



SOUTH ORANGE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION Minutes

Thursday, October 16, 2025 – 7:30 PM (Virtual WebEx Meeting)

Adequate notice given to the public.

Commissioner Attendees: Kathleen Grant, Andy Stone, Julianna Garreffa, Larry Hirsch

Green Team/Public attendees included: Jennie Aylward, Alyssa Aronson, Lauren Sklaver, Julia Flath, Caleb Salmon

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- 1. Call meeting to Order 7:33 pm**
- 2. Approval of Minutes of August meeting: deferred to next meeting**

UPDATES ON NEW and CURRENT PROJECTS & ISSUES

Stormwater/Green Infrastructure: Andy reported on the very successful October 5 planting of the rain garden next to the Middle School, and the well-attended October 15 dedication. A special, and relatively uncommon, feature of this rain garden is the installation of sophisticated monitoring equipment to measure the amount of rainwater captured by the garden.

The Middle School will study the garden, and help with monitoring, as part of their Spring semester River Curriculum. Members discussed ways to engage the school during other months, and Jennie mentioned the “Youth Net” program which aims to engage the district’s middle school students in extra-curricular activities.

Andy described a key next step: the likely launch of a Green Infrastructure Subcommittee of the EC. A possible kickoff for this could be an in-person or virtual gathering, with a presentation by local expert Kirk Barrett, followed by a discussion and brainstorming of possible projects for the new subcommittee.

Julia mentioned a potentially worthwhile effort for the subcommittee: advocating for South Orange to pass an updated “Completed and Green Streets” ordinance, modeled on State policy guidelines described here:

https://www.nj.gov/transportation/eng/completestreets/pdf/CS_Model_Policy_2019.pdf

These guidelines incorporate significant green infrastructure methods, related to streets, including “vegetated curb bump outs” and bioswales.

School Recycling: Lauren updated the EC on her continued efforts, with Green Team leaders at various SOMA schools, to advance recycling in the public schools. In recent months she has had substantial conversations about this with both the District Superintendent and the Business Administrator (the BA). The BA described some kind of new contract with a recycling company but the details and possible rollout are unclear. While she tries to monitor that, she has been designing a simple program for classroom and schoolwide collection of paper and cardboard at South Mountain School. This pilot program would likely depend on volunteers delivering the materials to the S.O. Public Works depot. (Walter Clarke indicates that, while the Village can’t do the pick-up they will accept the materials).

Electrify SOMA: Kathleen and Julianna described the September kickoff event. Next steps involve rolling out assistance to the community, such as helping homeowners develop electrification plans for their houses.

Meet Me in the Middle: A showing of the film “Meet Me Halfway” is scheduled for Sunday, Feb 1, at 2pm, at the Baird. A planned Restaurant Week has been postponed from February 2026 to February 2027 in order to build more visibility.

Legislation and Advocacy: As discussed at our last meeting, Julianna (with Ben Vitale) has been preparing a memo for EC consideration, to request that our Village Council support the “Packaging and Paper Product Stewardship Act” now under consideration in the NJ Legislature. Julianna needs to clarify an issue about this piece of legislation (that issue emerged when reviewing Maplewood Village’s endorsing resolution). Larry offered to follow up with Maplewood Mayor Nancy Adam to help get clarification.

Julianna mentioned the EC’s recent statement of opposition to large West Orange development which would level a mature forest and compromise the watershed for South Orange’s drinking water. Following our efforts, the Maplewood Village Council announced their opposition to the project.

OTHER BUSINESS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Julia reported on current items on the Walk/Bike/Ride Committee (WBR) agenda:

- 1) As part of a Village “Safe Streets for All” effort, WBR is helping publicize a new online survey. *(Following the meeting, we posted this on our EC Facebook page).*
- 2) There is a new working group, to support the development of a non-commuting SOMA Shuttle, offering public transit to various SOMA destinations. A major goal is to encourage the two villages to apply for a new public grant that could support this.

Caleb Salmon, a junior at Columbia H.S. reported on two efforts he is undertaking with a fellow student:

- 1) He and the CHS Principal met with the District Superintendent to encourage the district to apply to the NJ ISIP (Energy Savings Improvement Program) to fund installation of solar panels at our schools. He believes the District is pursuing this but asks for our help in monitoring this.
- 2) He described an emerging environmental education effort aimed at elementary school students called the Little Environmentalist Society. He and his friend are forming a NJ chapter.

NEXT MEETING DATE – November 20,2025

ADJOURNMENT: 8:30 pm