Environmental Commission

August 13, 2026 7:30pm – at Boro Hall and via Zoom

Minutes

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance
Chair Yarin called the meeting to order at 7:31 PM with the Open Public Meetings Act announcement and the Pledge of Allegiance. The room camera was unavailable; the meeting recording is audio only.

2. Attendance
Present: Paul Yarin (Chair), Council President Chris Cho, Liel Dulev, Marina Layvand, Arati Navar, Krishna Rege (arrived shortly after roll call). **Absent:** Ansar Batool, Anna Maroules (Council Liaison), Sarah Ritter Chung, Conway Wong. **Guest:** Sam Layvand (via Zoom).

3. Approval of Minutes (June 11 and July 9, 2026) No corrections noted. Mr. Dulev moved to approve the June minutes, second Ms. Navar. All in favor. Carried. Ms. Layvand moved to approve the July minutes, second Ms. Navar. All in favor. Carried.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments Sam Layvand (40 Rutgers Street) reported that Mr. Kane, faculty advisor to the NVD Environmental Science Club, left the school this year, which explains the difficulty reaching the club; a new advisor must be found. Chair Yarin offered to speak with teachers or present briefly at a school event about the Commission. Mr. Layvand welcomed the offer but suggested waiting until the school year is underway and will advise when an opportunity arises.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Budget Update
No update; Ms. Weatherly was on vacation. Apart from a small expenditure on plants, the budget position is unchanged from the July report.

b. Partner Organizations and Events
Chair Yarin recommended the annual ANJEC Environmental Congress in New Brunswick as the most useful event for members, with sessions and exhibitors from organizations, utilities and vendors in one building; the Commission can cover registration and members may carpool. He also spoke about a NJ Building Electrification Network webinar on plug-in solar (small panels that plug into a standard outlet, recently permitted in some U.S. jurisdictions and suited to apartments and balconies); a multi-day tomato tasting event; and three Sustainable Jersey clean energy webinars.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Birdhouses

Four birdhouses built by NVD students were installed on the trails around Buzzoni Park. Ms. Rege and Chair Yarin selected the locations; Chair Yarin built a combined predator guard and mounting stake. Boxes were staked in the ground rather than attached to trees to avoid any risk of harming the trees. GPS coordinates were recorded. With several designs and mounting styles now in use, the Commission can compare what style works best. Chair Yarin proposed a web form to index every box: design and dimensions, ID number, GPS location, orientation, predator guard, distance from other structures, installer, and inspection and cleaning records. Members who have been builders and installers of the birdhouses, including Mr. Dulev, were asked to compile this information, especially GPS locations.

b. Buzzoni Pollinator Garden

Plant cards were printed for newly added species; the garden now has 43 species, mostly New Jersey natives. Chair Yarin demonstrated a new Plant Guide page on sustainablecloster.org that presents the cards, filtered by bloom season, deer resistance, pollinator value, soil moisture, and other traits. Links to the Native Plant Society of New Jersey vendor list are included.

Tree alley: The planned consultation with tree experts has not yet taken place and remains open. Ms. Layvand reported that many trees along the alley have oozing openings on their trunks; they almost look like wounds. Members noted the age of the trees, heavy vine growth, a dense canopy suppressing understory growth, and deer pressure.

Discussion for the next steps included a site walk with an expert (fewer than a quorum of members), a short video walkthrough to send to experts, Ken's Tree Care, and the Closter Nature Center, which has long experience with its own trees. Chair Yarin will ask the Nature Center whether a tree expert could join a site meeting.

c. Green Challenges

Ms. Layvand introduced the August-September challenge: visit a local farm or farm stand, pick or buy local produce, and make a recipe with it. Entries may be sent to the challenge email address or by tagging the Commission on Facebook or Instagram; the flyer is posted on social media. Sources include MacBain Farm, Closter Farms on Closter Dock Road, the Abram Demaree Homestead, and supermarkets stocking local produce. The native plant challenge received one entry, which was beautiful and included photographs and artwork; gift cards were awarded.

d. Health Walks

On hold while farm season occupies Ms. Layvand's weekends; they will resume in cooler weather, and this pause has been noted on the website.

e. MacBain Farm
Ms. Layvand shared photos. Eggplant is abundant this year in several varieties; tomatoes will peak in one to two weeks. Residents are welcome to visit. PAVA World volunteers have come every Saturday; she thanked them for making this one of the farm's best years. The Harvest Festival will be held the second or third week of October.

f. Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI)
No new update. Rutgers reported that it is working on mapping and data integration; Chair Yarin will follow up.

g. Community Energy Planning Grant (CEPG)
Chair Yarin acknowledged that the project has stalled for the past two months; however, an extension is available. He reviewed the requirements: the $10,000 BPU grant, already received, supports preparation of a Community Energy Plan that reviews how the Borough uses energy. The process is intended to involve town stakeholders, who are required to meet at least once and select from a catalog of roughly 40 initiatives. The finished plan must be adopted by Council resolution. Fifteen initiatives were previously identified as compatible with Closter, including EV charging siting, community solar, and resident education on energy efficiency programs. Adoption does not commit the Borough to any project but qualifies it for state implementation grants.

Chair Yarin asked whether members could help coordinate over the next month; the original working group was Chair Yarin, Ms. Rege, Council President Cho, and Borough Administrator Winters. Council President Cho offered to help and said the Mayor and Council would likely support the Commission's recommendation. With only one Council meeting in August, the plan could be introduced at the first September meeting (possibly by email) and adopted at the second. Chair Yarin will contact the grant program about the extension immediately and meet with Council President Cho and Mr. Winters early next week. Members agreed the plan is still worth completing.

Sustainable Jersey forwarded Rockland Electric residential energy program materials (flyers and a banner). With no tabling events upcoming, these may be posted on social media or sent as a mailer, for which some funding may be available.

7. New Business

a. Environmental Stewardship Award
Following a video call with the PAVA World leadership, whose students have worked at Buzzoni, MacBain Farm, and Cleanup Day, the Commission learned that it would help college-bound students to receive documented recognition. Rather than a one-time award for PAVA, the Environmental Stewardship Award would be general and non-competitive. It would require six days (at least 2 hours per day) of service on Environmental Commission projects in a calendar year. The form created by Chair Yarin includes the student's name and activities and requires sign-off by a leader of the student's organization (PAVA, Scouts, school club, etc.). Non-residents are eligible.

Sample certificates were circulated; the design will be finished with the EC logo. Awards would be presented at a Commission meeting or mailed.

Council President Cho noted that mayoral recognition would require a Council resolution and that PAVA students have already received one. Ms. Layvand noted that MacBain Farm supervises student volunteers under a signed liability release; Chair Yarin said the Commission has not formalized supervision and will rely on the sponsoring organization or parents for that role. Ms. Rege confirmed the draft covers what was discussed with PAVA and suggested introducing interested students to Rutgers and other environmental education contacts. Mr. Layvand (via Zoom) said the award would appeal to environmental club students. PAVA has also offered to donate tools.

Motion: Chair Yarin moved to allocate $250 from the general budget for award materials (certificates and frames), second Ms. Layvand. All in favor. Motion carried.

b. PSEG/Sustainable Jersey Energy Education Grant
Council President Cho reported that the $2,000 grant was awarded to Closter. The check was delivered to Mr. Winters and Maria Passafaro (Tax Collector and Assistant CFO). Ms. Passafaro asked for a description of the grant's intended use so she can complete the state filing. The application covered speaker fees and printed or mailed outreach materials for an energy education effort with the schools, possibly including a student art contest. The term of the grant is one year. EV and heat pump demonstrations are not as novel as they were a few years ago; alternatives included a simpler topic for elementary students. The question arose as to whether the activity needs to be energy related: perhaps a Liberty Science Center visit, a speaker with a demonstration, and utility youth outreach programs (Veolia has one; PSE&G will be asked). Council President Cho will confirm the grant's scope from the application and determine the level of detail Ms. Passafaro needs; the project may be coordinated with the CEP. Chair Yarin asked members for introductions to Hillside and Tenakill science teachers; Mr. Dulev offered to connect him with a teacher at NVD.

8. Plan Review and Comment Deferred; Ms. Batool was absent.

9. Liaison Reports
Governing Body: Ms. Maroules was absent. Council President Cho reported a brief August 12 Council meeting with nothing further to report. Planning Board: Ms. Batool was absent; several residential applications are in the pipeline; no report.

10. Adjournment Council President Cho moved to adjourn, second Mr. Dulev. Meeting adjourned at 8:24 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary