



FANWOOD ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
FANWOOD
ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMISSION

2016

INTRODUCTION

Under the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law, each municipality in New Jersey is empowered to form an environmental commission via ordinance. Fanwood created its Environmental Commission circa 1972. Under the enabling legislation a commission can have up to seven regular members and two alternates, which are appointed by the mayor. A member of the commission is to be appointed to the municipal planning board. The mayor and council also select a member of the council to be the liaison between the commission and the town government. A commission may also name “associate members”—that is, people with no formal responsibility with the commission, but who have worked with the commission as volunteers and have performed special and/or unique services for the commission and the town’s environment.

Commission responsibilities

The Commission is an advisory board to the Mayor and Council and the town in general for environmental issues. The Commission is in charge of keeping a town’s Open Space Inventory and for preparing an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), which the Fanwood Environmental Commission (FEC) has done several times (1976, 2007, with a current edition pending). The FEC also reviews development plans from the Planning & Zoning Board and provides comments on environmental concerns. The FEC can also accept land and easements in its name on behalf of the Borough and can suggest ordinances and related regulations for environmental and health protection of its citizens. The Commission can also apply for grants to help with various projects.

In Fanwood, the FEC also works with Borough officials to oversee the 8-acre Nature Center located between Cray Terrace and LaGrande Avenue. The Nature Center provides an opportunity for recreation in a “green” and “quiet” setting for hiking, bird watching, plant observation, photography, educational programs in an “outdoor” classroom, and similar activities. The Commission provides guidance and direction for the Nature Center Caretaker. Further, the FEC often works with Girl and Boy Scouts and other civic groups on environmental stewardship projects in the Nature Center and elsewhere in town which may include spreading wood chips on trails, removing invasive plants, erecting informational signs, repairing or constructing boardwalks, creating pollinator habitats, and so forth.

Commission members—2016

Gary Szelc—Chair

Eric Gaulin

Margaret Chowdhury

Phyllis Sandrock

Sandy Redder

Carol Walczuk

Matthew Juckes—Planning Board Member

David Schwartzberg—Alternate Member

Kevin Boris—Council Liaison

Jane Vanhaasteren –Associate Member

Nikolai Chowdhury—Associate Member

Moenika Chowdhury—Associate Member

Keenan Porter--Associate Member

Meetings—Commission meetings are held the third Thursday of every month starting at 7:30 in the upstairs, second floor meeting room of the Community House (“The Old Train Station”). They are open to the public.

ACTIVITIES

Earth Day/Clean Communities Day (April 23)—As it does every year, members of the Commission participated in the annual event hosted by the Borough of Fanwood. A member of the FEC also participated on the planning committee.

Green Fair (July 23)—The Borough “Green Team” sponsored a Green Fair for environmental awareness that attracted a number of organizations—including other municipal agencies, non-profit groups, and private vendors. The FEC helped with the planning of the event and had a booth for the dissemination of literature, answering questions, and related services.

Fanny Wood Day (September 18)—Like the above, the FEC had a booth at this annual celebration and provided information in the form of displays and handouts and answered questions from the public.

NATURE CENTER

Goat Project—Continuing a project that started in 2015, a herd of goats were brought into the Nature Center to eat invasive plants and poison ivy. During 2016, they returned briefly to the northern half of the Nature Center (where they started in 2015) and were then moved to the southern half for the remainder of the growing season. Commission members aided in the goats' care including providing them with water and examining the fences for damage and other problems. It is anticipated that they will return at least one more time in 2017 (in late spring or early summer).

Identification Signs—Starting in 2016 the Commission oversaw a project by Girl Scout Gold Star candidate Julia Guarneri to provide plant and animal identification signs along the trails in the Nature Center. Follow up work to fix up the display case and trails will probably be completed in 2017.

Bat Box Project—Boy Scout and Eagle Scout Candidate Christopher Bondarowicz finished up a project started in 2015 to install several “bat boxes” in the Nature Center. As several bat species are threatened, the structures give the bats a secure home (bats are exceedingly important in insect control, eating substantial numbers of mosquitos and moths).

Edibles Plant Walk (June 4)—As she has several times, Debbie Naha, park naturalist, teacher, and nutritionist conducted a plant walk through and near the Nature Center to identify wild edible plants (and plants to be avoided). This walk was open to the public and attracted a number of participants from Fanwood and surrounding communities.

Native Plants—The Commission worked with local resident Keenan Porter, currently studying landscape architecture, to develop a planting plan to restore native plants to the Nature Center as a follow up to the goat project.

