

Vineland Environmental Commission  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
May13, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m. by Lisa Fleming, serving as substitute Chairperson. The public notice was read into record. Present were: Lisa Fleming, Charles Valentine, Ariana Headley, David Lowenstern, John Pedersen, and guests Ellen Pedersen, Josh Aderholdt, and Tiffany Falcone (NJDEP, via TEAMS)

A motion to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2023 meeting was made by Charles Valentine and seconded by John Pedersen. All were in favor.

The 2024 budget has been approved by City Council and ordering can proceed under the normal process.

The Giampietro Park Stormwater Mitigation project is pending verification from City Engineer of existing drain pipe locations so that Rutgers can finalize the design. John P. expressed concern that the project should not affect trees that have been planted. It is hoped that the EC has access to the plans as soon as possible so that any significant conflicts can be resolved before work begins.

A question was also raised about who would be maintaining the project plantings once the project is completed. A larger discussion was held regarding landscaping maintenance of all EC projects. It would be ideal for the City to have a dedicated employee for this (e.g. City Gardener and/or City Forester). This issue needs to be the focus of future discussions.

Natural Resource Inventory - Lisa informed members that a Purchase Order has been issued for work on the inventory update to begin, and that Diane, Lisa, and John Pedersen have volunteered to participate in discussions with the consultant.

John said that the litter removal last month at Willow Oak has left the area in pretty good shape, but more is always accumulating. The area in front of Willow Oak has been cut again. John noted that the letter that Anna Lisa Franceschini spoke about at the last meeting regarding no-mow wildflower areas has been sent to Council President Arthur, but it doesn't appear to be formed as an ordinance or resolution.

David said that the state-owned area near the soccer fields that was made a no-mow area previously for butterfly habitat has become overgrown. There is a lot of Callery pear growing there now. This area should be included in the maintenance issue discussion.

Raingardens - Lisa indicated that the Giampietro gardens have been mostly cleared of old growth to make them tidier. The aster old growth at the library has also been cleared, though the coneflower stems remain. Phlox and Lyre-leaf sage are blooming at the library, crating some interest from the street. Milkweeds are growing vigorously at Giampietro, but not yet blooming. Other plants are starting to bloom there.

The Annex / Reber School garden has become quite filled in with shrubs, and the honey locust trees that grew from the tree that was originally in front of the school are getting tall. There are weeds and thistles growing along the front mulched edge that Lisa hasn't been able to get to. Anyone who might have time was urged to weed at least the front edges of the Annex garden, and do as much as they might otherwise like to make it look more presentable. Because we've been told that the Annex garden will eventually be affected by an upcoming City project on the Reber School building, we need to keep in mind any opportunities to move plantings to other locations, especially the trees, which include a swamp white oak. It was suggested that perhaps some could be moved in conjunction with the Giampietro Stormwater mitigation project, and / or the fall planting planned for Landis Park.

Ariana said that she thought we were going to get some rain garden information in the Library newsletter. David indicated that he might be able to work on this, and wants to also get back to a larger education initiative for all EC issues.

There is no Second Saturday activity planned for May due to both Wheaton EcoFair and Vineland Green Fair in same month. Although John, Ellen and Lisa did some invasive removal at Giampietro in April, more needs to be done there. John and Josh suggested that the next work day (June 8) should be scheduled for Willow Oak to capitalize on the recent cleaning efforts. Emphasis will be trail-clearing and vegetation control to make the area more useable.

Ellen reported that the Community Wildlife Habitat Program is up to 148 points – halfway to the goal. Natural Vineland had a table at the Wheaton EcoFair which attracted a number of interested people.

The City's Green Fair will be this Saturday, May 18. Diane, David Lowenstern, and Josh Aderholdt will be there. Diane will need to scale down the booth due to vehicle capacity limitations and difficulty in transporting all items from the Annex without help. If anyone else can make it, contact Diane.

