred the responsibility of the maintenance of the Woods to the EEC. Councilman Hoffman said he would email a copy of the Ordinance to the members for reference, but also cautioning that we should discuss, as there are many grey areas regarding the maintenance of EWP and role definitions.

Chairwoman Clark agreed that all complaints and issues relating to the EWP are complicated, and to respond efficiently as a Commission we must thoroughly discuss and understand it all, which will help to inform a holistic action plan for consideration. She also noted that the majority of the issues impacting the EWP seem to be as a result of lack of partnership and cooperation across the Borough, and community partners, such as Suez. In what she has researched so far, Chairwoman Clark noted that issues and opportunities may be able to be simplified by grouping into three main objective areas: (1) waste control, (2) encouraging proper usage and (3) fostering greater partnerships.

MEMBER COMMENTARY:

Chairwoman Clark stated that due to a business commitment, she may not be in attendance at the June 19 meeting, and if so, that Ms. DiNallo, as Vice Chair, would run the meeting. Ms. Shust then told the members that she would not be at the meeting of June 19. Mr. Guarriello volunteered to take notes during that meeting, in place of Ms. Shust.

When hearing the meeting date, Councilman Hoffman asked why it was not the last Wednesday of the month, and he was reminded that a new calendar for all 2019 dates was reviewed and approved by the EEC at the start of the year, and is appropriate communicated on the Borough website.

Concluding this section of the meeting, Chairwoman Clark asked Mr. Leeds to introduce himself to the members, since it was his first meeting for 2019. He stated that he had been a resident of Emerson since 1971, had been a Councilman in the 1980’s and is a professor at St. Peters.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Chairwoman Clark asked for a motion to open the floor to the public, which was made by Mr. Leeds made a motion to open the floor to the public, second was made by Ms. DiNallo, all were in favor.

Aliza Karathomas of 132 Hasbrouck Avenue approached the podium. Her concern was with the plastic waste – bags and bottles, and wondered if Emerson would ever ban plastic bags at retailers, and how the recycling could be improved.

Chairwoman Clark replied there were several areas the EEC was in the process of leading, including:

1. Educating residents on how to properly recycle
2. Encouraging routine cleanup and proper disposal
3. Finding ways for reusable bags to become more mainstream within town

Chairwoman Clark stated that conversations with retailers are important to negate extensive plastic bag usage; and that exploring a “ban” within town would not be an end-all or immediate solution. Councilman Hoffman advised Ms. Karathomas and the EEC that there were ordinances being passed in neighboring communities in effort to reduce plastic bag usage.

Ms. Karathomas then asked if a compost project, similar to one in Paramus, would be possible. Chairwoman Clark said the EEC is open to new ideas, 1:1 conversations and education, if learnings on such a compost project could be shared.

Lastly, Ms. Karathomas shared that residents have many questions in regard to recycling plastics, for instance what whether or not to exclude caps from plastic bottles. Chairwoman Clark agreed more education is required.

Mr. Don Pierro of 70 Eagle Drive then approached the podium. He said for many years he was a runner through the Emerson Woods, using its main trails and came across dog walkers, who did not clean up after their pets. He told the members the using Apple GPS, he would record the square footage of the trails, which is comparatively small in relation to the entire size of the EWP.

On a recent visit to EWP, Mr. Pierro said that he saw tracks of bikers, but not the bikers themselves. He shared that the heaviest “dog deposit” was at the entry, and the smell there was quite offensive. He also mentioned that some of the tree canopy is in very bad shape and should be inspected, to avoid possible injury from falling branches. Councilman Hoffman said that when Steve Frassa was on the Shade Tree Committee, he would visit the woods often to determine the condition of the trees. Councilman Hoffman stated that fallen trees are good for the ecology. They are beneficial to wildlife and nourish the soil. He said currently the Shade Tree Committee consists of four members and he is the temporary chairperson.

Mr. Pierro thought there should be a bike area dedicated for use by children. Councilman Hoffman replied that both Suez Water and SWAN are against the idea; and continued that the area is a Preserve and more trails would disturb the habitat.

Mr. Pierro asked if there was a detailed map of the trails through the EWP. He suggested more waste bags and stricter leash rules. Chairwoman Clark said they would work on reinforcing the leash requirements. Councilman Hoffman told Mr. Pierro and the members that at one time there was a kiosk which had been established by the Boy Scouts, which exhibited the rules of the Emerson Woods.

Chairwoman Clark said it was her intent to create a EWP Guide PDF and share broadly with residents, perhaps via the Borough website, among other new tactics to engage Emerson residents and visitors in helping to reinforce the safety and conservation of the EWP.

Seeing no other hands, Chairwoman Clark asked for a motion to close the floor to the public, which was made by Mr. Guarriello, second by Ms. DiNallo, all were in favor.

Since there was no other business, Chairwoman Clark asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made by Mr. Romanski, second by Mr. Leeds, all were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40PM.

Respectfully submitted
M. Marie Shust
Commission Secretary