

**MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION  
BOROUGH OF EMERSON  
March 27, 2019**

This meeting of the Emerson Environmental Commission was held in the Municipal Building. Chairwoman Stephanie Clark opened the meeting at 7:32 PM. In compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act, the Clerk has notified The Record and The Ridgewood News of this meeting and notice has been posted in the Municipal Building.

Roll call was taken:

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

**BOARD BUSINESS:**

Chairwoman Clark asked for confirmation that each of the Commission members had received a copy of the updated bylaws, which was confirmed. She told the members that they would be posted to the Borough website for reference.

Ms. DiNallo advised Ms. Shust that she has been experiencing issues with her personal email, and has not been receiving memos and asked us to confirm whether her email on file is correct.

Chairwoman Clark advised the Commission that she had received enough applications to start assigning the 24 plots. She thanked Ms. Stutzel for all the administrative work that she had done to date, and noted that Emerson DPW had been contacted to conduct leaf cleanup of the Community Garden site. Chairwoman Clark said she would be ensuring the numbers were visible, and taking it a step further, by adding 'name markers' to the plots, to avoid any confusion. Ms. DiNallo said that previously, that participants didn't always notice the plot numbers. Ms. Boyce thought the addition of name tags was a great idea, as it would reinforce accountability in terms of maintenance and care.

Chairwoman Clark then addressed "Opening Day", asking when the Garden should officially open for the season – to either mark it simply as April 1 or as part of Earth Week, host a "Planting Party" on Monday, April 22, as an informal kickoff and an opportunity for participants to meet one another.

Chairwoman Clark welcomed an open discussion, asking for suggestions as to how to best assign all 24 plots for the 2019 season. Options being (1) all applicants are assigned at random, (2) reoccurring participants keep their old plots and new participants are randomly assigned to open plots, and lastly, (3) recurring participants will be given the choice for this year only to either keep their previous plot or enter the lottery, beginning this year.

Ms. Boyce stated that she had already started a clean-up on her previous plot and would like to remain there. Ms. Stutzel said a lottery may go over well, since many would prefer to have plots closer to the hose. Ms. Boyce would like to see the previous applicants have a chance to keep their plots and then moving forward, go into a lottery. Chairwoman Clark asked if there was a preference to a lottery or “FIFO” approach (first in, first out). Councilman Hoffman asked if a ‘plot assignment process’ had already been communicated to applicants – to which, it has not. Ms. DiNallo asked if there was any ‘plot assignment process’ verbiage in the application, Chairwoman Clark said to her knowledge, it also was not covered.

Chairwoman Clark proposed that for this year, and to follow, a random lottery would be an efficient and fair method of assigning Garden plots.

Ms. Boyce agreed the lottery would be a safer option. For “reoccurring” participants, Chairwoman Clark asked if an email communication was sufficient in asking if they’d prefer to have (1) the same plot as last year, or (2) enter themselves into the lottery – which will be the process moving forward. Ms. DiNallo noted that an email notice would be sufficient and likely appreciated. It was agreed that for this transition year, we’d email all return residents and give them a choice – making it clear that moving forward, a random lottery will be the process.

Ms. Boyce asked about proof of residency. Chairwoman Clark responded that unlike last year, the Commission would not require a copy of a drivers’ license, as that is against data privacy best practices. Instead, all addresses of residents would be checked against public record. Councilman Hoffman asked if all the applicants were residents. Chairwoman Clark responded that of the 24 plots, all were residents with the exception of two “group plots” -- one elementary class plot, and one Boy Scout plot.

Councilman Hoffman wanted to know if there was a grant involved in originally opening the Community Garden, and if so, would they require the space to be open to non-residents. Ms. Boyce replied she didn’t think so, since there were conditions for the matching funds that could not be met. . Chairwoman Clark said she would have to do homework to confirm, as this pre-dates her role as Chairwoman.

Chairwoman Clark said moving forward, she thought it would be nice to have an opening and closing event to mark the Garden season, and leverage as a communications opportunity to reinforce the sign-up process, deadlines, etc.

Chairwoman Clark then went on to provide an overview on this year’s Earth Week, slated for April 22-28; which officially includes the following events, thanks to the collaboration of many Borough partners:

**Monday 4/22:** “Planting Party” for Community Garden participants, held at Centennial Park

**Thursday, 4/25:** Storytime at Emerson Library with Mayor DiPaola reading “We are the Gardeners” by Joanna Gaines”

**Friday, 4/26:** “Walk to School Day”, at Emerson Junior-Senior High School, that encourages walking, biking, or carpooling to school to lower carbon emissions

**Saturday 4/27:** Annual Arbor Day Ceremony - time and place to be determined

**Sunday, 4/28:** Emerson Woods Clean-up

Ms. Boyce said she would like to have final Earth Week information sent to the Pascack Press.

