

MINUTES---S.O. ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

Prepared by David Kraiker

Attendance: Kathleen Grant, Olivia Lewis-Chang, David Kraiker, Mark McQuillen, Jennie Aylward, Walter Clarke, Julia Flath, Andy Stone (absent), Beau Schwegman (absent), Rob Orgera (Absent), Larry Hirsch (Absent), Lorraine Graves, Chris Sidwa, Rob Landau, Alysa Aronson

7:36 pm, Meeting Begins

AWARDS/RECOGNITIONS:

-South Orange was awarded the Sustainable Jersey “Bronze” Status (per Walter’s email). Mentions sharing with governing body. Spread news to TAPinto and Village Green, SOMA Lounge, WordPress for Green Team.

-Julia Flath mentions that Maplewood got “Safe Routes to School” this year – perhaps comingle the announcement?

-Also, we were awarded the BPU Energy Grant. Olivia Lewis-Chang says Julie hasn’t received any official paperwork yet.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION APPLICANTS: Received 1 application for a new commissioner to fill Katie’s seat. This applicant cannot meet on Thursdays, however. Commission considers moving meeting date, but ultimately declines, due to scheduling issues for other members.

GOALS FOR YEAR:

Discussion about EC goals for this year. (Kathleen)

ELECTRIFICATION. Mark McQuillen talks about promoting the Electrification Initiative – he would like to use High School Students. He met w/ Kathleen, and they drafted and sent message to H.S. If not productive, will look for other avenues.

Energy Grant – We must develop methods for S. Orange to electrify. Possibly identify areas where the most energy is being spent. Then step two, apply for \$ for further plans and projects, including through Sustainable Jersey.

Building Codes for new homes/developments. No allowance in NJ of “stretch codes.” It is hard to directly impact residential electrification. So, instead, ask town offices to electrify. OLC says something is mentioned in the master plan. Says to look at some other Village bldgs.: Police Station, SOPAC,

Walter suggests having a replacement plan as Village buildings get upgraded.

Kathleen says Master Plan doesn’t have a lot of sustainability ideas in it. Need a sustainability check-list for development applicants. “Electrify Soma Group” will be working with homeowners.

Lorraine asks about putting solar carports over town parking areas. Walter states downtown might have the best opportunities.

WASTE REDUCTION: Lorraine gives a quick report on Tool Library and Waste Reduction Group. Asks if we’ve done school audits in our district. She has a lot of preprinted materials to give out – wants to infiltrate schools but doesn’t know the right avenue to do this. OLC mentions sharing tools in Seton Village.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- a) Julia Flath mentions the construction pollution created especially by residential “flippers”. She says it’s an environmental health issue. Wants to get support from SOEC. Building and Health Departments need processes to oversee the flips. Construction dust doesn’t seem to be monitored by town government. Common complaint: crews are filling open trash cans with loose debris, then dump into dumpster creating dust clouds. She also mentions the dumping of dust out of second-story windows. (Shows video as proof). → The flippers never received any violations. They did repeated demolitions all around town. She says Building Department should be doing their jobs – making visits; shouldn’t be incumbent on the neighbors. Head of building

department said they can't go beyond the state's laws. Julia's ask: (1) an informational sheet for neighbors (2) special permit if interior/outside demolished – rename it a “full demolition” which would trigger better protections. Would trigger periodic site visits. (3) make sure bldg. and health departments show up in a timely manner. (4) Require town staff to use “create a concern. “

OLC backs what Julia Flath says, and suggests taking it to the Village Council. JF mentions that she's been at all meetings, and thought the council would have heard her.

- b) Mark McQuillen says he was in South Mountain Reservation – but says that there was supposed to be a place where one could take in the view of Manhattan. Wants trees to be trimmed so people can see Manhattan. (It's noted in the meeting that SMR is owned by Essex Co., and not by S. Orange.)

Next Meeting Oct 17th at 7:30pm

Meeting adjourned at 8:23pm