

Celebrate Commissions!
NEW JERSEY'S ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONS
REFLECT ON THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

To mark ANJEC's 40th anniversary, we invited environmental commissions to send a description of a significant accomplishment they were especially proud of. As ANJEC's history is inseparably linked to that of environmental commissions, this celebration is theirs as well. Twenty-six commissions sent their stories, representing the very new commissions to ones that are as old as ANJEC. They are spread throughout the state from Cape May to Bergen County, from cities to the most rural communities.

This compilation of their replies shows the breadth and depth of the work of commissions. Their activities range from conducting studies and educational projects, to open space preservation and working with neighboring towns on regional problems.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE INVENTORIES (ERIs)

An ERI is the fundamental building block of land use planning that is based on the constraints and capacities of the natural resources of a town. State law empowers environmental commissions to compile the ERI for their municipality. Princeton, Kingwood, Woodbridge and Bernardsville explain the importance of this information to their towns.

Princeton's First ERI in 30 Years

The Environmental Resource Inventory identifies and describes the natural resources of Princeton Township and Borough. Princeton's natural resources — soil, water, air, forests, fields, and waterways — are fundamental to its character. They are the foundation for future economic success, quality of life and the health of the community. The ERI provides the basis for the development of methods and steps to preserve, conserve and use those resources.

Though separate and distinct municipalities, Princeton Borough and Princeton Township have a strong cooperative relationship, share a similar sense of place and possess the same ecological framework. The Borough and Township formed the state's first joint environmental commission.

Once the new ERI is completed this spring, it will become an important tool, allowing the PEC to use it to screen applications for development, and as a guide for which sections of Princeton, whether geographic or environmental, are the highest priority for the Commission's time and attention.

The ERI highlights an extremely important achievement -- the Princeton municipalities' goal, set nearly 40 years ago, which is the preservation of 25 percent of our land as open space. The towns passed an open space tax to provide dedicated funding for this purpose. As of 2007, some 2,990 acres (25 percent of Princeton Township and Borough) have been permanently preserved through purchases and easements. The Commission is proud of its long-term commitment to protect, develop, and use natural resources in the Township and Borough of Princeton.

-- Wendy Kaczerski, Chair, Princeton Environmental Commission

Kingwood Township

A notable achievement of the Kingwood Township Environmental Commission was the creation of the Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) in 2004 with an update in 2009. The ERI is a 169-page document rich in facts, pictures, tables, maps, references and general descriptive information that will aid in ecologically-based planning for the Township. It shows and explains the natural characteristics and environmental features of the municipality including surface and ground water, soils, geology, steep slopes, wetlands, open space, human impacts and regulatory framework. Current Chair of the Commission Deborah Kratzer, of Kratzer Environmental Services, prepared the update as a volunteer. It is conveniently available on a CD, with the maps in an easily accessible, interactive format that allows for use as a planning and educational tool for the community. It is an outstanding contribution to help Kingwood in conservation efforts and can serve as a model for other communities in New Jersey.

-- *Gail Ashley, Kingwood Environmental Commission*

Woodbridge

In 2008, the Woodbridge Township Environmental Commission completed its ERI. The decision to produce an ERI came about mainly out of frustration. As the Commission received requests for "Letters of Interpretation" and opinions on proposed development projects, it lacked a single reference to answer questions that arose. In addition, the town's recently completed Open Space Inventory confirmed that little open space remained in Woodbridge, so what was left needed protection. The current ERI gives the Commission a better understanding of local resources and sets the stage for a more meaningful planning process.

After receiving a grant from ANJEC in 2006, Commission members were elated, but at the same time knew that they had a lot of work ahead. Their challenges included matters such as scheduling meetings around everyone's busy schedules, acquiring information from a multitude of sources, and editing, editing, and more editing. ANJEC staff offered both guidance and encouragement along the way. Approximately two years after the kick-off meeting, the ERI was presented to and approved by the Town Council. Since that time it has been adopted as a part of the Master Plan, which will allow for its use in review of all future development plans.

Bernardsville

The Bernardsville Commission started as a Conservation Commission in 1969 and became an Environmental Commission in December 4, 1972 after the State amended the enabling legislation. The first environmental resources inventory (ERI) was done by the Upper Raritan Watershed Association. Other information supplemented it, including a Critical Water Research Study. Then, in 2002, the Commission did a revised, updated, expanded, state-of-the-art ERI.

-- *Joanna Wissinger, Bernardsville Environmental Commission*

OPEN SPACE

The legislation that establishes the environmental commission directs them to compile an index of the town's open space, both public and private, and to make recommendations for the same. Over the past 40 years, environmental commissions have helped their towns preserve thousands of acres of land. Franklin Township and Mendham Borough are two of the many commissions that have been instrumental in establishing a local open space tax and trust fund. Allamuchy EC has found many ways to fund open space preservation and enhancement projects. Norwood EC owes its creation to an open space issue. The commissions in Egg Harbor and South Plainfield have restored parks and turned them into educational centers. Ringwood EC has developed an advocacy organization to promote open space.