Student Volunteer Program (October 15)—The FEC was able, through a volunteer program at the College of New Jersey, to obtain the help of 22 students who worked to spread mulch over the invasive Japanese stilt grass, to pull out other invasive plants, and to plant native vegetation.

OTHER

Butterfly Garden—Boy Scout and Eagle Scout candidate Brian Felber created a new butterfly garden around the flag poles in front of Borough Hall. This garden replaced a group of shrubs that were dead or dying.

Pipeline Meeting (September 27)—A meeting sponsored by the Sierra Club and other organizations was attended by the Commission Chair to obtain information about proposed pipelines that would crisscross New Jersey including Fanwood.

Special Acknowledgement—On March 18, 2016, Commission member Margaret Chowdhury was named a “Union County Woman of Excellence for the Environment.” She was feted at dinner hosted by the Union County Freeholders. Several representatives from Fanwood’s government (elected officials and staff) and several Commission members attended as well.

Other Acknowledgements and Supporters

Fanwood Public Works Department—PW personnel were invaluable in helping the Commission with several projects including labor and supplying tools.

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)—The FEC is a long standing member of ANJEC, the umbrella organization for environmental commissions throughout the state. The FEC has participated in workshops, the annual meeting, and other educational events sponsored by ANJEC.

PHOTOGRAPHS

GREEN FAIR



Figure 1--GREEN FAIR--Councilmen Tom Kranz and Kevin Boris open up the fair.

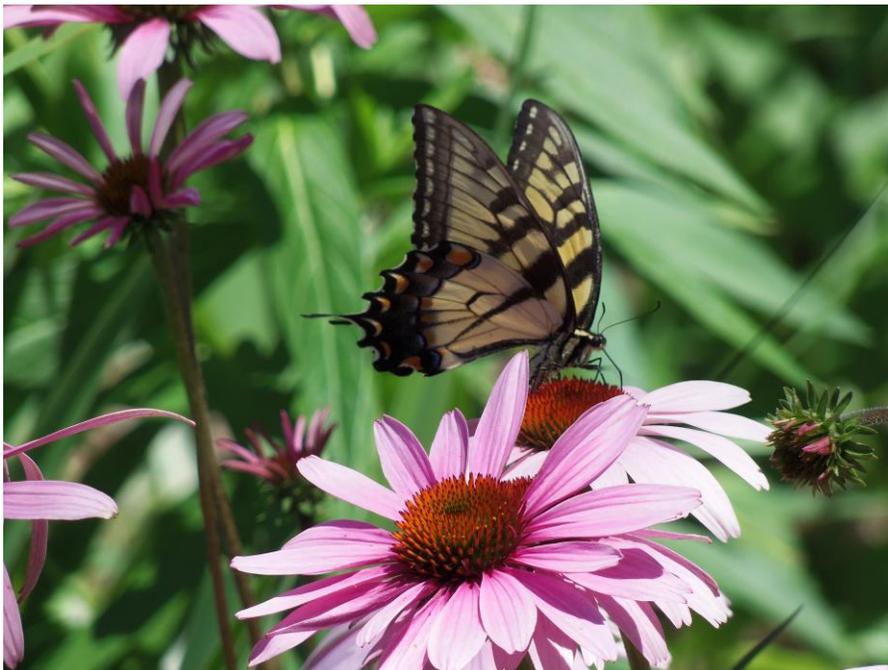


Figure 2--GREEN FAIR--The Borough Rain Garden was one of the centerpieces of the fair.

EDIBLES PLANT WALK



Figure 3--EDIBLES PLANT WALK--Park Naturalist Debbie Naha (on left in red) leads a group of people through the Nature Center to identify edible and non-edible plants.



Figure 4--EDIBLE PLANTS WALK--Identifying plants in the middle of the Nature Center.

WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE DINNER



Figure 5--WOExcellence--Margaret Chowdhury (center) with family, master gardeners, and commission members.



Figure 6--WOExcellence--Commission members Eric Gaulin, Phyllis Sandrock, Margaret Chowdhury, Gary Szelc.

GOAT PROJECT



Figure 7--GOAT PROJECT--A portion of one of the Nature Center Trails BEFORE the goats arrived.



Figure 8--GOAT PROJECT--Left side--no goats--Right side--area of goat activity.



Figure 9--GOAT PROJECT--Boardwalk area BEFORE the goats....



Figure 10--GOAT PROJECT--Boardwalk area AFTER the goats....