



Verona Environmental Commission

600 Bloomfield Avenue
Verona, New Jersey 07044
www.veronaec.org

Verona Environmental Commission Meeting, October 21, began at 7:30 P.M., 2nd floor of the Annex Building in the Verona Community Center, 880 Bloomfield Avenue, Verona N.J.

Attendees: Gloria Machnowski (Chairwoman), Anthony Saltalamacchia (Vice-Chair), Jessica Pearson (Treasurer), Martin Golan and James Loudon.

MINUTES:

1. Chairperson Call to Order and Roll Call. Treasurer reads notice of Open Public Meetings law.
2. Members approved September 16th, 2015 minutes after fixing a typo.
- 3- Visual list / flyer of Verona's recycling accepted materials. Chris sent apologies, he is not able to attend and trying to catch up with Keith about his design work still.
- 4- Tony and Gloria met the new Schools Director of Facilities, Joe Trause, on the first week of October. Steve Neale couldn't join them, there was a fire and he volunteers for the fire department. Joe used to work in the Madison school district (they signed up for sustainable jersey for schools). They installed a cardboard baler at the schools. He basically said that the Verona school district has very little money and it's understaffed, 16 people for all the schools, that limits the available time for record keeping for a program like sustainable jersey for schools. He mentioned that he doesn't have a secretary to take care of it and that he is usually out on the field, not in an office. He recommended that Neale meets with Rui Dionisio to present the program and see if the BOE is interested.

Joe said that he likes the water bottle filling station (<http://www.elkay.com/bottle-filling-stations>) and the 3 waste/recycling bin system for the schools but he needs to know prices and he mentioned that the bins for garbage are too small. Gloria sent him the information: the standard Triple Waste Watcher Station is \$350 and the XL System, is \$470 for the triple station. They also sell cases of custom clear, snap in bags for \$30/case of 200. <http://www.buschsystems.com> – Gloria recommended him to contact the Junior Woman's Club of Verona for founding opportunities for 2016. Tony said that the HBW cafeteria will need 3 stations so kids don't have to wait on line, and that HBW could borrow one 3 bin station from the Verona Community Center to test it at HBW and see how it works out. Joe said that in Madison they had a lot of support from students doing the recycling and the sorting of materials and that at the VHS they don't have that. Tony explained that there are 4 lunch periods at HBW and custodians rush to cleanup and kids from the environmental club do the sorting, make posters, collect recyclables and are planning to make an educational video. Gloria explained that kids don't like to sort other people garbage, and if they are volunteering to do so, at least we should support them by providing the right bins and putting out the message "leave no trace" and "do not put garbage in the recycling bins" and "Don't put recycling materials in the garbage bins". They just need clear labels and the principals need to actively encourage recycling, like they enforce the dress code, or other school rules.

Joe said that he'll visit the cafeterias and try to get a sense of what they need to change. He can help

us but he can't take on more responsibilities, he mentioned that usually he doesn't have time to eat lunch. Gloria gave Joe a list of environmental achievements that the VEC already accomplished working together with the schools and township.

5. Progress made at Grove Park, Nature Preserve & Historic Park located at 42 Grove Ave. Gloria informed Mayor Ryan that a \$1,500 budget is enough to buy all the needed trees and plants for 42 Grove Ave. Chuck from DPW came to the park on Oct. 11, while we were working. He walked the nature trail and admired the new slate walkway. He suggested to do the plantings during the Spring of 2016 to avoid winter damage. We agreed.

Chuck said that if there is no enough money to pay a nursery to plant the trees, DPW can help VEC volunteers to plant them all. And if he has the watering truck he can water the trees during the summer, since it's close to the street it will not be a problem, he said. Gloria doesn't want to ask DPW to water, to avoid over time, Jessica and Martin mentioned that they could add it to the watering truck route used to water the hanging basquets or other township plants during the summer. If more water is needed for the new plantings, a neighbor also offered us to use his water faucet.

