

Final

SOUTH ORANGE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MINUTES

Thursday, May 16th - Virtual. 7:30 p.m.

Attendees: Members: Kathleen Grant, Beau Schwegman, Andy Stone, Rob Orgera, Katie Skibinski, Lorraine Graves. Public: Ben Vitale, Jenny Aylward

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. Call meeting to Order
2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from March 2024 meeting

Deferred to next meeting

3. ACTION ITEMS

The Community Energy Grant has been submitted! Kathleen stressed that, if funded, this will give us access to important information about baseline energy expenditures in the Village.

Later in the meeting, during a discussion of resources available for the Village to acquire electric jitneys, some members suggested that the inventory of Village infrastructure (made possible by this grant) should include all Village owned vehicles (e.g. jitneys, police and DPW vehicle)

Sustainable Essex Alliance Update –at a recent meeting, bids from alternate energy providers were reviewed. They were above PSE&G rates; for this reason the cooperating municipalities voted down the aggregation proposal.

Electrification Event – An event, “Electrify Your Home” has been scheduled for Wednesday, July 17th, 6:30-7:30 p.m., at the Baird, before the Summer Nights Concert Series. Ernie Dorflinger, from Citizens’ Climate Lobby, will speak. Kathleen and Rob will have a planning call in advance with Ernie. Members exchanged ideas about whether, in addition to a talk from Ernie, there might be some hands-on or interactive component (e.g. attendees might be encouraged to bring laptops and, after a brief talk, plug numbers in and then some could share questions or comments).

Questions were raised about how to publicize the event. In addition to Village and EC social media, perhaps key local players (e.g. realtors) could push this out. Aside from this event, Ben suggested that if there is sufficient interest (e.g. starting with attendees at the event) a social media group could be started, to encourage mutual cooperation

Become an electrification coach: Kathleen spoke about an online class. Next class starts May 23; online; four weeks; 8+ hours total. Both Rob and Lorraine are interested.

Climate Action Plan Update (Katie): Katie has been looking at standard templates used by various towns to describe their current energy use as well as goals and strategies for reducing

reliance on fossil fuels. As she continues to think about how we identify strategies and funding sources, she's identified an important current funding resource: Federal tax credits through the IRA, which can significantly reduce local costs for alternative energy infrastructure (note: even though localities don't typically pay federal taxes, these tax credits can function as subsidies).

Sustainable NJ Re-Certification (Andy): An application for bronze certification was submitted, mid-May. We will get feedback on suggested changes for final submission in September. Kathleen mentioned that SNJ Certification's "actions" provide a thorough blueprint for what an EC could address. After we receive (or don't receive) certification in the Fall, Andy will report on what this process says about what the EC and the Village are doing and not doing.

Communications/Website We agreed that current EC communication with the public is very limited. We discussed various means to increase outreach and communication: a) more frequent attendance at Village events; b) greater use of our FB and Insta feeds; c) mailing list; d) Gaslight quarterly newsletter.

Even though we do have a sign-up sheet at some events, we don't have a mailing list (or at least an active one). We should decide at our next meeting whether to establish and use an active mailing list and/or to increase our postings on social media. Among information that some members felt should be spread more widely: a) monthly EC meeting schedule (i.e. currently an interested member of the public would need to find this on Village website; not everyone will do this); b) local environmental news (e.g. should we post the recent Sustainable Essex news re. aggregation bids being too high?).

Waste (Lorraine): Lorraine reported that she and David Kraiker have been discussing materials reuse, and Trustee Hilton is supportive. She referred to an innovative program in Summit—a reuse center located at their recycling depot: <https://www.summitfreemarket.org/>. They also have "book barn" at their depot-- <https://www.instagram.com/cityofsummit.nj/p/Cr6VHcFLDAs/>. Lorraine may set up a field trip to see these features.

Electric school buses: Ben Vitale shared info and a fact sheet about the Federal Electric School Bus Program, which requires cooperation between the school district and its bus provider. Ben may follow up with Kathleen to discuss a letter from the EC to the School Board on this matter. Katie noted that there may be an impediment due to the height of electric buses preventing them from getting under the railroad tracks.

4. NEXT MEETING DATE – Thursday, June 20th, 7:30 p.m. In-person. Conference Room #1, Village Offices

5. ADJOURNMENT: 9pm