There have not been many Planning & Zoning Applications sent to us recently, although it was noted that a new Marriott hotel is being planned. Lisa mentioned that a new TV ad the City is running on Comcast emphasizes warehouses. We may expect to see some applications. The warehouse project in Pittsgrove that had generated a lot of community concern was eventually passed.

**Arbor Day** was celebrated with a Cub Scout planting on April 27 at Pagliughi Park facilitated by Sue. They planted a Sweet Bay Magnolia tree.

**The Blackwater Branch Tree Tube removal** on April 10 was successful. Many thanks to Tiffany Falcone from the NJDEP for arranging a great event with other DEP employees and Vineland volunteers, along with help from Giordano's Recycling and City Public Works. The project went quickly, and most of the collected tubes and stakes will be provided to a group in North Jersey that is involved in plantings along the Raritan River. Giordano's is going to help transport these to the Raritan group next week.

John indicated that he would like to get some of the stakes for his work before they are taken. Lisa indicated that the steel posts we wanted to keep for birdhouses are also still in the roll-off. Lisa and John will coordinate getting these. Tiffany also offered to pull these aside for us if a pickup cannot be arranged before they are taken away.

Lisa asked if Tiffany has any connection with the Invasive Species Task Force, since invasives like autumn olive and phragmites are creeping into the Blackwater Branch project area, despite EPA's effort to start with a "clean slate" there. Tiffany doesn't have a direct plan of this type at this time, but will keep in mind as a possibility.

Lisa reported that a representative from the National Arbor Day Foundation visited Vineland and toured Giampietro Park with Alexander McCartney and Diane Amico. Their interest was in the trees that were planted from the Tree Recovery Campaign seedling giveaways, of which they are a funding partner. After seeing a number of plantings, including many at Giampietro Park that are now of a good size, the representative was excited about what's been happening in Vineland. She informed Diane of other Arbor Day programs that might be of interest to the City to provide still more planting opportunities, particularly noting the "Front Yard Program" that seeks to give trees to individuals for private property planting. This grant could provide trees that are larger than seedlings (though not necessarily the 5 to 6 feet size), and may possibly be coordinated with a "plant-one-take-one" planting event. Diane has suggested that we apply for this grant, with details to be arranged later. It could perhaps be combined with the fall planting at Landis Park.

A motion to make an application to the National Arbor Day Foundation for a grant to purchase trees was made by John P. and seconded by Charles Valentine. All were in favor.

Ariana discussed the possibility of education and activity programs to promote Water Conservation, in support of the City's Sustainable Jersey efforts. Possible actions are a rain barrel workshop or an education initiative. Ariana passed around a flyer that has some of the water conservation basics on it. There was support for at least using this as one of our table handouts. David is interested in working on our education initiatives, which could include this.

Tiffany Falcone contacted the Nature Conservancy regarding Willow Grove Lake to see what they are doing about maintenance here, since John had indicated previously that the parking area and trails are becoming overgrown. She said TNC indicated this is not a priority right now, but that it is still in their overall planning. John would like to see if the EC could do some work here, maybe with Tiffany's help. Tiffany is keeping a list of possible activities.

Lisa also mentioned that the Maurice River Corridor Study will be having a public meeting this Wednesday where a summary of the study results will be presented. Willow Grove is the northernmost part of the study area.

Tiffany mentioned that there will be training addressing illegal dumping on June 8. If anyone is interested, please contact her.

Tiffany also indicated that Vineland and Rowan are expected to participate in an Air Quality Monitoring program led by EPA that involves citizen monitoring of 'black soot' in the air.

David attended a Dendrology course at Duke Farms at the beginning of the month for CEU credit.

Diane has met with Kathie Hicks, Ryan Headley, Dave Maillet, and Rick Tonetta to go over the new NJ State Tree Ordinance requirements. Work is proceeding on defining how the new ordinance should work, but there is not a proposal as of yet.

Adjournment made by consensus.