



Township of Morris  
**ENVIRONMENTAL  
COMMISSION**

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# **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**

## FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

The past year has been one of challenge for the Township of Morris Environmental Commission. First and foremost: the challenge to respond to a warming climate — an ever-accelerating problem threatening life as we know it on our planet. While reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere truly is a herculean task, all must do their part and starting with our first meeting of the year the Commission pursued a number of initiatives designed to lower the Township's carbon footprint.

The Commission also faced the many challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. After its first two monthly meetings, the Commission was forced to curtail in-person activity while the Township grappled with adapting to pandemic-related restrictions. The Commission did not resume formal meetings, albeit via Zoom, until June, but in the interim Commission members sought to hone their environmental knowledge through participation in on-line “webinars” addressing topics such as stormwater management, invasive species, environmental justice and the New Jersey energy master plan. The remote learning continued beyond the resumption of scheduled meetings and the insight gained enhanced the Commission's ability to perform its work.

At its first meeting in January, I presented an agenda of issues for the Commission to address in the coming year and proposed to do so through the creation of a separate, three-member sub-group for each matter on the list. The members responded with enthusiasm and, more importantly, great effort. The resulting accomplishments detailed in this report are remarkable and credit goes to the members.

Buz Kenney

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The majority of the members came to the Environmental Commission with no formal environmental background. To offset this lack of training and experience, the members throughout the year availed themselves of an array of in-person seminars and, after the COVID-19 shutdown, remote, on-line “webinars” offered by national, state and local environmental organizations addressing a diverse range of subjects 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 2020 by at least one Commission member:

- January 16 — Building for a Sustainable Future seminar hosted by the combined Madison and Chatham Borough Environmental Commissions
- January 21 — Hunterdon Area Energy Cooperative Governmental Energy Aggregation informational meeting hosted by Mendham Township
- January 29 — Republic Services recycling facility plant tour
- March 7 — Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) seminar: Fundamentals for Effective Environmental Commissions
- April 29 — Energy Star Training: Discovering Energy Savings with Treasure Hunts
- April 30 — ANJEC webinar: Single-Use Plastics Impact on Habitat and Waterways
- May 7 — Sustainable Jersey webinar: Tracking Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Municipal Operations
- May 12 — Sustainable Jersey webinar: Community Energy Outreach Made Easier with Sustainable Jersey Toolkits

- May 14 — Cornell University webinar: Healthy Lawn Care
- May 20 — Pinelands Preservation Alliance webinar: Got Too Much Water?
- June 3 — ANJEC webinar: Making Green Infrastructure and Functional Stormwater a Reality
- June 3 — Sustainable Jersey webinar: Residential Energy Efficiency Outreach
- June 11 — Sustainable Jersey webinar: Commercial Energy Efficiency Outreach
- June 30 — ANJEC webinar: NJ's Clean Energy Program
- June 30 — NJ Spotlight virtual roundtable on Environmental Justice
- July 13 — NJ Clean Energy virtual roundtable: Energy Efficiency Core Programs Stakeholder Meeting
- September 9 — ANJEC and The Watershed Institute webinar: New Stormwater Rules: Compliance and Enhancement
- September 21 — Morristown Unitarian Fellowship Green Earth Ministry on-line screening of "The Story of Plastics" film and discussion
- September 24 — Morris County Chamber of Commerce on-line Environmental and Sustainability Tech Talk
- September 29 — Transportation and Climate Initiative webinar: Ensuring Environmental Justice and Equity in a Regional Low-Carbon Transportation Program
- October 1 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, Opening Session
- October 2 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress opening address by Catherine McCabe, NJDEP Commissioner
- October 8 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, Climate Resilience Initiatives and Programs
- October 9 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, Green Infrastructure
- October 16 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress keynote presentation by Judith Enck, Environmental Policy Expert and Founder of Beyond Plastics
- October 22 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, New Jersey Legislative Update
- October 23 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, Clean Energy Projects in New Jersey
- October 29 — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, Environmental Justice Advances
- October 30. — 50th ANJEC Environmental Congress, New Jersey Environmental Commission Networking
- November 2 — The Watershed Institute 4th Annual Watershed Conference

- keynote address by Ben Strauss, CEO and Chief Scientist, Climate Central; NJ Protecting Against Climate Threats (PACT) Rules workshop
- November 4 — The Watershed Institute 4th Annual Watershed Conference, Election Impact on the Environment workshop; Sustainability and Environmental Management: Moving Beyond Climate Resiliency workshop; Climate Safe Neighborhoods: Advancing Equitable Resilience Strategies workshop; Helping Environmental Organizations Prioritize and Normalize Racial Justice workshop; Gadgets, Gizmos and Good Science workshop
- November 5 — The Watershed Institute 4th Annual Watershed Conference, Increasing Effectiveness of Your Green Infrastructure Communications by Applying Insights from Behavioral Science workshop
- November 6 — The Watershed Institute 4th Annual Watershed Conference, Protection of Soil Resources on New Jersey’s Preserved Farmland workshop; Green Infrastructure and Enhanced Stormwater Ordinance workshop
- December 3 — New Jersey League of Conservation Voters webinar: Health and Air Pollution: Understanding the Links
- December 16 — Sustainable Jersey webinar: Too Good to be True? Reducing Energy Costs with Community Solar

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS**

One of the primary functions of the Environmental Commission is the review of proposals submitted to either of the Township’s land use boards to ascertain any adverse environmental impact. To better perform this function, several Commission members attended a site review training workshop included in the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions “Fundamentals for an Effective Environmental Commission” program in March. The comprehensive manual provided to each program attendee served as the guidebook for the Commission as it worked during the year to formalize the environmental review process and hone member reviewing skills. Copies of the manual subsequently were obtained and delivered to each Commission member.

Formalization of the environmental review process also was abetted by the Commission’s decision to switch to monthly meetings in 2020. Previously, the Commission met only once every two months and reviews solely reflected the opinions of the person or persons performing the review. The additional meetings allowed a

proposal to be presented by the Township Engineer and assigned to be undertaken by one or more members during the ensuing month. Following review by the Township Engineer, the initial report would be submitted to the Commission as a whole for discussion and comment at the next meeting and, thereafter, a final report would be prepared. The final report, reflecting the Commission's collective wisdom, then would be submitted to the appropriate Township land use board.

The following Environmental reviews were completed by the Commission in 2020:

#### Planning Board

PB-01-20, OSBNJ-Delbarton School, 230 Mendham Road: reconfiguration of tennis courts and bleachers, field house expansion, indoor hockey rink construction and reconfiguration of parking lot

PB-02-20, OSBNJ-Delbarton School, 2330 Mendham Road: construction of one-story addition to existing Fine Arts building

PB-06-20, John & Mary Weisgerber, 5 Shippen Lane: proposed lot subdivision

PB-10-20, DKR5, LLC, 200 Madison Avenue: subdivision of existing bank building and lot to accommodate childcare center and bank

PB-11-20, Rabbinical College of America, 226 Sussex Avenue: construction of new education building and existing parking, drive aisle and walkway improvement

PB-12-20, Estate of Charles DeGraw, 10 and 14 Jones Drive: proposed subdivision to create an additional lot

PB-13-20, Solar Landscape, LLC, 230 Mendham Road: installation of rooftop solar panels on various Delbarton School buildings

PB-15-20, 6-10. Kahn, LLC, 6-10 Kahn Road: addition of 2,000 square feet to lower level of existing structure

#### Board of Adjustment

BA-10-18, 257 Mt. Kemble, LLC, 257 Mt. Kemble Avenue: proposed development of 11-unit townhouse project with related site improvements

BA-10-20, CIT Bank, N.A., 340 Mt. Kemble Avenue: installation of emergency generator incident to reconstruction of existing office building

BA-12-20, Seneca Heights, LLC, 168 Lake Valley Road: subdivision to create an additional lot

BA-14-20, 6-10 Kahn Road, LLC, 6-10 Kahn Road: conversion of existing childcare facility into ten residential units

BA-18-20, New Cingular PCS, LLC, 99 Columbia Road: construction of a 120-foot tree-pole tower, generator and related equipment

## OUTREACH

Included among the Environmental Commission's primary 2020 agenda goals was the creation of an effective and ongoing community outreach program. It was hoped that such a program would serve to elevate the Commission's profile in the community while providing residents with timely information on Commission initiatives and matters of environmental significance. Despite the outreach sub-group being hampered for most of the year by an inability to conduct in-person activities, progress was made and a foundation was laid for more effective efforts in the future.

The Commission's 2020 outreach accomplishments follow:

— Government energy aggregation booth at the Unitarian Fellowship Green Earth Ministry environmental fair

— Installation of Commission bulletin board in the Township Municipal Building, including display of Clean Energy brochures (subsequently removed due to COVID-19 related lobby reconfiguration)

— In-person canvassing of the Township businesses in March to distribute a fact sheet on the Township ordinance banning single-use plastic bags

— School recycling poster contest to promote awareness of new Township recycling restrictions (not completed due to COVID-19 restrictions)

— Inclusion in the Township's Municipal Messenger e-newsletter of Commission articles on the single-use plastic bag ordinance, recycling and government energy aggregation

— Informational mailing to each of the Township’s commercial establishments regarding the single-use plastic bag ordinance and the extension of its effective date to October 1, 2020

— Initial efforts to establish a Commission on-line presence

— Initial efforts to compile a Commission electronic mailing list, including placing a sign-up link in the Township’s November Municipal Messenger and on the Commission’s webpage

## **ENERGY AGGREGATION**

Because of its potential to derive a greater portion of Township residents’ electricity from renewable sources while lowering their monthly electric bills, government energy aggregation was a priority agenda item for the Environmental Commission in 2020. A sub-group was formed at the January Commission meeting and tasked with researching energy aggregation and determining its feasibility for the Township.

The aggregation of individual electric customer accounts became possible with deregulation of the electric utility industry in the 1990s. Deregulation separated the industry’s generation, transmission and retail distribution components into independent businesses and allowed individual Township JCP&L customers to seek more favorable rates from non-JCP&L electricity generators. Government energy aggregation, which was specifically authorized within New Jersey by a 2003 statute, takes the concept one step further by allowing the Township to leverage the combined purchasing power of its residents to obtain a single, lower electric supply rate for all. Residents participating in an aggregation pool would receive a lower electric rate owing to a group contract entered on their behalf with an unrelated electric power generator. The aggregation contract could be entered with the Township on a stand-alone basis or with the Township and one or more other municipalities to enhance the buying power through increased scale. Either way, Township residents would continue to have JCP&L as their retail electric distributor and would see no change, other than rate, in their monthly bill format.

Adoption of an energy aggregation program by the Township also would afford residents the ability to increase the proportion of their electricity derived from renewable sources such as solar, wind and hydropower. At present, New Jersey mandates that approximately 20% of all electricity delivered within the state come from such sources. However, the Township could require a greater renewable proportion as a condition of any energy aggregation contract entered by it on its residents behalf.



The members of the Commission's energy aggregation sub-group devoted significant time and energy during the year to understanding the concept and its potential benefits for Township residents. The sub-group spoke with numerous environmental commissioners and other representatives of New Jersey municipalities which have already adopted an energy aggregation program. Various consultants involved in guiding the municipalities through the energy aggregation process also were interviewed. The insight gained led the sub-group to determine that energy aggregation should be pursued within the Township and at its September meeting, the full Commission unanimously voted to recommend that the Township (i) express its desire to inform Township residents of the benefits of energy aggregation and (ii) consider various alternatives for bringing such benefits to Township residents.

In furtherance of the foregoing recommendation, Dan Falkner, former Commission chairperson, gave an energy aggregation presentation at the November Township Committee meeting. Thereafter, the Township Committee, by unanimous resolution, directed the Commission to proceed with its energy aggregation effort.

The next step for the energy aggregation sub-group is to ascertain the specific economic and renewable energy terms of the two existing area aggregation cooperatives. Assuming favorable economics, the Commission would then determine whether to recommend that the Township Committee proceed with energy aggregation and, if so, whether on a stand-alone basis, jointly with one or more municipalities not already party to an energy aggregation contract, or as a member of one of the existing area energy aggregation cooperatives. It is hoped that the Commission will be in a position to make this recommendation early in the coming year.

## **ENERGY AUDITS**

One of the primary drivers of the Environmental Commission's 2020 agenda was a shared desire to combat the growing climate crisis by reducing the Township's carbon footprint. The Commission determined that the most effective way to convince Township residents to become more energy efficient would be to lead by example and, to that end, at its February meeting the Commission recommended that the Township Committee pursue an energy audit of the Township's facilities. Under the Local Government Energy Audit Program administered by the New Jersey Bureau of Public Utilities as part of its Clean Energy initiative, municipalities are eligible for full grant funding of the cost of an audit to (i) establish how qualifying facilities use energy, (ii) identify conservation measures to reduce such facilities' energy use and (iii) assist the Township in implementing all potential energy reductions.

Because of the the distraction borne of COVID-19, the Township was not in a position to seek audit funding until the fall. When formal application ultimately was made, the Township was informed that of its thirteen municipal facilities, only two met the 200 kw last-twelve-month average peak electricity demand eligibility threshold. The Township has appealed this determination and the appeal is pending.

The New Jersey Clean Energy Program also contains a residential component and at its first meeting of the year, the Commission undertook to spread awareness of the program within the Township. For a modest fee (typically under \$100), Township homeowners could have a full energy assessment of their property by an approved professional energy performance contractor. The cost of any efficiency improvements recommended in the audit report would be covered through a grant of up to \$4,000 and a 0% loan of up to \$10,000. Several Commission members had gone through the process and reported energy savings of up to 30 percent. The Commission intended to conduct community outreach events during the year but COVID-19 restrictions limited the Commission outreach to the dissemination of Clean Energy brochures at the Township Municipal Building.

Township business and commercial establishments also can participate in the New Jersey Clean Energy Program. Under the Direct Install initiative, up to 70 percent of the cost of replacement lighting, HVAC and other operational equipment of small and medium-sized businesses would be provided through Clean Energy funds. The Commission intends to publicize this program within the Township business community in the coming year.

## **TREES AND INVASIVE SPECIES**

Following the resumption of its monthly meetings in June, and at the request of the Township Committee's Standing Committee on Environment, Energy and Sustainability, the Environmental Commission undertook a consideration of tree removal on Township residential lots. The Commission tree and invasive species sub-group began by reviewing tree ordinances in effect in various surrounding municipalities. A proposed, but never adopted, 2013 revision to the Township tree ordinance also was examined. Ultimately, the sub-group determined that because trees were both an important component of the Township's character and essential to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions within the Township, resident tree removal should be regulated. Using the 2013 proposed ordinance as a framework, and drawing from certain of the other ordinances reviewed, the sub-group prepared a suggested restatement of the existing Township tree ordinance incorporating a residential tree removal permit requirement. The suggested ordinance was considered at the

Commission's December meeting and it was agreed that further discussions would be held with the Township Engineer addressing administration of the proposed permitting process.

Early in the year, the Commission was asked by a member of the Township Committee's Standing Committee on Legislation, Government Liaison and Grants to address the problem posed by the unchecked spread of bamboo in certain areas. This matter was deferred pending an invasive species training session conducted in July by the head of the New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team. Two Commission members attended the session and, thereafter, a Commission member accompanied the Township Committee member on a tour of Jones Woods and observed first-hand the proliferation of bamboo within the Township property. After review of the bamboo/invasive species ordinances in effect in various New Jersey municipalities, the Commission tree and invasive species sub-group prepared and submitted to the Township Committee member a suggested ordinance requiring that no future bamboo be planted within the Township without appropriate confinement. The ordinance was adopted by the Township Committee at its November meeting.

The invasive species training session served to sensitize the Commission to an issue of critical importance to the Township. To gain more insight into the problem posed by the proliferation of non-native flora and fauna within the Township, the Commission invited John Landau, an invasive species expert, to speak at its September meeting. Mr. Landau gave a detailed and well-documented presentation, leading the Commission to include invasive species as one of its ongoing action items. Both Mr. Landau and a representative of the Township's Community Garden have been invited to become volunteer associate members of the Commission in 2021 to assist in addressing the problem.

## COMPOSTING

A fundamental goal of any organization concerned about the environment is the reduction of municipal waste and the Environmental Commission is no exception. Less waste incinerated or deposited in a landfill translates to fewer toxins in the air we all breathe and the water we all drink. But there also is an immediate economic benefit to municipal waste reduction as the Township's waste disposal costs would be reduced, saving taxpayers money.

A principal method of municipal waster reduction is the recycling of organic waste through composting. Early in the year, the Commission's composting sub-group began investigating the possibility of establishing a community composting program

within the Township. Such a program would involve one or more centralized composting sites where residents could drop off their organic waste. After sub-group community composting efforts failed to gain significant traction, the Commission decided to shift its primary focus to the encouragement and proactive support of individual resident composting. The composting sub-group is continuing to examine potential resident incentive programs and funding sources with the intent that a pilot program might be undertaken by the Commission in 2021.

## **ASSOCIATE AND STUDENT MEMBERS**

The Environmental Commission is restricted by both state law and Township ordinance to seven voting members and two non-voting alternates (who only vote when required to achieve a voting quorum). However, the variety and complexity of the various issues confronting the Commission led to a consideration of how to involve more people in the Commission's workload and this, in turn, led to the possibility of non-voting volunteer Commission members. At its November meeting, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance suggested by the Commission and providing for the appointment of non-voting associate (adult) and student members. The ordinance provides that such new members need not be Township residents, thus making it easier to recruit expertise and foster student involvement. It is hoped that appointment of the first associate members will be completed prior to the Commission's January, 2021 meeting.

## **REGIONAL COLLABORATION**

Environmental Commission involvement in seeking to ban single-use plastic bags stemmed from the work of a group of area environmental commissions seeking adoption of a critical mass of ordinances to compel the New Jersey legislature to enact a statewide single-use plastic bag prohibition. From contacts developed in this process, Commission members have continued to reach out to neighboring commissions to discuss issues of mutual concern. In December, a conversation between the respective Madison and Morris Township environmental commission chairpersons resulted in an agreement to continue to speak on a regular basis.

In October, several Commission members participated in an on-line "multi-town environmental check-in" convened by the Northern New Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance. Program participants included representatives of numerous northern New Jersey environmental commissions, most if not all of whom volunteered to serve on at

least one of the following subcommittees: energy aggregation, green building, regional climate action strategy, stormwater utilities, green transportation and municipal fleets and pesticides. The Commission Chairperson subsequently volunteered to chair the green transportation and municipal fleets subcommittee. The hoped-for regional collaboration bore fruit within a matter of weeks. At the first meeting of the green building subcommittee, the Commission Chairperson was asked about the recently-adopted Township electric vehicle charging ordinance and subsequently provided copies of the ordinance to the subcommittee members. Within a matter of weeks, a clone of the ordinance was adopted by the Township of Berkeley Heights.



# TOWNSHIP OF MORRIS ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

## 2020 MEMBERS

The Environmental Commission is composed of seven regular members with three-year terms and two alternate members with two-year terms, each appointed by the Mayor. The 2020 members are set out below with their respective years of term expiry.

Daniel “Buz” Kenney, Chairperson, 2022

Alex Ambrose \*\*

Tilly-Jo Emerson, 2021

Craig Giannantonio, 2020

Siva Jonada, 2022

Cecile Kent, 2020

Honeah Mangione \*\*

Brian Morgan, 2020 \*

Joshua Saks, 2021

Steve Trachtenberg, 2020

Jaraun Wright, 2021 \*

\* Alternate member

\*\* Resigned and replaced during 2020

