



SOUTH ORANGE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION Minutes

Thursday, August 21 , 2025 – 7:30 PM (Virtual WebEx Meeting)
Adequate notice given to the public.

Commissioner Attendees: Kathleen Grant, Andy Stone, David Kraiker, Julianna Garreffa, Olivia Lewis-Chang (Village Council)

Green Team/Public attendees included: Alyssa Aronson, Lauren Barnett

ORDER OF BUSINESS

- 1. Call meeting to Order 7:33 pm**
- 2. Minutes of June meeting: APPROVED**

UPDATES ON NEW and CURRENT PROJECTS & ISSUES

Electrify SOMA: Launch meeting set for 9/20, 2:30, Maplewood Library.

Rain Garden/Green Infrastructure: Andy announced that plans are coming together for the development of a municipal rain garden adjacent to SOMA, led by the SOEC. Public works will be providing a backhoe and operator to dig out the garden on September 22 or 23 (school is closed those days). Planting will occur on October 5. A dedication will be planned for mid-October, and we are working with the SOMS science teachers to involve students in monitoring and maintenance. We will use the dedication ceremony, and related communications efforts, to help launch a new Green Infrastructure for Stormwater working group.

Greenway: The good news: the State has provided final approval for S.O. to sign a contract with their chosen construction contractor for Phase 2. The bad news: according to Olivia, NJ Transit has apparently decided not to partner with the Village on a plan for the redevelopment of the NJT parking lot. The Village had been hopeful that such a partnership was in the works and would fully accommodate Phase 3 of the Greenway.

State Legislation: Julianna presented a [proposal for a process](#) for people to recommend state legislation for the EC to endorse and send on to the Village Council. This was well-received on the call. Julianna suggested that the first piece of legislation we might consider is a Product Packaging Stewardship Act, sponsored by our Assemblyperson Garnett Hall. Ben Vitale drafted a request for the EC to endorse this act. Olivia suggested that Ben's memo, and future memos for this purpose, provide a bit more information about the current status of the legislation (e.g. where it is in the legislative process), and number of current sponsors. Juliana will ask Ben to add this information.

Proposed West Orange Development: Julianna shared information about a proposed large scale development in the Canoe Brook watershed which could negatively impact South Orange's drinking water. Numerous Essex County organizations and municipal environmental commissions have officially opposed this project—on the basis of drinking water impacts, forest destruction and other factors. Olivia and Julianna will try to obtain information on NJ American Waters' assessment of the project. Julianna is drafting a statement from the EC, opposing the development, due to drinking water concerns especially, and will circulate to members.

Open Space Trust Fund Ordinance: A proposed ordinance will be on the November ballot, to double the Village's special open space assessment, from \$.01 per \$100 of assessed value to \$.02. The Village has not yet reached out to the EC about this (e.g. to request active support) but Olivia reported that their focus has been on information and presentations to all residents and they will soon be reaching out to entities like the EC, for their involvement. David said he was impressed that, at the most recent outreach meeting, Village staff described a proposed process for allocating these funds (something that's seemed to be lacking, to date). He hopes the Village can commit to establishing such a process for expending these funds, whether or not the new ordinance is approved.

Other Items:

- Regarding ongoing proposals for artificial turf, both David and Kathleen remarked that when they've passed by some existing turf fields this summer, they noticed a significant increase in air temperature. Both stressed that this "heat island effect" deserves more attention.
- David described S.O. Community Day, on September 14, as an opportunity for the E.C. Since he will have a table for his civic association, he can also include information for the E.C.

NEXT MEETING DATE – September 18, 2025, 7:30pm

ADJOURNMENT: 8:45 pm