Environmental Commission

January 8, 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 7:38 PM with the Open Public Meeting announcement and the Pledge of Allegiance. The meeting was held at the Closter Nature Center due to a scheduling conflict; future meetings will resume at Boro Hall.

2. Attendance
Present: Paul Yarin (Chair), Anna Maroules (Council Liaison), Ansar Batool (Planning Board Liaison), Chris Cho, Liel Dulev, Marina Layvand, Conway Wong, Krishna Rege, Sarah Ritter Chung. **Absent:** Arati Navar. **Guests:** Mayor John Glidden, Flynne Wiley (resident), one unnamed Closter resident.

3. Approval of Minutes (December 11, 2025) The minutes of the December 11, 2025 meeting were approved.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments No public comments were made.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Welcome to New Members
Chair Yarin welcomed six new members: Liel Dulev (software engineer), Ansar Batool (Planning Board Liaison), Sarah Ritter Chung (retired advertising/banking), Anna Maroules (Council Liaison), and Marina Layvand. Arati Navar was absent and will be introduced at the next meeting.

b. Oaths of Office
Mayor Glidden joined via Zoom at 7:45 PM and administered oaths to Paul Yarin, Chris Cho, Conway Wong, Marina Layvand, Ansar Batool, and Sarah Ritter Chung (terms ending 12/31/2026–12/31/2028). Arati Navar will be sworn in later. The Mayor highlighted two upcoming events: the America 250 Celebration (June 13, 2026), a major anniversary event led by Anna Maroules seeking EC participation; and the Village School groundbreaking (January 21), a 35-unit affordable housing project satisfying Closter's state housing mandate.

c. 2025 Review

2025 accomplishments: Buzzoni Pollinator Garden enhancements with grants from ANJEC ($2,250) and Bergen County Audubon ($350); securing a $20,000 Open Space Trust Fund grant for the ERI with Rutgers; receiving a $10,000 NJ BPU Community Energy Planning Grant; attending major conferences (ANJEC Congress, NYC Climate Week, League of Municipalities, Rutgers Stewards); hosting the Closter Cleanup Day; and initiating birdhouse, gas leaf blower, and solar survey efforts. The EC used approximately half of its $5,000 budget.

New member orientation: Meeting schedule (second Thursday, 7:30 PM), the sustainablecloster.org website, and Open Public Meetings Act requirements limiting discussions to 3 members outside meetings.

d. 2026 Projects

Committed Projects:

- ERI: Rutgers-led atlas of local natural resources involving GIS mapping, field research, and stakeholder engagement. Chair Yarin leading.
- Community Energy Plan: Workplan for Borough efficiency and emissions reduction; qualifies for future implementation grants up to $250K. Chair Yarin leading with Krishna Rege and Borough Administrator Jim Winters.
- Buzzoni Pollinator Garden and Closter Cleanup Day (ongoing).

Possible Additions:

- Green Challenges: Bi-monthly engagement campaigns with prize drawings. Subcommittee formalized: Marina Layvand, Krishna Rege, Conway Wong, and volunteer Flynne Wiley.
- Green Building Checklist: Voluntary scorecard for developers; draft created. Ansar Batool suggested distribution via Building Department with permit applications. To be circulated for member input.
- Green Fair: Consensus to participate in existing events (PTO fair, America 250, Nature Center) rather than standalone.
- NVD Environmental Club: Student-led club; Chair Yarin to visit the following week. Liel Dulev interested in educational demos.

Explorations:

- Twelve early-stage efforts were listed in the meeting packet: beekeeping, birdhouses, deer management, composting, gas leaf blowers, health walks, light pollution, MacBain Farm, rodenticides, social media, Sustainable Jersey Silver, and trail maintenance. Members were encouraged to review and identify interests.

e. Planning Board Coordination
Ansar Batool discussed tree removal fines, proposed developing open spaces near Closter Plaza, and mentioned a contact with deer management expertise.

f. Upcoming Events
Rutgers Environmental Stewards course (Jan 20 start, Krishna Rege enrolled); ATL-NJ gas leaf blower webinar (Jan 12); NJ Sierra Club Building Electrification panel (Jan 15; Chair Yarin speaking in March); Village School groundbreaking (Jan 21); principal meeting on school involvement (Jan 15, Anna Maroules).

6. Unfinished Business

a. Project Updates: Due to time constraints, unfinished business items were not individually discussed during the meeting. Members were referred to the meeting packet for detailed status updates on gas leaf blowers, rodenticides, birdhouses, beekeeping, Buzzoni Garden, MacBain Farm, NVD Environmental Club, and social media.

7. New Business

a. 2026 Green Challenges: Discussed under agenda item 5d. A subcommittee consisting of Marina Layvand, Krishna Rege, and volunteer Flynne Wiley was formalized to develop and launch the Green Challenges program.

8. Plan Review and Comment

a. No plan reviews were discussed.

9. Liaison Reports

a. Governing Body (Anna Maroules): Offered to connect the EC with school principals at a January 15 meeting regarding student involvement.
b. Planning Board (Ansar Batool): Discussed tree cutting fines, Green Building Checklist distribution via Building Department, open space development near Closter Plaza, and a deer management expert contact.

10. Adjournment The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary