Environmental Commission

March 13, 2025 7:30pm – at Boro Hall and via Zoom

Minutes

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance Chair Yarin opened the meeting at 7:35 pm with the Open Public Meetings Act announcement.

2. Attendance

Present: Paul Yarin, Shelagh McCaffrey, Krishna Rege, Conway Wong, Councilman Cho

For personal reasons, Rachel Suter has decided to withdraw from the Environmental Commission. Chair Yarin gave an overview of her contributions to the Closter Environmental Commission since 2023.

3. Approval of Minutes (January 9, 2025) Ms. McCaffrey moved to approve the minutes, second Councilman Cho. All in favor. Carried.

4. Open Meeting to Public Comments The meeting was opened to the public. Hearing none, the meeting was closed to the public.

5. Executive & Treasurer's Report

a. Budget update The temporary budget is in place; the 2025 Budget should be in place in May. The staff healthcare costs have increased significantly for the Borough and COVID-era grants are ending. Both add strains to the budget. Department meetings will be held, and then the overall budget will be more clear.

b. Solar homes survey results Chair Yarin asked Closter residents who use solar to fill out a survey about their satisfaction and motivations: 31 surveys were sent out. Initially 6 were returned. In the end, about 30% were returned. Solar installations are recorded by the state (address and last name). These public records and visible panels were used for survey distribution. Most people reported being happy with solar panels. One respondent was not happy that solar did not completely offset the energy costs. The survey also covered how they used it, recommendations, and other information. Chair Yarin read a summary of the results. The best predictor of whether someone gets solar is if your neighbor has solar. Discussion of community solar. Chair Yarin is very familiar with the program and will look into whether Closter is eligible.

c. Rutgers Enviro Stewards program Chair Yarin is taking this class and is about halfway through. It is a 17-week class ending with a 60-hour project.

d. Closter Nature Center support Chair Yarin has met with representatives of CNC. A group from Rutgers has been working there on a forest analysis. Perhaps there could be

an event where the Closter EC can meet the Board of the Nature Center. The Nature Center also offered the cabin as a location for talks, etc. Discussion.

e. Light Pollution ongoing discussion

f. Students / recycled paper A group of students reached out. Chair Yarin wrote to them with suggestions. This is also a Sustainable Jersey action.

g. Police EV's webinar Robert Martinez, who ran a lot of the fleets for the NY Police Department, spoke about practical matters of electric vehicles in the Police Department. Chair Yarin attended and then shared contact information with the Closter administrator and Police Department.

6. Unfinished Business

a. Sustainable Jersey actions for 2025 (S. McCaffrey) Ms. McCaffrey spoke about the work she has been doing for Sustainable Jersey and actions that the Borough could take. Discussion about how to strategize for recertification. Discussion of how and when to utilize social media.

b. Cleanup Day planning (K. Rege) Mr. Yarin moved to make May 3rd with a rain date of May 4 be the date of the cleanup. All in favor. Carried. Mr. Wong said that there will be a blood drive for the Ambulance Corps that same day at the Senior Center. Mr. Yarin suggested promoting both together and coordinating the two. The flyer will need to include the Nature Center as one of the locations. Ms. Rege spoke to the head of the DPW about the pickers and grabbers. Councilman Cho shared a photo of the vest designed for the Cleanup Day. The vests will need to be returned; t-shirts may be designed. The logo was created by Rachel Suter. Mr. Yarin said that if only one color can be used that is fine. He also spoke about his wish not to have a lot of swag for environmental reasons, but the organizers want to use a grant earmarked for uniforms to make the t-shirts. Perhaps gloves could be bought instead? Ms. McCaffrey said that she would like to use the opportunity to promote composters. Discussion about neighborhood composting and programs that pick up composting materials from your house. Maybe the neighborhood composting people could come to the cleanup; perhaps someone could demonstrate a mill composter.

c. Community Energy Planning Grant update Mr. Yarin explained that the forms have been submitted and that the Closter EC will receive $10,000. The next steps are to create a budget and that a letter will be sent to department heads inviting them to become part of the stakeholder community examining the way that energy is used and plan to decrease it. The grant is for a study. Larger grants for implementation are available.

d. Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) planning ANJEC explains that the ERI is a reference document for city planning and that it is important to have an updated ERI on file. Mr. Yarin stated that he wants to have an ERI done this year. He has looked at three possible experts to complete this: Debbie Kratzer, GZA Environmental Services, and

Beth Ravit. The typical range of this project is $15,000-$30,000. It will have to go out to bid and specs will need to be created.

7. New Business

a. Greenway Project (C. Wong) Mr. Wong shared slides about the Northern Valley Greenway Project—the conversion of 8 miles of unused railways into a park from Northvale to Englewood. It would be about 60 feet wide in a lot of places. There will be a bike path, a running trail, and a walking path, as well as playgrounds and pollinator gardens. CSX owns the rails. The project is currently in talks with them to purchase the property. The financing will not be from taxpayer money but rather from grants. Each town has a member in this Project group. There are many factors in this project, including making sure that the land is uncontaminated. Discussion of goals, etc. A current goal is to garner public support for the project. Perhaps the Closter EC could post information on the website. Mr. Yarin asked for more information on what the EC is being asked to do to help.

8. Plan Review and Comment

TBD

9. Liaison Reports

a. Governing Body (C. Cho) No report, as the information he was going to share had already been discussed.

b. ~~Shade Tree Commission~~ (postponed pending new appointment)

c. ~~Planning Board~~ (postponed pending new appointment)

10. Adjournment The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Marti Francis
Commission Secretary