

**MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
BOROUGH OF EMERSON
August 21, 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	Present
Michael Casey	Present
Pat DiNallo	Present
Kevin Leeds	Absent
Michael Guarriello	Present
Walter Romanski	Absent
Kate Stutzel	Present
Councilman Ken Hoffman	Absent

Chairwoman Clark asked if there were any comments or corrections on the minutes of May 22. Since there were none, Ms. Stutzel made a motion to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Ms. DiNallo, all were in favor.

BOARD BUSINESS:

Chairwoman Clark told the members that the term for the student liaison, Kathryn Height expired in June and she was waiting for the Mayor to appoint a new student.

EMERSON COMMUNITY GARDEN:

Chairwoman Clark spoke of the Community Garden summer get together, stating that even though it was very hot, there was a good turnout. She asked for some suggestions in regard to having a closing/clean up program. Ms. Stutzel suggested November 16th. Ms. Boyce suggested that after the close of the gardens, the area be locked down. Chairwoman Clark also stated it was important that at the end of the year there be a thorough clean-up of the plots, education on composting and preparation for the upcoming planting season.

Ms. Boyce agreed a composting instruction session would be a benefit to all, since currently the wrong items are being put into the buckets. She also said that the compost needs to be raked and turned, and should be done several times during the year. Putting "seeded" items into the compost only increases weeds. Ms. Boyce thought the lesson should be mandatory for garden users.

Ms. DiNallo agreed and added that non-conformance to proper cleanup and compost instruction should result in not being invited back.

Ms. Boyce wanted to know if it was possible to reserve the same plot as the previous year, when applying. Chairwoman Clark reminded her of the spring meeting, where the Commission determined there would be a lottery selection for the plots following the 2019 season.

Ms. Stutzel asked if it would be possible to get some barrels in the garden specifically for weeds/waste, to prevent the compost from becoming contaminated. Chairwoman Clark said she would contact the DPW to see if they can put green barrels in the gardens and maintain them.

There was discussion about the various “critters” in the garden. Ms. Boyce said the Franklin Lakes Animal Shelter may be open to helping removing them.

Lastly in the meeting opening, Chairwoman Clark referred to the issue of proper pet waste disposal, and confirmed plans to create a flyer on pet health and safety to be given to the Board of Health to issue along with annual pet licenses – complete with messaging around proper behavior when walking dogs in EWP; must be leashed and proper waste pick-up.

‘CLEAN THE BLOCK’ PARTY:

Chairwoman Clark went on to introduce the ‘Clean the Block Party’ local business engagement campaign, tentatively scheduled for November 9th. She wanted ideas on how to best involve the business community in the project, especially areas along the tracks. Mr. Romanski and Mr. Casey were confirmed as the leads for this program.

NATIONAL ‘WALK TO SCHOOL DAY’ AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY:

Chairwoman Clark then discussed the National Walk to School Day, scheduled for October 2, 2019. She said the Board of Education and Police Dept. were on board with partaking this year. As during the Walk to School Day pilot held during 2019 Emerson Earth Week, this campaign would only involve the high school to ensure student safety.

Chairwoman Clark introduced guest speaker, Councilwoman Jill McGuire to the members. Councilwoman McGuire was in attendance to share some updates, beginning brought up the Police Dept. open house that would address classroom safety, and various other safety procedures in conjunction with the Board of Education, with an outreach to Westwood, Hillsdale and other communities in the Pascack Valley.

Ms. Boyce asked what the procedure would be to get a crosswalk across Main St. to the Woods entry. She was told that is a matter for the Governing Body. In relation to current hazards and crosswalks, Councilwoman McGuire told the members that she had done a five year history on the heaviest accident locations. Additionally, the Borough recently joined the NJ Street Smart program and would soon be rolling out “heads up, phones down” messaging to protect walkers, cyclists, etc. Special outreach would also be conducted directly to senior citizens, with an emphasis during the Senior Dinner, to be held later in the year. Councilwoman McGuire also said there would be a signage program, to be posted on main streets at the start of the campaign.

Chairwoman Clark asked how the EEC could help. Councilwoman McGuire answered, just assisting with the promotion and awareness of key messaging and campaign materials where appropriate. She noted that there would be social media component that the EEC could leverage.

EMERSON FALL CLEAN-UP:

Chairwoman Clark asked for suggestions on which areas to concentrate during the late-fall cleanup. Ms. Boyce said the Emerson Woods always needs cleanup, but the woods behind the Community Garden could use attention. She said that at one time there was a defined path in that area, which has since been grown over. Mr. Guarriello reminded the members that that is a swamp area. Chairwoman Clark reminded the members they needed a child/family friendly area, and the EWP had been the focus of the Earth Week clean-up, earlier in the year. This topic closed out with Ms. DiNallo and Ms. Boyce volunteering to canvas Emerson to identify areas for the clean-up to focus on, and bringing these recommendations to the next EEC meeting.

LEAD TESTING / WATER CONCERN:

Chairwoman Clark asked Councilwoman McGuire to report on the lead issue in the water system. Councilwoman McGuire explained that there are areas in the Borough that are listed as positive for lead pipes and each family could confirm whether their home was in a contaminated area by contacting Suez Water. By giving Suez their account number, they would find out if they were affected. Councilwoman McGuire said that her home was confirmed as being in a positive area.

In response, Councilwoman McGuire has organized a program in partnership with Northwest Regional Testing to offer water lead testing to residents at a discounted rate. Residents will be invited to pick up testing kits, at cost, the Emerson Library on September 12, and then return as instructed for testing and results. Councilwoman McGuire told the members she and the Governing body were working closely with the Board of Health and Northwest Regional Testing who plans on having information available for the residents.

Mr. Guarriello told the members that there were other testing services the Borough could use in the future, if needed. The Councilwoman stated that the special discounted rate being offer this time around was offered specifically through Northwest Regional, but residents are welcome to use whatever company they prefer.

PLASTIC BAN PROPOSAL:

Chairwoman Clark told the members she spoke with Mayor DiPaola, who showed her the presentation made earlier in the month, by a young elementary aged student from Emerson. This presentation proposed the banning of plastic bags in an effort to combat plastic waste.

Chairwoman Clark said that the problem the young student is referring to, and the community at large, is specifically in regards to 'single-use plastic', not rPET or other recyclable materials and a ban is a honest gesture but not a solve-all solution to the broader issue. While you see communities like best-practice Jersey City ban plastics, we could be more effective in also focusing on ways to improve recycling education, our Borough's infrastructure and encourage the use of rPET, biogradable or compostable materials in lieu of single-use plastics, where appropriate.

Ms. Boyce wondered if a tax incentive would help discourage use of plastics. Chairwoman Clark responded that taxes were not the jurisdiction of the EEC, and not necessary to explore at this stage.

OPEN MEMBER COMMNETARY:

STATUS OF EMERSON WOODS PRESEVE:

Ms. Boyce told the members there is a lot of destruction being done to the Emerson Woods Preserve (EWP) and to Suez's property by nearby bikers. She said she has seen new paths, bridges, and trees cut down. A view of Trails.com listed bikers who ride through the EWP, which includes elected officials in the area. When the local governments were approached by Ms. Boyce, they responded that the issue was not their jurisdiction.

Ms. Boyce continued that the Suez property is receiving the worst damage, even though signs are visibly posted. At a June 2019 meeting held without the Commission's knowledge and arranged by Ms. Boyce and Councilman Hoffman, the two parties met with Suez and a representative from Bergen Swan, it was mentioned that new informative signs had been installed and removed by citizens. They also discussed how the damage to the grounds and runoff is damaging to the reservoir, and how Suez had been ineffective in the past in helping to correct this issue.

Chairwoman Clark told Ms. Boyce and the members, that this matter is no longer in the hand of the EEC, and due to the safety element, is now being owned and handled by the Emerson Police Department, as instructed by the Mayor and Council, following the off-the-record meeting with Suez, not on behalf or in collaboration with the EEC.

Ms. Boyce asked for an explanation as to why the EEC can no longer be involved, and Chairwoman Clark repeated the previous explanation, that is now being handled by the Emerson Police Department. Further, she reinforced that had the meeting in reference with Suez had been properly scheduled with the EEC's knowledge, the outcome and current role of the EEC would have likely been more positive. More so, developments and plans confirmed without EEC was not handled properly from an external communications perspective, which has led to resident complains and confusion, as seen with many posts to non-Borough owned social media channels. Chairwoman Clark presented a print out of an example for everyone's awareness.

Ms. Boyce said she would like to speak with Mayor DiPaola, and then continued on to the matter of the number of members it takes to form a quorum. She was advised that at the organization meeting, the number '5' was agreed upon. Ms. Boyce said that the quorum had always been 4, and wanted to know why the change had been made. Chairwoman Clark explained that the quorum was proposed, reviewed, and approved as '5' at the 're-organization' EEC meeting at the start of the year for two core reasons: (1) Chairwoman Clark wanted to have an odd number for a majority/tiebreaker and (2) it corresponds to the best practice quorum held by other Commissions and Boards, such as Land Use Board, Recreation, etc. Further, the EEC to date has only been unable to meet once, due to lack of quorum, which was June 2019.

Ms. Boyce returned to the issue of the EWP, and why the EEC could not continue their efforts – despite already discussing this topic minutes earlier. Chairwoman Clark repeated the guidance once more, that despite the EEC working on a proactive, professional, written plan to protect and clean the EWP, that because a meeting was held without the EEC's knowledge and the Emerson Police Department was contacted to assist, that the Dept. is now handling for the time being, and no need to own at the moment to avoid duplication of efforts.

Ms. Boyce told the members that in the meantime, Laurie of Bergen Swan was working with a reporter of the Pascack Press, for a potential story. Mr. Guarriello wanted to know if at some future date, the EEC would be able to address the biker issue. Ms. Boyce then mentioned statistics from Strava showing an increase of biker use, almost doubling since 2017. Chairwoman Clark replied that as of right now, the EEC cannot 'own' the issue, but could certainly provide guidance and expertise in helping to correct the ongoing issue.

CONCLUSION:

Due to a commitment, Mr. Casey departed the meeting at 9:15pm.

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

Since there was no other business, Chairwoman Clark asked to close the meeting. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. DiNallo, second by Mr. Guarriello, all were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted
M. Marie Shust
Commission Secretary