

Vineland Environmental Commission
Minutes
Regular Meeting February 10, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 by Chairperson Diane Amico. The public notice was read into record. Present were Diane Amico, John Pedersen, Charles Valentine, and Josh Aderholdt, as well as guests Tiffany Falcone NJDEP (virtually), Meredith Pichini NJ Tree Foundation (virtually), David Ferrara Americorps Watershed Ambassador, and Ellen Pedersen.

The TreeKeepers Education Program, a 3-hour course geared toward residents, is on hold due to federal funding freezes of the Inflation Reduction Act. They are looking for new grants to fund this. Meredith Pichini will reconnect with us at a later date, possibly in the summer. The session does include a hands-on component for pruning which can either be done on existing small trees or potted, or on branches.

Josh has been appointed as a new member. A list of current members and appointment terms was passed out and Diane explained the process of appointments and terms.

A motion to approve the minutes of the January 13, 2025 meeting was made by Charles Valentine and seconded by Josh Aderholdt. All were in favor.

There is no budget report because it is the start of the new year and the budget amounts will be set after approval by City Council. The budget approval process with the Finance Office was discussed.

There has not been movement on the Natural Resource Inventory and Marathon has been very non-responsive to emails. They have invoiced us twice and we have seen some working maps, but we have not seen a draft yet. Purchasing procedures for professional services for environmental consultants was discussed.

Regarding volunteer work days, John said there is nothing to report. Josh said they picked up 46 bags of trash on Saturday at Tarkiln Branch, and the trash problem continues past where the cleanup took place behind the houses along the stream. Diane said the EPA is also working on something for this stream and had previously contacted the City. Newer stormwater grates that prevent trash from passing through would be helpful at the corner of Shirley Ave. & West Ave. The trash is a combination of non-point source pollution and other large items that were dumped. Tiffany is still working with the City's Clean Communities office with illegal dumping cameras and she will discuss this area with them. The non-point source material is hard to pinpoint but the larger appliances are easier to see on camera who is bringing them into an area. Diane will reach out to City Engineering to discuss the inlet covers. John will forward the photos he took so Diane can follow up. Saturday's cleanup included John, Ellen, and Josh, and approximately 12 members of Citizens United. The litter is comprised mostly of plastic bottles, with labels still on so they have not been that very long. The solution to the problem will need to include a combination of property owner participation, volunteer groups, and addressing the grates. Code enforcement is the last option, as there are regulations for property owners that EPA discussed with Diane. Getting property owners' permission to access their property would be a very large endeavor. Cleanup on the streambed is going to become more difficult as spring approaches and the water level rises. Diane will try to reach out to the EPA enforcement representative to see where he is at with his efforts on contacting property owners, as well as discussing with City Code Enforcement to get a feel for whether they have ability to get involved. The Housing Authority properties are City-owned.

Diane asked for any comments on Site Plans. There were none. In the last few weeks, Diane has only seen a few smaller development applications coming through. John said the Planning Board agenda is busy.

Diane received a letter from a resident who lives near a proposed development on Maple Avenue. The Environmental Commission had previously submitted official comments to the Planning Board in June of 2024 on this. Diane referred her to the Planning Board for questions, and she already had a copy of our comments. The neighbors have concerns about endangered species on the property and they have already been in touch with NJDEP, which is the right track to pursue that issue. The project has been postponed, at the developer's request, for several months and contains numerous variances. The Environmental Commission does have the ability to attend the Planning Board meeting and make comments on our own comments previously submitted. Diane received subsequent calls from others in the same neighborhood. Tiffany said DEP has recently received inquiries from Bohler Group as to the stream classifications in this area. This appears to be an Engineering firm. If the site plan review committee would like to discuss the EC's previously submitted comments in person at the Planning Board meeting, it is encouraged that they watch for upcoming agendas, or they also have the option of asking John Casadia as the Board's liaison if he can discuss the particulars of the comments. The members of the site plan review committee should discuss among themselves if, and how, they would like to follow up.

Tiffany said NJDEP has a Community Day of Service scheduled with Citizens United on Wednesday, February 26, at 9 a.m. to pull the invasive species Japanese Barberry in Peaslee WMA. This is not in Vineland, but Diane will spread the word to members who wish to attend as individuals.

Diane received a call from someone who is considering developing property on N. Mill Road who was inquiring as to what to do if there are eagles nesting on the property. Diane gave her the phone numbers for both NJDEP and US Fish & Wildlife in Galloway. There may be a permit involved.

John said the City removed 8 trees along Park Avenue on city property. Diane did previously attend stakeholders meeting held by City Engineering for the Park Avenue design, where she did discuss it is preferable to preserve the trees, and this is reflected in the minutes from that meeting.

Diane said we need to make a plan for the remaining trees that are being stored at John's office. The Ironwoods are not appropriate for wet areas at Giampietro Park, so he will put some at Magnolia Road Park. Diane will reach out to Lisa regarding any for Giampietro. We may need to reach out to others, such as the Boys & Girls Club, to see if they want them.

David Ferrara, Watershed Ambassador, spoke about assisting with the invasive species at Willow Oak, with identification, organizing, or removal. John said we did a map of the invasive plants there, including autumn olive, bamboo, and lilac. Different methods of bamboo removal were discussed. March 15th will be the next volunteer day. John would like to do Willow Oak invasive plant removal and the west trail tree roots. David Ferrara would like to see the invasive plant map to determine how AmeriCore can assist. They can share the event announcement with their volunteers. It was noted that there can be no spraying by anyone without a license. David will research whether there are any native non-invasive plants that can be planted in place of the removed plants.

Adjournment by consensus.