Chairwoman Clark opened discussion regarding the Arbor Day ceremony. First, she said the DPW would be available to assist with Arbor Day, if needed, and then asked for suggestions.

Ms. Boyce asked about the Veterans Housing property, Councilman Hoffman stated this was not Borough property. When asked about Hillman field, Councilman Hoffman said that our request would have to be shared with the Recreation Commission for review. Ms. DiNallo thought a weeping willow in the wet section of Centennial Park would be a good idea. Councilman Hoffman thought there might be a problem with damage to the branches. Ms. Boyce asked if one of the smaller willows would work. Chairwoman agreed to look into three property options offline, and per approval, secure a location prior to the next Commission meeting.

Chairwoman Clark went on to review details for the Emerson Woods Clean-up scheduled for April 28. Ms. Boyce told the members that Liberty Subaru would provide garbage bags; Emerson Shop Rite would provide water; Emerson Stop and Shop would provide a Gift Card, Emerson Starbucks would provide coffee and Emerson Dairy Queen would provide certificates as an incentive to volunteers. Ms. Haight said she would put the flyer on the school website. Ms. Boyce said she had not received reply from the Boy or Girl Scouts and wondered if they were still in existence in Emerson. She continued that she would try again.

Ms. Boyce also stated that Emerson's JSHS Seniors need community service hours, and volunteering for the Clean-up would count towards that quota, should any student ask on-site. She continued that she was currently recruiting and creating a volunteer list, awaiting reply from the Churches in town. Ms. Boyce noted she would share the event with Bergen Swan. Chairwoman Clark then thanked Ms. Boyce for all her work in leading the Clean-up logistics to date.

Ms. Boyce asked if anyone knew where the banner would be stored. Chairwoman Clark said she would reach out to Tom Browne to ask.

Mr. Guarriello asked about the number of clean-ups the Commission aims to host per year. Ms. Boyce replied normally there are two each year. In regards to the Clean-up planned for April 2019, Councilman Hoffman cautioned to control the number of people in the groups to prevent trampling of the woods and growth. Mr. Guarriello asked about the heaviest areas for clean-up. Ms. Boyce replied that at another time, we should focus a clean-up to address the areas behind Shop Rite and position as an opportunity for employees of Shop Rite to get involved.

Chairwoman Clark clarified that there is no rule as to number of clean up events, but aimed for two in the woods, and perhaps more often by the locals. She stated they would park at Emerson JSHS and walk to the wood.

Mr. Guarriello asked if there would be guidelines for the volunteers.

Ms. Boyce stated the catch basin was always a magnet for trash, She stated that she had been in contact with Ray at Suez Water, the Bi-State cleanup, which is scheduled for the day before, April 27, would cover that area, allowing us to focus on other areas.

Chairwoman Clark then asked for any comments/suggestions/changes to the minutes of January 22 and February 24. Members did not have feedback or edits, she asked for a motion to approve both, which was made by Ms. Stutzel, second was made by Ms. Boyce, except for Mr. Romanski who abstained, all members voted yes to approve.

Ms. Shust had one voucher in the amount of \$17.60 that needed to be approved and that was advertising for the change in the calendar for 2019. Ms., DiNallo made a motion to approve the voucher, second was made by Ms. Boyce, all were in favor.

Ms. Di Nallo asked about the rain barrel program that had been mentioned during the last meeting of 2018. Chairwoman Clark said she had been in touch with Christine of the Hackensack River Keeper, but did not feel their plans were immediately feasible for Emerson, and asked for a proposal on how a workshop would work without cost to residents.

Ms. Boyce asked about the recycling bins that had been distributed and wanted to know if any additional bins were available to residents. Councilman Hoffman said most had been distributed per the recycling contractor who had provided 200 free to the Borough, but there were some set aside, Ms. Boyce wondered if one could be used for the clean-up. Chairwoman Clark agreed it would be good to have during clean-up and wondered how to go about requesting one. She would follow up with the DPW.

Councilman Hoffman asked about the budget items. Chairwoman Clark responded that the current Budget and expenses would be reviewed at the April meeting, as well as the advantages of ANJEC and the matching grants.

