Environmental Commission

February 12, 2026 7:30pm – at Boro Hall and via Zoom

Minutes

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance Mr. Yarin opened the meeting at 7:35 pm with the Open Public Meetings Announcement.

2. Attendance

Present: Ansar Batool, Liel Dulev, Sarah Ritter-Chung, Marina Layvand, Councilwoman Anna Maroules, Arati Navar, Krishna Rege, Conway Wong.

Absent: Chris Cho

3. Approval of Minutes (January 8, 2026) Ms. Rege pointed out that she was listed as sworn-in at the last meeting while her term had not expired, and that past grant amounts should be corrected to $2250/$350 rather than $2000/$500. Finally, she mentioned that Mr. Wong is also on the Green Challenges team. Councilwoman Maroules moved to approve amendments, second by Ms. Rege.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments No one wished to be heard.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Budget update: Mr. Yarin stated that he needs to confirm the amount of the 2026 budget.

b. Legislative update: Governor Murphy passed a few measures on his last day of office, including an invasive species act restricting the sale of a specific list of prohibited invasive plants (perhaps signage at Buzzoni and the EC website could reflect these changes); development easements of private woodlands (existing areas could be indexed in the ERI); more stringent licensing for arborists; single-use utensils; and college food-waste reduction.

c. Conflict of Interest policy: Mr. Yarin reviewed the policy and reminded people that the appearance of impropriety should be avoided. He also reminded people that specific vendors should not be promoted; rather, it is good to introduce three at a time. Avoid the phrase "we recommend…."

d. Rodenticides: Information concerning this issue was included in the February Mayor's Newsletter. The EC can share information in this way.

e. Grant opportunities: BCAS (Ms. Layvand and Ms. Rege are working on this Audubon grant to add shrubs to Buzzoni and shared information), SJ/PSE&G grants are available to be pursued in the future.

f. Partner orgs/events: ANJEC (everyone has been signed up), ATL-NJ, RES, Sierra Club, DarkSky, CNC, NVD HS Enviro Club. Ms. Rege shared her experience with the Rutgers program. Mr. Yarin spoke about the construction of data centers and the Sierra Club's response to it. Mr. Yarin will speak at a Sierra Club meeting in March. Mr. Yarin is pursuing periodic check-ins with the Closter Nature Center and other organizations. The CNC has also asked for help with a trail cleanup. More details to come.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Project updates: Birdhouses, Buzzoni Garden, MacBain Farm, Green Challenges, Green Building Design Guidelines Discussion about cedar being the material of choice for birdhouses; Ms. Layvand spoke about the monthly challenges. January and February are green challenges—asking people to waste less. Perhaps an incentive would motivate people to get involved, maybe recognition of some sort. Mr. Wong created flyers. Many stores in town took one; Councilwoman Maroules asked that it be sent to the Commission. The schools are distributing it. The EC logo should be on everything. Discussion. Ms. Layvand shared that John McCaffrey, the caretaker of MacBain Farm unfortunately passed away recently. A tribute will be planned, probably in the spring.

7. New Business

a. 2026 project interests and signup

Closter Cleanup Day: Cleanup Day will be held April 25th, with a rain date of May 3rd. There was a conflict on April 26th. Sarah Ritter-Chung is coordinating the Cleanup. She has spoken to Ms. Weatherly and will give her the application form. Ms. Chung asked everyone who could to participate starting at 9:30 to set up at the Senior Center and Nature Center and stay until 2:30. A checklist and signup sheet will be available, probably at the next meeting. Mr. Dulev will not be available, as his sister is getting married. Ms. Rege moved to submit the two selected dates to Council for final approval; Ms. Layvand seconded.

Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI): The ERI kickoff meeting will be held a week from today; members are asked to let Mr. Yarin know of any interest. A student journalist from NVD published an article about the ERI in the Northern Valley Press.

Community Energy Planning Grant (CEPG): The Community Energy Planning Grant has had several meetings but not a completed work plan yet. More volunteers are welcomed. Community Solar – Closter is serviced by Rockland Electric, and their solar facility is already over-subscribed. However, if anyone sees a good spot for solar construction in town, it would be worth pursuing. A public stakeholder event about energy will be held in the future. Details need to be worked out.

A chart was displayed with the current projects and other ideas. Mr. Yarin asked people to share what they would like to work on but noting on the chart what they were pretty interested in (by writing 2) or a little interested in (by writing 1). New ideas are asked to be held at the moment.

Electric Leaf Blowers: Councilwoman Maroules said that she is very interested in the electric leaf blower situation and thought that starting with the larger landscapers would be good. Discussion.

Deer Management: Councilwoman Maroules shared that there will be a Town Hall meeting with the residents about the deer situation and said that the solution needs to be regional.

MacBain Farm: Councilwoman Maroules shared that MacBain Farm is an area of interest for her.

Ms. Batool stated her interest in the health walk, bird houses, deer management, and Cleanup Day.

Councilman Cho sent word that he is interested in Cleanup Day and Sustainable Jersey Silver.

Survey Results: Mr. Yarin tabulated the responses. Buzzoni Pollinator and Cleanup Day received the most points, followed by challenges and birdhouses. Health walks and Green Building came in third. The others received some points as well.

Project Committees: Those who signed up for topics will form committees. Ms. Layvand volunteered to lead the birdhouse and health walk groups. Discussion about trails, days, etc. Mr. Yarin will summarize interest and send out a summary.

8. Plan Review and Comment

a. 53 Trautwein Court (not discussed) Ms. Batool shared that the Planning Board meeting times and structure are in transition. She asked that Mr. Yarin speak to the Planning Board about their work with the Environmental Commission. Discussion.

9. Liaison Reports

a. Governing Body (A. Maroules): PAVA World was recognized last night. Mr. Yarin asked for any updates on the 250th celebration and whether the Environmental Commission should get involved. Councilwoman Maroules said that there are ways they can get involved if they would like. Perhaps they could have a table at the event being planned for June.

Mr. Yarin welcomed Arati Navar, who will be sworn in to the Environmental Commission by the Mayor at a future meeting.

b. Planning Board (A. Batool): Ms. Batool reported that the Planning Board is transitioning to a single monthly meeting. EC recommendations have been distributed to Board members. The Board Chair has invited Mr. Yarin to present at a future work session; scheduling to be coordinated.

10. Adjournment Councilwoman Maroules moved to adjourn, second Ms. Rege. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary