

Vernon Township Environmental Commission

March 15, 2021 Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 by Diane Wexler.

Diane Wexler read the statement of Compliance

Salute to the flag.

Roll Call for attendance: Diane Wexler, Bonnie Tadrick, Catherina Sawoszczyk, Craig Williams, Peg DiStasi, Debbie Coulson (recording Sec).

Approval of the February 15 2021 minutes with spelling changes. Abstain: Craig Williams, Peg DiStasi. All others approved.

Guest Speaker: Silvia Solaun with a slide show on logging/Deforestation.

Deforestation topic. Keep forests intact for the animals, flora, clean air, clean water.

When the Tennessee gas 300 Line Upgrade took place, you see that through the pictures the heavy equipment pats down the soil which causes problems with invasive species. Approximately 53,000 trees were removed.

The Highlands Region gets more visitors yearly than Yellow Stone, Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. Ecotourism is important in the Highlands region.

Showing an Aerial view with trees removed Deforestation; (Sparta Mountain) changes PH in the soil due to more sun exposure. It takes approximately 72-100 years to replace the trees. When builders remove the trees to build it causes mudslides. More information at feedbackloopsclimate.com Highlands provides 70% of the water in our area.

Craig Williams stated that securing slopes is very important.

Climate change the birds found a new home and are moving north.

Craig Williams asked if they (Fords Stewardship) were going to replant. And the answer was No, the idea was to plant one or two trees per ten acres that will drop acorns and reestablish themselves.

ATVs are coming out to the open space and destroying the land for tree growth.

Craig Williams stated that in the early 1900s in McAfee the quarries that were producing burned most of the trees and it has taken 40 plus years to reforest.

Peg DiStasi also stated that it has taken forever to re-establish trees on her property lost to the Ice storms. What can we do to help?

Diane Wexler stated that we have no control.

Silvia Solaun said to stop the State on its plan to Deforestation by passing a resolution. Four bills (A-43, A-44, A-45, A-46) promote logging and is Senate sponsored. Friends of Sparta Mountain are a group with a tree planting plan.

Craig Williams stated that an Arborist is hard to find.

Silvia Solaun stated that the Audubon has three Foresters on it.

Peg DiStasi asked what is a good group to follow for information.

Silvia Solaun stated the Sparta Mountain group and the Sierra Club. We need to get these four bills stopped. These bills first came out with the Agriculture Committee.

Public comment: Laura Balice asked how to get involved. Silvia Solaun responded with the Facebook Page. West Milford has a resolution and she will send a copy over to Diane Wexler.

Catherina Sawoszcyk asked national level, Silvia responded the National Level the Wildlife Management Institute are the creators of it.

Craig Williams's discussion on forests in the West versus the East. Air quality in New Jersey is poor. He suggested reading "1491" which is pre-Columbus and how people lived.

Silvia Solaun discussed a Bill that has 18,000 acres burned. 50,000 acres in the Pineland, 10,000 acres elsewhere. She will send Diane Wexler a petition to be signed.

Public Participation:

Jessi Paladini stated that we had spent an hour on the Deforestation Speaker's Presentation. She is confused because in 2015 Harry Shortway abolished the committee due to other out of town issues being brought up. What changed since then to allow out of town issues?

Diane Wexler stated the Shortway was upset that the Commission was making up a resolution at that time. Logging is important and Shortway cannot prevent us from discussing it. Diane Wexler then closed the meeting to the public.

Land Use Board Liaison Craig Williams reported that the meeting was about paying bills. He was recovering from surgery. The next meeting will have Farm LLC. He will not be at that meeting due to a trip to California.

The Farm 94 LLC will be the topic at the next Land Use meeting with concerns of campfires and the Fire Dept. access. The Barn and store existing, improving parking lots, increased use of parking. We should send a letter to Cory. We have not received his reports as of this date.

Peg DiStasi stated that Will Brown is making it very rustic and more comfortable where the campers stay. There will be bathrooms, showers. This is a positive move. Craig Williams also agreed.

Old Business:

Pollinator Garden – Grant Application has an April 21, 2021 deadline. Diane Wexler stated that it is easy to fill out. She spoke to Mishelle Downtain concerning the garden area. It will be on the outside of the paid gardens. We could do it in sections, Peg DiStasi said it should be a raised bed and we could do one side at a time.

The DPW cuts the grass so the raised garden would help to not accidentally get chopped down. The Eagle Scouts and Girl Scouts will help out. The raised edge should be about 2-3 ties high.

Diane Wexler and Peg DiStasi is the sub-committee for the Pollinator Garden. They will ask Martin for pricing. Cones for bees and hummingbirds.

Catherina Sawoszczyk stated we should buy from our local businesses. Diane Wexler said we have to go where we can save money. Our money is tight.

Trout Stream Clean Up:

Peg DiStasi stated that the Grant is available and we need to do it.

Catherina Sawoszczyk and Peg DiStasi could not walk the property due to the inclement weather.

“Eagles” group have not picked a date yet to clean up the stream.

Catherina Sawoszczyk stated that we need to keep an open dialogue with Acme and keep an eye on it. Peg DiStasi stated that the Eagles have spoken to the landscaper and are in contact. Craig Williams has also spoken to the landscaper and the owner of the Acme Plaza. The landscaper does what they want to do... Craig Williams stated that the landscaper did what he was told but plugged the stream. Catherina Sawoszczyk asked if the Environmental Commission also be talking to the owner. That would be two people calling him with complaints.

Peg DiStasi stated that we do not have authority to do that. Who Does?

Craig Williams was messaged by Jessi Paladini that the Zoning Officer does.

Green Energy push Craig Williams found a company to do an energy analysis on all commercial enterprises and residential co-op. could be reduced rate buy in. Energy Planning Grant to come up with a plan. If shown an interest for clean energy in bulk where people can opt in. Craig Williams will do more research.

NRI:

The Township manager and Mayor will handle this. Highland Council will do it for us with no cost. They might have to come to us for additional information.

Catherina Sawoszczyk asked about a contact person. Craig Williams will get it from the Township Manager.

DPW Laydown Area:

Peg DiStasi will make everyone aware. Is there anything we can do to push this along?

Bonnie Tadrack will see the Mayor about it. Peg DiStasi will send Bonnie information.

TGP Maintenance project:

Diane Wexler read a statement. We have questions. The Council has not responded. Toni Cilli responded to Peg DiStasi and Andrew responded to Diane Wexler. And both will research and get back to us. Diane Wexler stated that the pipes are in the ground and they have to pay taxes on them. Hamburg signed a resolution and Sussex Borough is contemplating it as well. Peg DiStasi wrote a letter and Catherina Sawoszczyk read the letter concerning the compressor issues. A motion of support in sending Peg DiStasi's letter by Craig Williams and second by Catherina Sawoszczyk, all in favor.

EC Topics for Council public session:

Hybrid Vehicles in the future for Vernon Township

Soil Conservation in trout streams. Storm water Ordinance. Water running down Breakneck down into Trout Stream. The Land Owners such as the Coffee Shop, Rehab and houses should be aware to keep stream clean.

This would be brought up at the end of the Council meeting, Public Session. We should try to get it on the Agenda. All we need is five minutes. Peg DiStasi will put it together. Diane Wexler will ask for time on the agenda for council meeting scheduled for April 12, 2021. We should individually get back to Peg DiStasi with add-ons or deletions.

New Business:

Spotted Lantern Fly: we should get the eggs before they hatch. Peg DiStasi stated that we should let the public be aware on the Vernon Page as a Public Notice. We need to get the white patches off the trees. Diane Wexler said she will look into the posting. Peg DiStasi said it had prior approval and we should forward to the web master. This would be a Public Service Announcement, send to Diane Wexler.

Public Participation:

Jessi Paladini announced that Vernon is now a National Scenic Byway. We can now apply for funding and improvements. The Mayor and Council President have ignored this. Come join us at a Scenic By Way Meeting, just let Jessi know. Jessi is very disgusted with this town but she loves Vernon and has spent 45 years here. The Commission did nothing the Acme owners talked to her and wanted a meeting. So on Tuesday at 11:30 AM she will meet with them. She has called the DEP today. She has talked to them in 2019 and saw the landscapers do the same thing.

Craig Williams on Delta Gas. Peg DiStasi was right. Nothing was done but all cleaned up. Diane Wexler called 11 minutes to Jessi Paladini and went on to the next speaker.

Alorah Bliese asked if there are any areas in Vernon that need a cleanup. Craig Williams mentioned the Trout Stream, Cemeteries (Historical /Slave/Farm Families)

End of Public Session.

Commissioner Comments:

Craig Williams: none

Peg DiStasi: Hybrid vehicles major station required for Hybrid charges. The Town might look into leasing Hybrid vehicles. 2025 Hybrid will be mandated in NJ.

Discussion on Hybrid vehicles from Craig Williams, Peg DiStasi and Diane Wexler. Beautification-Greenway-Environmental Coalition to bring up next month. We need a united front.

Catherina Sawoszczyk asked if Vernon is going to have an Earth Day this year. Diane Wexler will ask.

Bonnie Tadrack: none

Diane Wexler: none

Adjournment:

Motion from Craig Williams to adjourn, second by Bonnie Tadrack. All in favor.

Meeting 2 hours 17 minutes

Respectfully submitted by Debbie Coulson