Mr. Romansky brought up the subject of prior years' having an essay contest. Chairwoman Clark confirmed we could host an essay contest with an incentive, per the budget, but only should if it lent value to the community. Ms. Boyce thought the past prize had been \$100, and wondered if sponsorship might help to increase the award.

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

Mr. Ken Baker of Wortendyke Avenue approached the podium. He had questions about the soil in the Community Garden. He said it was not deep enough for many plants to take root. He thought some top soil should be added. Chairwoman Clark thanked him and said she would look into it.

Mr. Baker also commented on the proposed starting point of the Earth Week Clean-up and thought having the High School parking lot was a more central location than previous years. Councilman Hoffman asked about clean-up needs along Main Street, whether the Earth Week event would cover, or slate for another time. Chairwoman Clark said they were concentrating on the Woods in coordination with Earth Day and would look into other areas during the year.

Ms. Natalie Rehak, from Park Ridge, a teacher at the Emerson Junior-Senior High School approached the podium. She said she was representing the Park Ridge Green Team. She is a teacher of Environmental Sciences. She works with the Builders Club in the middle school, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of Emerson, which are temporarily meeting with her troop in Park Ridge. She is working with Rick Solimando with the Emerson Cub Scouts. And has been active in the Bi-State water shed cleanup for the past 5 years

Ms. Rehak wanted to give the Commission a heads up of the Bi-State Clean-up's plan to focus on the EWP, in an effort to avoid duplication of efforts, and to invite Emerson to join their effort – either in place or in addition to our own Clean-Up.

Chairwoman Clark replied that with all the quantity of clean-up needed, hosting two clean-ups would be fine and not a duplication, but an amplification. Bi-State will keep their date, April 27, and the Commission would keep its date, the next day, April 28.

The Commission would be open to joining Bi-State efforts in the future, as long as it does not conflict with Earth Week events. Likewise, Chairman Clark invited her and her volunteers to join the Emerson effort.

Ms. Rehak said that the Park Ridge Green Team also does a "Walk the Curb" program, where businesses and residents clean up the front of their property. Chairwoman Clark liked the idea but said the agenda was full for this clean-up perhaps as a follow-up or Fall project. Ms. Boyce suggested we try to get the merchants and commercial entities involved in at least cleaning in front of their premises during Earth Week.

Mr. Michael Griggs, 19 Lincoln Drive, approached the podium. Mr. Griggs had previously been a member of the EEC and was looking to return. Chairwoman Clark advised that it was a Mayoral appointment, and the decision would come from Mayor DiPaola.

Mr. Griggs mentioned that he believed there had been a grant for the Community Garden. Mr. Griggs continued that the area behind Emerson Plaza/Shop Rite is still full of litter and he'd like it addressed. He said the installation of the fence helped, but the residents of the area are complaining. Chairwoman Clark asked about the property owners' responsibility. Mr. Griggs said Suez for the most part and Shop Rite Plaza. Ms. Boyce thought a meeting with the manager of the Shop Rite, and the Plaza owner, would be a good start.

Mr. Joseph Geronimo of Washington Avenue, wondered what could be done about the empty wooded lot across from the cemetery on Forest Avenue. Councilman Hoffman said that property was owned by Town & Country Development. He said Mr. Geronimo could approach them about doing a clean-up on their own, although at the moment there is a dispute between Town and County and the Borough. He said if the public were to do clean-up, it would technically be "Trespassing."

Councilman Hoffman suggested Mr. Geronimo file a Property Maintenance complaint with the Building Dept. and let code enforcement follow-up.

Mr. Geronimo referred to the pending Clean-up in the Emerson Woods. He said there were tire marks and new trails made by bikers. He wanted to know what could be done about it. He also suggested providing pet waste bags to eliminate the droppings that are left in the Woods. Ms. Boyce asked if a collection container could be put in the Woods.

Councilman Hoffman told the members that Suez used to have security patrolling the area, but eliminated it to save money, which is likely part of the increase of EPW issues.

Chairwoman Clark noted there are no defined property or boundary lines, that the community uses the open areas, but must be educated on the use and care. This is a primary goal.

Chairwoman Clark also noted that the EWP are the primary goal during Earth Weeks, but there are other areas that need attention and she would like to have suggestions from the members as well as the community.

Ms. Boyce mentioned that dogs are allowed to run loose in the EWP. Mr. Guarriello thought all dogs should be on a leash when in the EWP as well as on streets.

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

With no other business to discuss, Chairwoman Clark asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was made by Ms. Boyce, second by Mr. Casey, all were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Marie Shust  
Commission Secretary