Environmental Commission

May 14, 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 7:33 PM with the Sunshine Law announcement and the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Attendance
Present: Paul Yarin (Chair), Councilman Chris Cho, Liel Dulev, Marina Layvand, Krishna Rege (via Zoom), Conway Wong.
Absent: Ansar Batool, Anna Maroules (Council Liaison), Arati Navar, Sarah Ritter Chung.
Guest: AJ Martin, Department of Public Works (via Zoom).

3. Approval of Minutes (April 9, 2026) No corrections noted. Councilman Cho moved to approve; seconded by Mr. Dulev. All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments No members of the public addressed the Commission. Mr. Martin (DPW) joined the meeting via Zoom but declined to speak during the public comment period.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Budget Update. The 2026 operating budget is still in progress. A temporary budget of $2,500 remains in effect. All of the modified budget has been expended, leaving $1,808.67 remaining in the Miscellaneous line item of the $2,500. The BCAS grant (birdhouses) has $115 remaining. The BCAS conservation grant funds for Aronia chokeberry plantings at Buzzoni are still being cleared through the borough's purchasing process.

b. Submitted Grants: PSEG/SJ. Councilman Cho reported no decision yet on either the $20,000 EV charger grant or the $2,000 energy education grant. The decision was expected by the end of April. Chair Yarin offered to inquire at the Sustainable Jersey Summit the following day. Chair Yarin noted that the EV charger siting question should be incorporated into the community energy planning discussion.

c. ANJEC Grant. The Commission did not apply for the 2026 ANJEC Open Space Stewardship Grant ($1,500, deadline April 13). The Closter Nature Center

declined to participate in a joint application. Chair Yarin recommended trying again in 2027.

d. Partner Events. Chair Yarin will attend the 2026 New Jersey Sustainability Summit in Holmdel on May 15, which includes sessions on sustainability topics, electric vehicle and landscaping equipment demonstrations, and policy updates.

6. Unfinished Business

a. PTO Fair Recap. Chair Yarin thanked Ms. Ritter Chung for securing access to the PTO Fair at no cost. The Commission's table was well received. The EC now has a tent, tables, and display materials for future outreach events.

b. Closter Cleanup Day Recap. Chair Yarin reported the event was a success: 80 bags of trash were collected May 3, even though it was the rain date and some groups were unable to attend. Chair Yarin thanked the DPW, Police Department, and Mayor and Council for their cooperation. Mr. Martin was thanked for DPW's support with setup, equipment, and bag collection. Lessons for next year include: (1) disclose in the promotional materials that photographs will be taken; (2) use heavier-weight trash bags (standard bags tore); (3) schedule EC personnel per site in advance. Chair Yarin thanked Ms. Ritter Chung, Mr. Wong, and all participants.

c. Birdhouses. Mr. Dulev continues building birdhouses; high school students in the woodworking shop are also building them, including a triple-unit birdhouse (shown via video from Sam Layvand). Ms. Layvand brought additional completed birdhouses to the meeting. Mr. Dulev reported that he has not yet observed nesting in the installed boxes. Ms. Layvand noted that nesting typically begins in late May or June. Chair Yarin requested that members send addresses or map pins for all installed birdhouses so that he can create a website index for tracking, maintenance (annual cleaning), and monitoring nesting success.

d. Buzzoni Pollinator Garden. Ms. Layvand reported multiple plants are in bloom. PAVA volunteers are scheduled for Saturday, May 16 (10:30 AM–1:30 PM); Whole Foods volunteers (Judy's team) are scheduled for May 20 for four hours. Ms. Rege encouraged Commission members to attend both events. Mr. Martin reported that DPW removed two dead trees and cleared vines from the garden. Chair Yarin reactivated the solar-powered automated sprinkler system, currently set for five minutes daily at 6:00 AM. Ms. Layvand reported a deer intrusion through a gate left open by a visitor; she asked all members to check the gate latch when visiting. Ms. Layvand proposed repeating the Sustainable Gardening Fair

(last held two years ago) in mid-September, with speakers, plant giveaways, and composting demonstrations. The Commission expressed support; Chair Yarin will work with Ms. Layvand to select a date.

e. MacBain Farm. Ms. Layvand reported that James, the new farm caretaker, has cleared the rows and volunteers have planted flowers. An herb garden is planned for the front section. The annual seed and plant swap exchange is scheduled for Saturday, May 23, 10:00 AM–12:00 PM; notices will be sent to registered households. Plastic replacement on the beds is an annual maintenance task.

f. Green Challenges. Ms. Layvand reported some momentum. Mrs. Gerbic's third-grade class at Hillside School participated in the energy saver challenge by cleaning up the school field and collecting trash. The April challenge has been extended through end of May. Ms. Layvand is considering switching to two-month cycles. The June challenge (planting native plants) is expected to generate interest.

g. Health Walks. Ms. Layvand reported that Health Walks continue every Sunday. Attendance has been affected by a series of rainy Sundays and holiday weekends (Easter, Mother's Day). Ms. Layvand attends every week and encouraged members to join.

h. Trail Maintenance. Chair Yarin reported that the trail survey walk he had taken with Mr. Dulev turned out not to be on the trail for which the Closter Nature Center had requested help. A follow-up visit with Riley Schwengel (CNC) is needed to identify the correct trail section. Mr. Dulev reported that he had independently surveyed the CNC Blue Trail and found it in generally good condition with a few downed trees and one boardwalk needing repair. Mr. Martin noted that DPW supports the Nature Center with heavy lifts and recently removed dead ash trees overhanging a trailhead. Chair Yarin noted that the EC is technically responsible for all open space trails in Closter and has trail markers in inventory but does not currently have a formal maintenance program.

i. Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI). Chair Yarin reported that Borough Engineer Nick DeNicola has transferred official documents to the Rutgers CUES team. An April 24 discussion with David Smith (Rutgers) and Riley Schwengel (CNC) identified the EC–Nature Center–Rutgers partnership as central to the project's success. The ERI should be a lasting reference document, not a checkbox exercise. There is a desire for quantitative, spatial data. Volunteers are willing to do fieldwork but need expert direction concerning methodology. Chair Yarin noted some confusion about the Nature Center's current data-sharing

priorities and reported that Rutgers conducted a preliminary field survey of Closter without advance notice. Chair Yarin will follow up with Dr. Wolfram Hoefer to ensure the project remains on track. The target completion date remains fall 2026.

j. EC Website. Chair Yarin demonstrated updated pages on sustainablecloster.org, including project pages for the ERI (with an interactive statewide ERI map), CEPG, birdhouses, Buzzoni, Cleanup Day archives, composting, Green Challenges, Health Walks, poison hemlock, and a new page thanking partner organizations. Chair Yarin encouraged members to suggest content or create new pages. Ms. Rege noted the Sustainable Gardening Fair should be added to the events page.

k. Community Energy Planning Grant (CEPG). Chair Yarin reported that the CEP closeout deadline is July 31, 2026; the BPU submission must include the completed plan, a Borough resolution, a final expenditure report, and a final project report. A mandatory stakeholder engagement meeting remains to be held and can be standalone or folded into an existing meeting. It must be publicly announced. Chair Yarin said he needs to focus on this. Councilman Cho will assist. Regarding DPW, Mr. Martin expressed interest in trying electric landscaping equipment and medium-class electric vehicles but noted that building capacity for large charging stations is uncertain. Chair Yarin will look for relevant information at the Sustainability Summit.

7. New Business

a. Composting Concepts. Chair Yarin presented three tiers of composting for Closter: (1) backyard composting using Earth Machine bins available through the Borough at approximately $70; (2) home pickup service through Source Compost or Nature Compost (fee-based); and (3) MacBain Farm as a potential municipal composting site. Chair Yarin reported a conversation with the founder of Source Compost, who is open to consulting on a feasibility study for a MacBain composting operation, including site layout, equipment, staffing, and pest management. Tomer from Patisserie Florentine, who attended Cleanup Day, expressed interest in local composting for his bakery's organic waste. Ms. Layvand noted that the MacBain Farm Committee expressed limited enthusiasm at a recent meeting; she will share the Source Compost contact with committee chair Shelagh McCaffrey. Mr. Martin confirmed that tonnage fees for garbage disposal are increasing. Chair Yarin noted that pending New Jersey legislation may simplify composting permits for smaller operations. The economic case for

municipal composting would depend on diverting heavy wet food waste from the garbage stream to reduce tonnage costs.

b. Closter Rev250 (June 13). Councilman Cho described Closter's celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary, scheduled for June 13 with fireworks, rides, historical readings, and the Declaration of Independence. (This will take the place of the Labor Day event). Some Council members will dress in period costume. Mr. Cho secured a table for the EC; the EC must provide its own tent and setup. Mr. Martin confirmed that the DPW will also have a tent at the event. The Commission discussed whether to participate with a table similar to their PTO Fair setup, possibly featuring an environmental history of Closter. Ms. Rege asked about costs; Mr. Cho indicated that there does not seem to be a fee for the table. Ms. Layvand suggested reusing the PTO Fair display materials. Chair Yarin noted the event is less than a month away and asked interested members to contact him.

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

9. Liaison Reports
Governing Body: Ms. Maroules was absent; no report. Councilman Cho had no additional items. Planning Board: Ms. Batool was absent; no report.

10. Adjournment. Councilman Cho moved to adjourn; seconded by Ms. Layvand. Meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM.
Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary