



SOUTH ORANGE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION Minutes

Thursday, December 19, 2024 – 7:30 PM (Virtual WebEx Meeting)

Adequate notice given to the public.

Attendees: Kathleen Grant, Andy Stone, Lorraine Graves, David Kraiker

Village Staff: Walter Clarke, Elizabeth Payne

Public: Julianna Garressa, Chris Sidwa, Alyssa Aronson, Ben Vitale, Susan Haig

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- 1. Call meeting to Order 7:35 pm**
- 2. Minutes of October and November 2024 meetings: APPROVED**
- 3. UPDATES ON NEW and CURRENT PROJECTS & ISSUES**

Leaf Blowers: Andy described a conversation with Councilmember Lewis-Chang. She reported that potential State legislation which would largely ban gas-powered leaf blowers appears to be dead, making the Village's broader ordinance more necessary. Olivia views Maplewood's ordinance (effective January 2023) as a model (<https://www.maplewoodnj.gov/government/public-works/leaf-blowers-and-leaves-in-streets>) . She asks that the Environmental Commission be ready to provide support for this in early 2025.

Kathleen asked if any Commissioner would be willing to take a lead role, and David K volunteered. At our January meeting we will review the Maplewood ordinance, and discuss next steps (likely preparing to speak at an upcoming Council meeting). Note that Olivia reports that S.O.'s Health Officer has stressed the health impacts of gas-powered leaf blower emissions, especially on the mostly lower-income landscaping workers. Attendees also stressed that the increasing number of residents working at home makes the issue of noise pollution from gas-powered blowers a compelling issue.

Ben Vitale received the data from a survey on this issue, conducted by the Village, and is continuing to analyze this data for future use. Walter advised that the EC should prepare a list of potential objections to a ban, and be ready to address these. Perhaps we could locate transcripts or summaries from when this was debated in Maplewood.

An Expanded River Day for 2025 (May 4): The desire for an expanded River Day was strongly expressed at our last meeting. Walter Clarke, who has coordinated River Day for years, expressed support for this, saying that prior to Covid, River Day had essentially functioned as a local environmental fair with many features beyond the river cleanup.

Kathleen shared a Google Doc list of all of the ideas mentioned so far for the expanded River Day: [River Day 2025](#) . Among the ideas that were widely supported and/or most likely to be implemented:

- a kid's Scavenger Hunt, in and around Meadowland Park, with an environmental theme.
- a table on addressing food waste (Lorraine)

- planting seedlings and/or seeds at the pollinator garden (Andy)
- a Maplewood Garden Club and/or S.O. Community Garden table (ideally small seedlings or seeds could be given out)
- birding walk

4. BUDGET DISCUSSION

Kathleen will present SOEC budget items (up to about \$7000) to the Village Council on February 3rd. Commissioners and members of the public (Green Team members) should share any suggestions with Kathleen prior to our next meeting on January 16.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Susan Haig mentioned her involvement in establishing mini-forests based on the Miyawaki method—<https://bio4climate.org/miyawaki-forest-program/>. She has been involved with active projects in Summit and Elizabeth and is interested in locating a site, and organizing interested volunteers, in South Orange. She and Kathleen will discuss this further, possibly for a future presentation to the EC or the broader public.

6. NEXT MEETING DATE –January 16, 2025, 7:30pm

7. ADJOURNMENT: 8:45 pm