

SOUTH ORANGE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Thursday, August 15, 2024, 7:30 p.m. - Virtual

MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Members: Kathleen Grant (Chair), Lorraine Graves, Larry Hirsch, David Kraiker, Andy Stone. Council Rep: Olivia Lewis-Chang; Village Gov't Rep: Walter Clark; Members of the Public: Alyssa Aronson, Mark McQuillan, Chris Sidwa.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. Call meeting to Order: 7:34pm

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- June 2024 minutes approved

3. ACTION ITEMS

Filling two alternate slots : There are two seats on the EC to fill, as a result of the resignations of Katie Skibinski and Linda Beck. We discussed the following steps to be taken:

- All EC members are encouraged to identify potential candidates and urge them to complete an application via the Village website, at: <https://www.southorange.org/formcenter/applications-4/boards-committees-commissions-authoritie-71>. Please encourage people to apply by September 12, which will enable us to screen and share names of qualified candidates at our September 19 meeting. This deadline can be extended if needed.
- As suggested by the Village Clerk, Andy will provide a notice about the openings to the Clerk's office, to be shared with all Village Council members, as well as a notice to the Village Digest, which goes out weekly to a large email list.
- Kathleen will reach out to Linda Beck to see if she can access copies of applications submitted for open seats in 2023.
- Larry offered to share a notice of the open positions with the Village Green and TAP SOMA.

Discussion of application by The Top Condos for site alterations: The Village requested EC review of this application (mainly involving creation of 4 new parking spaces). Members were pleased to see inclusion of a rain garden, and Walter noted that the specified plants are appropriate for a rain garden. Members were not pleased that the removal of a sizable tree was to be compensated for by a contribution to a Village tree replacement fund. Members much

prefer the currently required tree replacement policy of 2 new trees of comparable size for the one removed. Subsequently Kathleen has informed the Village Clerk of this recommendation. Kathleen and other members recommended a stronger, clearer process for the EC to provide input, regarding trees, native plants, and rain gardens, for development projects requiring Village approval. Walter noted that there is a recommended tree list; but there does not seem to be a list of recommended native plants. Andy will identify one or two lists (for NJ) that currently exist online, including possibly on NJ Friendly Yards, and will share with other members. Further discussion of this matter will occur.

Discussion of major EC initiatives, 2024-2025

- Electrification–municipal: We should hear any day now about our application for a grant to do a review of municipal energy use, and potential for further electrification. While we expect that the Village would be the lead player in this, the EC would collaborate.
- Electrification-residential Kathleen would very much like to continue educational efforts, building on the July forum we sponsored. Larry volunteered to help and Walter offered to serve as municipal liaison. Kathleen is working with Bob McCoy of the Maplewood Environmental Alliance on an Electify SoMa campaign. Larry, Rob, and Walter volunteered to be part of the two-town committee.
- Ordinances: David stressed that when the Planning Board reviews development proposals, compliance with any Village ordinances is a major tool for ensuring good design (including sustainable design). The process for developing ordinances was discussed, a typical process for EC involvement was described: an interested EC member gets EC's buy-in, seeks support from one or more Village Councilmembers, who can then work with Village staff and attorneys to bring an ordinance before the full Council. Perhaps a native plants ordinance can be put forward by the EC.
- Waste: Lorraine described a June trip by her, David, and Andy to a state-of-the-art reuse center in Summit. If the EC wishes to launch a drop-off/reuse program, a one-time event (e.g. on a weekend in a school parking lot) is a possible activity. Lorraine also is very committed to addressing food waste and potential EC education efforts in this area were mentioned.

Public Comments

- Marc McQuillan made several suggestions: a) he and some neighbors have discussed involving high school students in EC/Green Team efforts, and he notes that video production around home electrification might be a good high school project. Kathleen suggested that he and his neighbors communicate further with her about this. b) he noted that permaculture argues against an exclusive focus on native plants (*see note at bottom of these minutes).
- Chris Sidwa described a venture with which he is involved: developing low carbon concrete, in a process that uses waste glass. Two attendees requested more information from him.

Meeting adjourned at 8:59

Next meeting: September 19, 7:30pm

**Here's what one online permaculture source*

(<https://shadesofgreenpermaculture.com/blog/permaculture-101/permaculture-and-native-plants/>) says about non-native plants:

- 1. The world is a dynamic and changing environment, accelerated by globalization. Planting certain species that do not have an analogous native alternative can facilitate resilience.*
- 2. The climate is changing, and many native species that occupy particular ecological niches are being threatened, for example, the Eastern Hemlock. Many ecologists advocate for planting non-native alternatives that fit the specific niche to not cause ecological collapse should the native species go extinct.*