VEC volunteers had been working in this project for over 10 months. The township already spent \$4,000 donated by the Junior Woman's Club of Verona and the Historical Society, purchasing two 6 Foot Memorial benches, one aluminum cast marker, a wayside exhibit, a sign with the park rules and the slate for the walkway.

Jessica explained that DPW installed the park benches and footings for the signage and the slate walkway and signage was installed by a group of skilled volunteers. Volunteers also worked on a third cleanup and finished creating the short sustainable nature trail. Several neighbors came to talk to us while we were working, including Mary, her daughter and Bill Knight, from 40 and 46 Grove Ave. They are happy with the project, to the point that Bill allowed us to use his water hose and electrical outlet for the equipment. In addition, the Shade Tree Commission pruned and removed dead trees with DPW. We are also fixing the original flagstone path with flagstone pieces collected in the woods by volunteers. We requested approval from the township to purchase native plants, a Dogwood and evergreen trees to be planted during the Spring of 2016.

Each bench comes with a 4" x 6" 304 brushed stainless steel engravable plaque. Members are considering the possibility of dedicating the benches and using donations to help purchase the trees and plants. Tina from C and J Trophies & Promotions charges \$15 or \$20 to do the engraving for each. She will need to see the plaque to make sure that they can engrave it, if not they could supply a plaque and engrave it for the same price. She said we can fit 6 lines of text.

6. Tree preservation ordinance draft and comparative analysis. Virginia was not available to attend the meeting and Gloria asked everybody to study the report that she prepared and submit their comments or questions during the November meeting.

7 VEC 7th Annual School Poster Contest: Gloria hung all the poster entries at the four elementary schools and Verona High School. Tony took care of the HBW exhibit. We received over 200 entries on Walk to School Day, October 7. The contest was open to Verona Public School Students Grade K to 12. All artwork is on display at the schools. The commission sent letters to the parents of the winners inviting them to the award ceremony in Town Hall on Monday, November 2. The winners are Jack Latson from Laning Ave. School, Nishini Fernando from Brookdale, Reese Falcone from Forest, Christopher Caldera from FN Brown, Tigerlily Fischer from HBW and Annaliese Tietjen from VHS. We placed "2015 winner" stickers on the winning posters at each school and asked the principals to announce it at the schools. Gloria made the certificates, requested the township to write the award checks and and contacted the SCA's and principals requesting photos from walk to school day to include in the video that she is editing with a sample of the poster entries. The video will be presented

during the award ceremony and shown on VTV and websites. Steve Neale will do the video set up during the ceremony.

8. Ideas to participate in Verona's Fair in the Square: Saturday, Dec. 5, 2015 - Noon to 5 P.M. Set up starts at 10 am. The only VEC members that confirmed that he is available is Martin Golan. Jessica suggested to concentrate in more important projects instead of participating in Fair in the Square. Members will decide during the November meeting.

5. Steep Slope Ordinance update: In 2013 the VEC formally requested Mr. Ryan to introduce the 4 pages long VEC draft to the Council. The draft included "Disturbance of lands with slopes 20% or greater shall be 0% and are prohibited" and the only exemptions was: "A variance shall not be required for additions to or accessory structures relating to an existing single family home where the proposed construction involves less than one hundred square feet (500 sq. ft.) of total site disturbance and does not otherwise require variance relief. Land development plans which were approved prior to the adoption date of this ordinance shall be exempt from these requirements."

In 2015, a few month ago, the town council submitted the VEC draft to the Planning Board for comments. During the October planning board meeting members agreed that they ask a set of questions for Helb to research and present back at the next session. Then they would present their recommendations for modification to the ordinance proposed by the Council (via VEC). Some board members skeptical but Ryan and Roman articulating the need to preserve vegetation as well as preventing soil erosion. Some concern that the ordinance would impose increased fees on any homeowner to determine if their work would be affected by the ordinance. The definition of steep slope was also challenged, with Helb suggesting 15-20% as likely minimum. Opposition to impositions on existing land where homeowners want to renovate, although mentioned that the 1,000 sq ft clause ought to cover most of these cases.

The Planning Board formed a subcommittee comprised of Jim Helb, town engineer, Jen Critchley and Michael Foley to work on recommendations for modification to the draft ordinance. The Planning Board sub-committee meeting in charge of reviewing the steep slope ordinance was scheduled to meet on Tuesday Sep. 8 at 4 pm in Helb's office. This was announced and Gloria received confirmation from Mr. Foley, VEC's planning board liaison, who invited commission members to attend. VEC member Martin Golan went to the meeting and when he got there he discovered that the meeting wasn't. He spoke to Helb in his office, and Helb told Martin that they haven't really gotten into it, and no one was meeting to discuss anything. Then Mr. Foley explained that Helb was going to meet the Master Plan Implementation Committee instead, and he was not sure when or where that meeting was going to take place.

A few hours before this October 21 VEC public meeting, Gloria received a copy of the new Steep Slope draft (9 pages long). She was told that the Planning Board will discuss the new draft during their October 22 meeting.

During the VEC public meeting members reviewed the new draft. The VEC considers that the new draft is unacceptable and has far too many exemptions, which would render the ordinance meaningless.

The new draft exempts the following zones from the ordinance:

- R40: comprised of 22.63 acres of land
- R-50: comprised of 191.18 acres of land
- R50B: comprised of 196.27 acres of land
- R60: comprised of 170.67 acres of land

In addition, in the new draft, minor subdivisions that does not create a new lot are exempted as well.

And there are more exemptions on page #7 of the new draft regarding "minimum disturbance" (under 500 square feet), "major disturbance" (over 1,000 ft) and "minor disturbance" (from 500 to 1,000 feet).

VEC member Jim Loudon also pointed out that slopes exceeding 10% should be considered as well, and that the contour intervals are too far apart. If we are basing this on a topographical survey that only uses 2 foot contour intervals (while 2 inch contour levels are recommended in his office), you can conceivably allow plenty of excessive slopes to go undetected.

Another very worrisome point is that the new draft exempts from the ordinance ALL public and semi-public land located in Verona. Public land in Verona includes 274.63 acres of recreational land, with the largest area in Verona's Hilltop (145 acres).

The VEC believes that the new draft violates both, the spirit of the New Jersey Steep Slope Model Ordinance and the VEC draft submitted by the Town Council to the Planning Board. VEC members Jessica Pearson and James Loudon will attend the October 22 meeting. Before the meeting Gloria will notify the VEC comments of the new draft to the planning board attorney and the mayor.

The VEC considers that only a strong and effective ordinance could empower local authorities to protect Verona residents and their properties from improper construction, building and development on steep slope areas. It has become widely recognized that disturbance of steep slopes should be restricted or prevented based on the impact of disturbing steep slopes on water quality and quantity, and the environmental integrity of landscapes.

Disturbance of steep slopes results in accelerated erosion processes from stormwater runoff. Related effects include soil loss, changes in natural topography and drainage patterns, increased flooding potential, further fragmentation of forest and habitat areas, and compromised aesthetic values. The requirements set forth in the VEC's Draft Ordinance are consistent with those found in the State of New Jersey's Water Quality Management Planning rule (N.J.A.C. 7:15.) and in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Steep Slope Model Ordinance. It is also consistent with the intent and purposes of Verona's Master Plan: Section 7-5: "Preserve the environmental resources of the Township ... by limiting development in environmentally sensitive areas; by encouraging the preservation of specimen trees and general landscaping; and by preservation of the township's natural character...Preserve environmentally sensitive lands by identifying steep slopes and deterring development on said lands."

Many of our neighbors have similar Steep Slope legislation, including Cedar Grove, Maplewood, Montclair, Bloomfield, Montville, Morristown, Parsippany, Clifton, South Orange, Totowa, West Orange, Essex Fells. Steep Slope Definition are anywhere from any average slope exceeding 10% to 20%. Jim Loudon submitted notes to the draft originally drafted by Jerry and approved by the VEC back in 2013.

10-Adjournment 9:30 pm.