**Environmental Commission**

**September 10, 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. The meeting served as both an official meeting of the Environmental Commission and the public stakeholder meeting for the draft Community Energy Plan.

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

**3. Approval of Minutes (August 13, 2026)** Postponed.

**4. Open Meeting to Public Comments**

**a. EC Presentation of the Community Energy Plan and Feedback Guidelines**
Chair Yarin presented the draft Community Energy Plan, which proposes 18 initiatives for 2026–2030, and referred to the State's energy targets for 2050. He explained that the plan's success requires the cooperation of the Borough and its residents, and said that the goal of the meeting was to receive the feedback of those assembled. He said that the problem of climate change has not changed, but that technologies have been developed that can help (e.g., electric vehicles, heat pumps, solar electricity). He encouraged people to learn about and try solar, as Closter is behind the state average in its use. Chair Yarin spoke about community solar and EV chargers, and about the importance of good insulation and efficient sealing of windows and doors. He also explained the Commission's voluntary Green Buildings Design Guidelines, available on the Commission's website.

**b. Public Comments (limited to five minutes each)**
Rances Perez (395 High Street) explained that he has solar and a heat pump and that in the summer they tend to get a credit on their bill. He agreed that insulation is important. He said that they also have a "smart" home, and that these things work and help the bottom line. He said that his solar panels are tiles and look attractive. He suggested using parking lots, including the municipal lot, for solar canopies, as the panels would also provide shade.

Miriam Lockhart (55 Everett Street) asked about the potential for solar panels at Closter Plaza and whether there has been any outreach to the Plaza's owner. Chair Yarin said that outreach has been made but has not gone far. He said that the roofs are not ideal, but that solar carports would be practical, though expensive.

Joe Bianco (7 MacArthur Avenue) spoke about a building built 40 years ago in Hackensack that uses solar energy and heat pumps. He said that what makes it work is super insulation ("outsulation"). A photo of the building was displayed to the assembly. He also spoke about geothermal energy and cogeneration. He offered his help.

Martin Kasdan (699 Closter Dock Road) said that he thinks a "major sales job" with the citizens of Closter is necessary, emphasizing savings for residents. He said that it is necessary to figure out how to keep costs from going up and keep taxes in check, and suggested collective purchasing and possible local rebates.

Yegor Bryukhov (8 Laurence Court) said that he has solar panels and heat pumps. He asked whether the plan's estimate of rooftop solar potential accounts for the added electricity demand from electrification, and urged that heat pumps be given priority. He noted that the plan does not address gas-powered landscaping equipment, suggested considering DC fast chargers, since a few fast chargers may serve more users than many Level 2 chargers, and said that batteries are not cost-effective under current net metering rules.

Steven Blechman (5 Union Street) said that a solar company told him that he has too many trees for solar. He also said that he was told that electric car batteries have only seven or eight years of life, that he had heard they pose a fire risk, and that EVs are no longer worth it without federal incentives. Chair Yarin responded that EV batteries generally last the life of the vehicle and can be recycled, noted that EVs have a far lower fire risk than gasoline vehicles, and said that the cost of ownership varies case by case. The Commission offered a future presentation on EV economics and test rides.

Mr. Bianco stated that there is a passive solar house in Closter. The sun comes through a large window and soaks into the masonry wall, and the heat is reradiated at night.

Daniela Kelly (238 West Street), via Zoom, asked whether the Village School has any solar or green building mandates and was told by Mr. Bianco that it meets energy codes but does not have any solar. Chair Yarin said that there are no solar mandates. She said that she supports the plan's other initiatives but has an issue with EV charging stations supplied by the government. She said that charging should be left to private enterprise, and expressed concern that public chargers would draw out-of-town traffic to Closter. She also questioned the cost estimates and how the chargers would be operated. Chair Yarin said that he would follow up with her directly.

**c. EC Summary of Comments**

Chair Yarin summarized the feedback on solar, EV chargers, and the preparation of homes. He said that most of the comments do not change the substance of the plan, but that the concerns raised about traffic, cost, and safety are valid and will be addressed more explicitly in the plan before the Council vote.

**5. Executive & Treasurer's Report**

**a. Budget Update**
Only a small fraction of the budget has been used. About $1,600 advanced for the Community Energy Plan mailing is awaiting reimbursement from the BPU grant.

**b. EC Website Updates**
Chair Yarin displayed updates to the Commission's website (sustainablecloster.org). The Meetings page shows which topics were discussed, when, and by whom; agendas and minutes are still available online. There is also an Events listing featuring events in and outside Closter. The Green Buildings Design Guidelines are now online and will be presented to the Planning Board. The Community Energy Plan is on the website. The issue of rodenticides is discussed online as well, after a red-tailed hawk found in Closter was sent to the State for necropsy.

**c. Partner Organizations and Events**
No report.

**6. Unfinished Business**

**a. CEPG and CEPI**
See Item 4. Adoption of the plan by the Mayor and Council is expected in two weeks; an adopted plan would make the Borough eligible for state implementation (CEPI) grants of up to $250,000.

**b. Tree Concerns at Buzzoni Farm Park**
Tree alley: A few people gathered to explore the state of these trees. Some trees are dead; the simplest solution is to cut off the dead branches, which would make the trees less likely to catch the wind. Many of the branches are high up, so a cherry picker would be needed, which could cause soil compaction. The tree expert said it is best to try to leave things alone. Another question is whether to thin out trees to allow more sunlight to reach the others. Deer overpopulation is also a factor in the health of the trees. A wildlife expert such as Marc Gussen should be consulted. Discussion followed. The future of the forest can be discussed at future meetings, and exploration and research are very welcome.

**c. Volunteer Recognition for PAVA World**
A member of PAVA World attended the meeting via Zoom. Chair Yarin shared that recognition of their excellent work is being developed.

**7. New Business** None.

**8. Plan Review and Comment** No applications were listed for review; Ms. Batool was absent.

**9. Liaison Reports**
Governing Body: No report. Planning Board: Ms. Batool was absent; no report.

**10. Adjournment** Ms. Rege moved to adjourn, second Ms. Layvand. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary