Environmental Commission Meeting

March 12, 2026 7:30pm – at Borough 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 Sunshine Law announcement and the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Attendance
Present: Paul Yarin (Chair), Councilman Chris Cho, Liel Dulev, Marina Layvand, Arati Navar, Krishna Rege, Sarah Ritter Chung, Conway Wong. **Absent:** Ansar Batool, Anna Maroules (Council Liaison). **Guest:** Marc Gussen, Closter Nature Center.

3. Approval of Minutes (February 12, 2026) No corrections noted. Ms. Rege moved to approve; seconded by Councilman Cho. All in favor. Motion carried.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments No members of the public addressed the Commission.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Budget Update
The 2026 operating budget is still a work in progress. A temporary budget of $2,500 is in effect until May. The 2025 BCAS birdhouse grant has a remaining balance of $161.00. No major expenses are anticipated for 2026.

b. "Big Picture" Reports
Chair Yarin highlighted two recent publications: (1) The Nature Record (naturerecord.org), a comprehensive national inventory of U.S. lands, waters, wildlife, and ecosystems prepared by 125 scientists, connected to Closter's work on stormwater, invasives, habitat restoration, and public health (a kind of ERI for the nation)

(2) the 16th annual J.P. Morgan energy transition report by Michael Cembalest, tracking global decarbonization progress and rising electricity costs.

The reports highlight the importance of local environmental work. Both reports are free online.

c. Grant Opportunities
BCAS Grant: Ms. Rege and Ms. Layvand reported that a $300 BCAS conservation grant was awarded March 2 for native Aronia melanocarpa (black chokeberry) plantings at Buzzoni Park. Funds are expected to be received in April.

ANJEC Stewardship Grant: Chair Yarin noted a $1,500 ANJEC grant with an April 13 deadline. Two concepts are proposed as subjects for the grant: (1) invasive species mapping and signage at the Closter Nature Center, integrated with the upcoming ERI; (2) a Closter open space, trails, and healthy walks guidebook. Mr. Gussen described the Closter Nature Center's recently created GIS-based invasive-species inventory, as well as the value of formal mapping for securing grants and record keeping. Mr. Gussen suggested that the EC explore additional areas in Closter that are in need of assistance and offered his help. He also acknowledged that the Closter Nature Center could utilize these funds. Mr. Yarin will arrange an additional meeting.

d. Partner Organizations and Events
ANJEC: Free EC training webinars will be held March 24–26; the Lechner Scholarship ($1,200) is available for NJ college juniors/seniors in environmental fields.

Sierra Club: Chair Yarin will speak March 19 at the NJ Building Electrification Network on heat pumps and home automation.

Closter Nature Center: Fraser Wilsher (President) requested EC assistance with trail maintenance on blue trail offshoots near Temple Emanu-El and Buzzoni. Mr. Gussen described what is needed and where: help with downed trees, broken planks, litter, and light chainsaw work. Ms. Rege said that the EC used to do some trail maintenance. Chair Yarin suggested forming a small group to survey what is needed. Mr. Dulev and Chair Yarin agreed to lead an initial survey walk to assess how the EC can realistically help. The group agreed to target litter cleanup during Closter Cleanup Day.

Northern Valley Greenway: Chair Yarin attended a February 24 meeting in Demarest with Tenafly, Cresskill, and Closter representatives. The Northern Valley Greenway project has resumed; CSX negotiations are ongoing. The cost will be in the tens of millions. The EC should note the project in the ERI.

Coordination among local ECs and a shared Instagram account were discussed at the February 24 meeting.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Project Updates

Birdhouses: Sam Layvand built a wren/chickadee birdhouse using wood procured by Ms. Rege. Chair Yarin presented a floating birdhouse design for a water installation at the Nature Center; it needs to be tested before nesting season. The Dulev family built ten birdhouses (six have been installed). Mr. Gussen advised birdhouses are most useful in manicured areas where the natural habitat does not provide nesting areas. He reported screech owl nesting at the Nature Center. Chair Yarin proposed mapping all installed locations.

Buzzoni Garden: Covered under BCAS grant (Item 5c).

Green Challenges: Ms. Layvand reported minimal participation despite flyer distribution. Discussion covered motivation barriers, aligning with school activities, using Cleanup Day, the Closter Nature Center Pond Celebration, and PTO Fair for recruitment, simplifying sign-up via QR codes, and including a mayoral certificate as an incentive. Ms. Layvand suggested an alternative creative contest. Sustainable Jersey requires 2.5% resident participation for a town to receive credit for this action.

McBain Farm / Composting: Chair Yarin raised the topic of food waste composting at McBain Farm. Ms. Layvand noted the Farm Committee concerns odor and the possibility of attracting unwanted wildlife. Mr. Gussen spoke about the differences between static and constant-input composting. Ms. Layvand will connect a Source Compost expert with the Farm Committee chair.

Green Building Design Guidelines: Chair Yarin will present his ideas to the Planning Board (March 26 or April 30) about green construction standards.

b. Closter Cleanup Day

Ms. Ritter Chung confirmed that the Cleanup will be held Saturday, April 25; rain date Saturday, May 3; 10:00 AM–2:00 PM. Volunteers will meet at the Senior Center by 9:30 AM. Chair Yarin will update the graphics; members are asked to suggest cleanup sites. Volunteers will either stay at the Senior Center or move to the Nature Center with supplies. Members were asked to distribute flyers around town. Mr. Wong will put reusable lawn signs (~20) around town; approximately 125 attended last year. Ms. Ritter Chung will promote through schools. Additional

pickers may be needed from the County; DPW coordination for supply drop-off needed.

c. ERI: Kickoff Meeting and Next Steps
Chair Yarin reported on the February 19 kickoff with the Rutgers CUES team (David Smith, Dr. Wolfram Hoefer, two GIS students), James Winters, David Barad, Joe Bianco, and Nick DeNicola. Topics include hydrology, soils, land use, tree canopy, invasives, wildlife, contaminated sites (former Swim Club), and light pollution. Interviews and site visits will be conducted. Mr. Gussen offered Nature Center GIS data and spoke about the Survey123 app. Mr. Dulev and Ms. Rege noted that the former Swim Club also contains lead paint and asbestos. Mr. Gussen noted that the abandoned pool is a significant amphibian habitat. This project will be funded through the Open Space Trust Fund. The final product will include a printed report, interactive StoryMap, and presentation boards. The target end date is October 2026.

d. CEPG Status
Chair Yarin provided a brief update. The plan addresses residential, commercial, and municipal energy usage. Some federal financing options are no longer available, but state-level options remain. A community stakeholder event is needed. Green building guidelines align well with this project. The Police Department is holding a staff training about electric vehicles.

7. New Business

a. Project Committees
Chair Yarin displayed a project priority list organized into three tiers:
<u>Committed Projects</u> (ERI, CEPG, Buzzoni Pollinator Garden, Closter Cleanup Day)

<u>Possible Additions</u> (Green Challenges, Green Building Checklist, Sustainable Gardening Fair, NVD Environmental Club)

<u>Continued Explorations</u> (12 additional topics).
-Health Walks: Ms. Layvand reported growing interest; Sunday mornings preferred. Chair Yarin asked that a description be posted on sustainablecloster.org.
-NVD Environmental Club: Club advisor on paternity leave; school does not allow clubs to meet without advisor. Tabled.
-McBain Farm Collaboration: The next event is the Seed and Swap Exchange in late April/early May. Ms. Layvand will bring EC flyers to the Seed and Swap.

-Sustainable Jersey Silver: Councilman Cho reported that recertification is not being done this year by Sustainable Jersey; current work will count toward next year. He is reviewing the work of silver-certified towns and cataloging point opportunities.

b. Sustainable Jersey / PSEG Grants
Councilman Cho submitted two PSE&G/Sustainable Jersey grants: $20,000 for an EV charger on Borough property (location TBD) and $2,000 for promotional materials. To be discussed further at the next meeting.

8. Plan Review and Comment 53 Trautwein Court was listed on the agenda but was not discussed.

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

10. Adjournment Ms. Rege moved to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Dulev. Meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Francis
Recording Secretary