



TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS
**ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMISSION**

**Morris Township
Environmental Commission
2022 Annual Report**



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Message from the Chairperson

The Township of Morris Environmental Commission had a very successful 2022 as measured by its ongoing commitment to reviewing development applications, growth/maturity in membership, and delivery on both its required and prioritized mandates.

Among the major accomplishments are the guidance of the Sustainable New Jersey Bronze certification, grant for a pollinator garden in Butterworth park, and increased popularity of the newsletter. Additionally, the Environmental Commission has helped guide the passage of several pieces of local legislation including an Energy Aggregation ordinance and Resolution for Do Not Plant list.

This year the Environmental Commission returned to in-person meetings just in time to host an educational review about Energy Aggregation (a policy that was later adopted by the Township Council).

A critical delivery for all Environmental Commissions in the state is to identify all of the environmental resources in town – with the explicit objective of having the Township professionals and volunteers use it when making planning decisions. With the assistance of a college intern's help in the Fall of 2022, significant progress has been made on updating the 20+ year old static inventory. Discussions have been held with the other Township volunteer boards (Planning, Board of Adjustment, etc) to capture their feedback on areas of greatest interest and prepare them for this valuable resource.

As a new chairman of the EC this year, I am amazed at how much the volunteer group has accomplished, and how much more we hope to accomplish in 2023. As residents of the township, state and planet, we all have a responsibility to protect our surrounding environment in a sustainable and equitable manner. There is no better way then to start locally, so please consider helping the volunteers already on the EC with your time and ideas. You can submit a volunteer application on the [Township website](#) or contact us via email at envcomm@morristwp.com.

Brian Morgan

About the Environmental Commission

The Township of Morris Environmental Commission (EC) is a municipal advisory commission created by Township ordinance pursuant to enabling authority conferred under a 1968 New Jersey statute. As stated in the ordinance, the Commission exists for the protection, development and use of natural resources, including water resources, located within the Township and, like most environmental commissions within the State, the Commission interprets this directive broadly to embrace the range of issues described in this report.

The Commission is restricted to seven voting members and two alternate members who only vote when required to achieve a voting quorum. At its November 2020 meeting, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance suggested by the Commission and providing for the appointment of an unlimited number of non-voting associate (adult) and student members to provide people interested in the environment with a sense of empowerment and connection to the Commission's activities while also expanding the experience and effort that could be brought to bear in discharge of the Commission's affairs. Entering 2023, [the Commission members](#) are set out below:

<u>Voting Members</u>	<u>Alternate Members</u>	<u>Associate Members</u>
Brian Morgan (Chairman)	Leslie Jones-Wentz	Carolyn McLain
Barbara Buda	Thelma Achenbach	Daniel Haines
Cecile Kent		Eric Rush
Charlie Schachter		Gabriella Rizzolo
Jennifer Carcich		Hart Coven
Joshua Saks		John Landau
Siva S. Jonnada		Ned Gardner

In addition to the volunteer members, Morris Township is fortunate to have two Township Committee liaisons assigned to the EC (who also attend nearly every meeting). In 2022, that was:

- 1) Deputy Mayor Cathy Wilson**
- 2) Tara Olivo-Moore**, and upon her resignation, replaced by **Donna Guariglia**

The EC met 11 times this year – on the second Thursday of every month except August.

Environmental Reviews

The Environmental Commission has as its primary function the review of proposals submitted to the Township’s land use boards to ascertain and report any adverse environmental impact. To this end, while having many reviews to execute, progress was made to improve and mature the process.

- **Education** - As in prior years, various Commission members sought to sharpen their site review skills through participation in the annual site review training workshop conducted by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions as part of its virtual “Fundamentals for an Effective Environmental Commission” webinar in January.
- **Standardization** – improved suggestions for land protection was developed and included on several reviews. Areas of focus this year included lighting and storm water management. Feedback from one lighting expert on the Red Bulls site review stated it was “one of the better ones I've seen”
- **Collaboration** – Partnering with our neighboring towns in Madison and the Chathams, an initial session was held to discuss each other’s Site Review process, share ideas and identify areas for each town to improve.

The following environmental reviews were completed by the Commission in 2022:

Planning Board

ID	Name	Where	What
PB-04-22	Spring Brook Country Club	Block 5802, Lot 1	Increase parking lot size
PB-05-22	284 Mendham, LLC	Block 4501, Lot 4	Minor subdivision to create one additional lot
PB-06-22	Red Bull Arena, Inc	Block 9101, Lot 4 & 5	Construct a training facility
PB-07-22	299 Madison Fee Owner, LLC	Block 8304, Lot 29	Installation of an emergency generator
PB-08-22	Storage Depot II, LLC	Block 9002, Lot 13	Install roof mounted solar panels
PB-09-22	Solar Landscape, LLC	Block 10104, Lot 1	Applicant proposes to install 35, 217 square feet of roof mounted solar panels and installation of associated ground mounted equipment with chain link fencing, approximately 6 feet high
PB-10-22	Order of St. Benedict of NJ	Block 4501, Lot 2.01	230 Mendham Avenue, OSGU zone. Applicant proposes to install new freestanding signs at three existing entrances to the Delbarton School.
PB-11-22	Sandi’s Soulbites Restaurant	Block 10501, Lot 2	255 Speedwell Avenue, B-11 zone. Applicant proposes to renovate the existing restaurant to include outdoor dining and other related improvements.
PB-12-22	JCP&L c/o First Energy	Block 8601, Lot 4	Applicant is seeking to replace the existing generator (with a second generator proposed at a future date as well).
PB-14-22	Sisters of Charity of St Elizabeth	Block 8801, Lot 1	Remove the existing guard station, move the location of the guard station and replace with a new guard station
PB-15-22	Morris County Golf Club	Block 9101, Lot 2	Morris County Golf Club, 36 Punchbowl Road, OSGU zone. Applicant proposes modification to accessory structures.

Board of Adjustment

ID	Name	Where	What
BA-07-22	Township Plaza, LLC	Block 109, Lots 19 & 20	Convert the existing office/commercial use into two residential apartments
BA-08-22	Morris County Hand Wash, LLC	Block 10201, Lot 16	Convert to automated express car wash
BA-12-22	30 Gregory Morris Plains, LLC	Block 10501, Lot 18	Expand the accessory building converted to an apartment by adding a second level to modernize and improve the existing living space

Energy Aggregation

New ordinance passed in December 2022

After several years researching, planning and conducting outreach, the Township Committee passed an Energy Aggregation (EA) ordinance in Dec 2022. This gives Morris Township the ability to work alone or in a group, to aggregate the energy requirements of residential, commercial and municipal customer accounts so that the participating customers can purchase electric supply from Third Party Suppliers (TPSs) at prices lower than the average utility price, with the possibility of added benefits such as higher renewable energy content.

The Environmental Commission had hosted two outreach events –in 2020 and again in 2022 - that are available for replay on the [township's website](#).

While conditions (rates) for Energy Aggregation were not favorable in 2022, this ordinance positions Morris Township and its residents to benefit from EA once market conditions improve.

Key points for residents to remember about Energy Aggregation:

- No changes regarding service reliability or customer service
- No incremental cost or burden on the town
- Managed completely transparently through JCPL and professional consultants
- Only activated if there are savings available vs the default JCPL provider pool
- Opt-out to the default provider pool or a selected alternative provider at any time
- No surprise price increases can happen (as might occur with alternative power suppliers)

Sustainable New Jersey Achieved Bronze Certification

Thanks to the hard work of the Environmental Commission's Green Team and township officials, Morris Township has been awarded Bronze Certification by Sustainable Jersey.

Sustainable Jersey (SJ) is a network and movement of municipalities, schools and school districts working collectively to bring about a sustainable New Jersey



What certification means

SJ Bronze certification means our municipality has made a commitment to sustainability and succeeded in implementing the first significant steps.

This certification is a public recognition of our efforts and accomplishments to date. It puts us in the company of the approximately 220 other municipalities in NJ who have shown by their actions the value we place on working to be a more sustainable community.

How we got certified

To become SJ certified at the bronze-level, a committee of volunteers (the Green Team) submitted documentation to prove that the township had completed the required sustainability actions, meeting a minimum of 150 points. The action points were earned in a wide range of areas, from community outreach and education to public EV charging infrastructure to open space plans.

Looking Ahead

SJ certification qualifies the township for numerous grant possibilities that will support future sustainability projects. The Environmental Commission's Green Team will oversee the ongoing SJ Certification process, seek opportunities to apply for grants, and explore the even more challenging Silver certification level.

Community Outreach

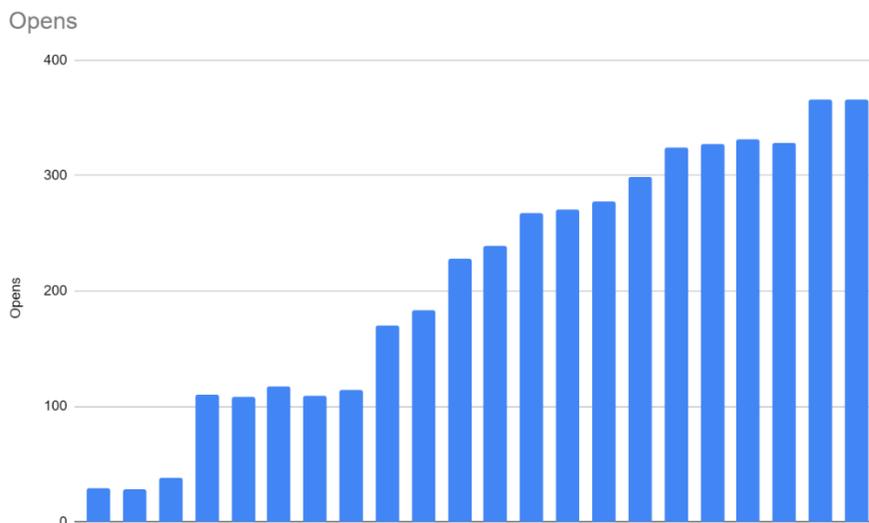
Newsletter

The Environmental Commissions' monthly email newsletter, *Environmental News You Can Use*, has been published continuously since February 2021. Twenty-one issues, containing more than 100 topics, have been researched, written, and delivered to resident emails.

The newsletter contains information about the activities of the EC, but also includes many articles about diverse topics such as native habitat and wildlife, lawn care practices, and energy conservation. There is a focus on actionable and seasonal information that readers can use to live a more sustainable everyday life.

The [newsletter's subscription list](#) increased from 40 in Feb 2021 to more than 650 by the end of 2022 -- which is one out of every 33 residents in the township. The goal for 2023 is to reach 1,100 residents by the end of the year.

The relevance of the newsletter to residents is manifested in the extremely high "open rate" of 65%. Below is a chart of newsletter "opens" since Feb 2021.



Outreach Events

The Environmental Commission continues to be on the ground meeting residents and informing of them the EC objectives and general sustainable practices. Events where the EC has been present in 2022:

- June 2022 - Whippany Reiver Watershed sponsored BioBlitz
- Oct 2022 - Morristown Fall Festival
- Jan-Mar, Dec – Grow it Green Winter Farmers Market



Avoiding Invasives / Encouraging Native Plants

Following the passage in April of a Do Not Plant list by the Township Committee, the Environmental Commission has played a key role in providing Outreach and communicating the benefits of avoiding invasive plants and encouraging native plants.

Invasive plant encroachment seriously threatens the health of the public and private forests that we depend upon for storm-water mitigation, drinking water filtration, and recreation. They also threaten insect, bird and other wildlife populations because the native plants they crowd out are a critical part of the food chain.

Additionally, partnering with the Madison Environmental Commission, our township officials and volunteers attended [a webinar with Dr. Douglas Tallamy](#), a nationally renowned expert on native plants and biodiversity. Dr. Tallamy explained how landscaping residential properties with just a few keystone native plants can efficiently and quickly restore the balance of nature.

The Morris Township Environmental Commission makes the education around a healthy native plant based ecosystem at nearly all of our outreach events in 2022 (and plans to do so in 2023).

Conservation

Grant for Butterworth Pollinator Garden

In June 2022, the Environmental Commission, partnering with the Township professionals, applied and was awarded \$1,000 to plant a Pollinator Garden in Butterworth Park. The grant was awarded by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) for Open Space Stewardship.

The \$1,000 endowment will be used to plant a small garden of native plants in Butterworth Park, creating a pocket of habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. The garden will be planted and maintained by a volunteer group of neighborhood Garden Stewards, at zero expense to Township taxpayers.

The 200-square-foot garden will demonstrate how monoculture environments, such as cool-season lawn grasses, can be replaced with native plants that promote biodiversity. The garden will provide the following benefits to the community:

- Create habitat for insect pollinators by providing food and shelter
- Demonstrate the feasibility of replacing grass lawns with native plants
- Provide education about biodiversity to people of all ages
- Visually enhance the park by providing botanical color and variety
- Reduce greenhouse emissions and noise from township mowers
- Improve storm-water mitigation
- Build an infectious community of native plant advocates



Site preparation began in Fall 2022, with planting planned for Spring 2023. It is expected that the garden will take 1-2 years to become fully established. Based on the interests and energies of the neighborhood volunteers, opportunities for enhancement and expansion include increasing the size of the existing garden; adding bat houses, bird houses, and bee hotels; and planting new gardens around the perimeter of Butterworth Park.

The Environmental Commission is hopeful that other volunteer teams will offer to take on similar pollinator garden projects elsewhere in the Township.

Annual Free Tree Giveaway

While driven by the township professionals and other township volunteers, the EC remains active in assisting and promoting this popular tree giveaway

ERI – Environmental Resource Inventory

The enabling legislation for of an Environmental Commission allows them to pursue a broad range of activities for natural resource planning, including to develop and maintain an environmental resource inventory (ERI) for the municipality.

The ERI is the gateway through which environmental concerns enter the municipal process, informing the master plan and the ordinances designed to carry it out. Without an ERI, decisions on a range of municipal functions are made without a conscious knowledge of the environmental impacts they may cause. ERIs are valuable tools in advocating for new legislation and regulation and defending existing ordinances and planning documents. An ERI confers legitimacy on the Environmental Commission and helps assure that municipal decision makers at all levels properly consider environmental values in their decision making.

The groundwork has started in 2022 to pursue an updated ERI for Morris Township. Research has been started to have an ERI created by internal Environmental Commission members leveraging the many available interactive online resources of public information. To ensure all options are considered, the feasibility of identifying grants to pay for a professionally created ERI have also been started.

Regional Collaboration

Knowing Environmental issues know no boundaries, the Environmental Commission's efforts in 2022 continued to extend beyond the Township.

NJSMA - Northern Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance

The Morris Township Environmental Commission continues to be an active member of the Northern Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance - an ongoing collaboration of environmental commissions and municipal officials from towns across northern New Jersey. Among the events sponsored this year, was an in-person presentation and discussion with experts on the electrification of households as a means to reduce fossil fuel dependency as well as insight into the federal legislation containing significant funding for electrification – the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act).

Composter Sale and Education Webinar

The Morris Township Environmental Commission initiated and helped conduct a multi-town composter sale and fundraiser for Grow it Green to sell over 30 composters to local residents. This effort included a composting education online webinar with a Rutgers Master Gardener. This was the second year in a row for the EC to participate in a Composter sale

Great Swamp Plant Sale

Running April 1-22, the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) Native Plant Sale was held for the second year in a row. This plant sale is supported by the Morris Township Environmental Commission with several members directly involved in its success. We are one of many municipalities and non-profit organizations that help publicize and staff the sale, including hosting over 15 local pickup sites.

Pollinator enthusiasts purchased nearly 23,500 plugs at this year's native pollinator plant sale. When you dig deeper and see that 500 purchasers across 96 towns purchased plants, the benefits to pollinators are even more significant. Now there are waystations for pollinators as they move around neighborhoods, and this will only increase as these gardens grow, and as our friends and neighbors follow our example.

Prior to the sale, there were three informational webinars on native pollinator plants, the important pollinators themselves, and how to prepare your own garden. Planting for pollinators is at the core of improving local ecology and creating a sustainable environment, so it was impressive to see just how much interest this generated. Over 750 people attended these programs.

Environmental Education

Environmental Commission members diligently sought to grow their expertise over the past year through participation in remote webinars and in-person presentations offered by national, state and local academic, environmental and governmental organizations and addressing a wide array of topics pertinent to the Commission's work. All such training was voluntary and completed on each member's own personal time. The following is a chronological list of the various environmental education offerings attended or participated in during 2022 by at least one Commission member:

Date	Event/Webinar name
1/21/2022	Cultivating a Community of Support for Native Plants
3/1/2022	Fundamentals for Effective Environmental Commissions
3/5/2022	Native Plant Society Annual Spring Conference
3/8/2022	ANJEC Effective Env Commissions
3/10/2022	ANJEC ERI/NRI creation
3/17/2022	ANJEC Master plan / Land Use updates
3/22/2022	Stormwater management Morris Twp sponsored ANJEC talk
5/3/2022	Countdown to NJ's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act
5/3/2022	Native Plants for the small yard
5/11/2022	Kill Your Lawn with Dan Jaffe Wilder
5/18/2022	Highlands Region Interactive ERI Training

6/24/2022	Sustainability Summit - SNJ
6/24/2022	SNJ-All Things EV
6/24/2022	SNJ- NJDEA Supporting Local Economic Development
6/26/2022	SNJ-Expert Hands for Energy Projects
7/7/2022	ANJEC MS4 Webinar
7/12/2022	Lose the Lawn, Create a Wildflower Meadow Instead
7/20/2022	NJ Conservation Blueprint 101
8/2/2022	ANJEC Roundtable Session: Creating a Certified Wildlife Habitat
10/6/2022	NJSMA October In-Person Meeting (heat pumps, microgrids, IRA overview)
10/17/2022	ANJEC 2022 Congress -Bridging the Stormwater Funding Gap
10/20/2022	Inland Flood Protection Rule Engagement Session
11/2/2022	Nature's Best Hope: Madison "Noon Zoom"
11/4/2022	Creating Pollinator Gardens: the Role of Plant Choice and Design with PSU's Harland Patch
11/5/2022	NPSNJ FALL VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
11/15/2022	NJ League of Municipalities/SNJ - Annual conference
11/29/2022	ANJEC Roundtable Session: Creating Sustainable Landscape
11/29/2022	Sustainable Landscape Practices ANJEC/Rutgers

Summary of EC Recommended Legislation

Part of the Environmental Commission responsibility is to inform the Municipality of environmental concerns and provide suggested solutions. To that end, there were several key pieces of legislation passed that were directly influenced by the Environmental Commission (some detailed earlier in this report):

- 1) [Invasive Do Not Plant List](#) (Resolution No. 93-22 - Apr 2022) - This resolution strongly encourages our community to avoid planting any species appearing on the [New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team's Do Not Plant List](#) and to use [native plants](#) whenever possible. It applies to:
 - All public, private and commercial property owners and managers
 - Local garden centers and nurseries
 - Professional landscapers
 - Township Recreation and Public Works Departments

Additionally, the [NJ Invasive Species Strike Team's Do Not Plant List](#) will be consulted when the Township reviews landscape plans that are part of site development plans.
- 2) [Energy Aggregation](#) (Ordinance No. 27-22 – Dec 2022) - After a several year planning and outreach effort, the Township Committee passed an Energy Aggregation (EA) ordinance. This gives Morris Township the ability to work alone or in a group, to aggregate the energy requirements of residential, commercial and municipal customer accounts so that the participating customers can purchase electric supply from Third Party Suppliers (TPSs) at prices lower than the average utility price, with the possibility of added benefits such as higher renewable energy content.

- 3) [Sustainable Land Use Pledge](#) (Resolution No. 91-22 Apr 2022) – The Sustainable Land Use Pledge is a public affirmation of a municipality’s intent to support sustainable smart growth land-use policies. The adoption of the resolution commits Morris Twp to a thoughtful, longer-term re-evaluation of current land use practices and planning policies. The result will be land-use decisions that balance economic, environmental, and social needs and provide the highest possible quality of life for all residents. This pledge announces the Township’s commitment to sustainability and was a priority for the Sustainable New Jersey certification.

Additional highlights

- **Internal Township Collaboration** – The Environmental Commission has made it a priority to collaborate with the Township professionals and other Township volunteer bodies where possible. For example, as part of Madison Avenue Corridor project run by the Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) the EC attended EDAC meetings and provided input/materials for their consideration. Additionally, the EC has established relationships with the Land Use boards, open space and transportation subcommittees to discuss the Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) and other goals.
- **Recognition**
 - o In April 2022, in recognition for all the effort spent and contributions to the township, the Environmental Commission and former chairman Buz Kenney [received recognition](#) from the Township Committee at the monthly meeting.
 - o In September, the EC successfully nominated Deputy Mayor Cathy Wilson for the Sustainable New Jersey Municipal Leadership Award which she won. This award provides an opportunity for an environmental commission, shade tree, open space, green team member(s) to nominate their community’s leadership for recognition for their exceptional environmental leadership. Deputy Mayor Wilson, and her many years of dedication to the Environmental Commission exemplify an exceptional Municipal Leader.

Get Involved

Three Ways You Can Help:

Attend the next meeting of the Environmental Commission. The Commission meets on the second Thursday of the month at 7:00 pm. A Zoom link and the agenda are available on our website: <https://www.morristwp.com/362/Environmental-Commission>

Subscribe to the Environmental Commission's monthly electronic newsletter and spread the word by forwarding the newsletter to friends, family and neighbors. A sign-up link may be found on our website: www.morristwp.com

Join us by completing a [volunteer form](#) at the Township Municipal Building (50 Woodland Avenue) or on-line at the Township website: www.morristwp.com

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

We can be reached at our email address: EnvComm@morristwp.com

Content created by EC members, the EC newsletter, and Great Swamp newsletters.