Franklin Township

Franklin Township (Somerset County) is a 47-square-mile municipality. Centrally located and near major roadways, the Township has become one of the most diverse and fastest growing communities in the state.

While the Environmental Commission welcomes the progress and its new residents, it has long recognized that the town's rural character, open space, natural resources and historic heritage were in jeopardy. In 1996 the Commission initiated a movement to place an open space tax referendum on the ballot. The Commission met with other Township boards and committees, wrote resolutions and created and distributed an educational brochure in support of the tax. The Commission made presentations to the Township Council and drafted an ordinance that outlined how the open space fund would be managed. As a result, a referendum was placed on the ballot in 1998 and the residents overwhelmingly passed three cents per \$100 of assessed property value for preserving land and historic buildings. Since then, the voters have added another two cents per \$100 to the tax, which generates approximately \$4 million a year.

In 1999, the Council established the Open Space Advisory Committee to manage the fund, make recommendations on open space purchases and advise the public, as well as the Borough Council and other boards and committees. Three members of the Environmental Commission currently serve on the Open Space Advisory Committee. By combining the Township trust fund money with grants from Somerset County, NJ Green Acres and the State Agricultural Development Committee, the town has successfully preserved nearly 10,000 acres (34 percent of the available open space), which includes purchase of the development rights for over a dozen farms. In conjunction with the Township's cluster ordinance, which the Environmental Commission also championed, this land has been saved in perpetuity. The fund has also been used to restore historic structures throughout the Township.

Mendham Borough

The Mendham Borough Commission also helped establish an Open Space Trust and the Open Space Advisory Committee. In 1996, the Commission worked with an ad hoc citizen advisory board to survey the Borough residents. The response was overwhelming – 94 percent said that the Borough should “take an active role in the preservation of open space.” This support launched the Commission on the trajectory of research, drafts and finally formation of an Open Space Trust and Advisory Committee in 1999.

The positive survey was instrumental in getting approval of a referendum in November 1998. The Commission created a flyer, sent to all Borough residents, urging them to vote for the Municipal Question # 1. The flyer information was based on intensive research by the ad hoc Open Space Citizens Advisory Group and the Environmental Commission under the leadership of Jen Gemberling. In November 1998, the referendum was passed “to establish an open space, recreation and farmland and historic preservation committee and farmland and historic preservation trust fund in the Borough of Mendham.” Since then, the Trust has worked hard in preserving undeveloped land.

In particular, the Environmental Commission laid the groundwork for acquisition of a 107-acre tract next to the Schiff Nature Preserve. The Trust for Public Lands, Schiff Natural Lands Trust, Mayor Neil Henry and Manager Ellen Sandman worked together to achieve preservation of this land. Funding came from Morris County, the Green Acres program, foundations and a willing seller. The Commission members volunteered many hours to preserve their towns’ natural beauty for generations to come.

Allamuchy - Funding Various Open Space Projects

Allamuchy Township has been known for its many open space lands and projects, achieved through the efforts of the Mayor, Town Council and the Environmental Commission partnering with various organizations, groups and individuals. Working with the State, Mayor Resker added many large parcels to Allamuchy Mountain State Park. The Mayor and Town Council also planned a Nature Center with a boardwalk through wetlands connecting to the Lehigh & Hudson River RR right-of-way, a future rail-to-trail. Environmental Commission member Steve Haydu obtained two substantial grants from Warren County’s Municipal Charitable Conservancy Trust Fund to preserve and renovate the Railroad Freight Depot and obtain status as a National Historic Site for it.

Charles Fineran, Director of Open Space and a member of Allamuchy Environmental Commission, informed local philanthropists about Allamuchy’s open space projects. The past successes and ongoing work inspired many contributions over the years to support several worthwhile projects. Donated open space funds aided trail clearing and trail markers, tree identification and marking project along trails, park benches for trail sites, restoring overgrown fields to farmland, access road and parking area for the State Park, a raptor Show at Allamuchy Day, and creating a natural fence line with 30 blue spruce trees.

The Start of the Norwood Commission

Preserving open space was the initial impetus for the formation of Norwood Environmental Commission in 2004. That year, during a Borough Council meeting, a suggestion was made to sell a piece of Borough parkland within the Central Woods. Opposition to selling the land led to the formation of a small, vocal citizen’s action group, and ultimately a change in the Borough’s governmental leadership, the appointment of the Environmental Commission and the formation of a wonderful alliance with the Meadowlands Conservation Trust.

The Commission's ongoing efforts over two long years led to the preservation of the original Borough parkland and the remainder of the Central Woods, comprised of over 120 acres of

wooded wetlands and streams. And Norwood granted a permanent easement on the property to the Meadowlands Conservation Trust.

The citizens of Norwood greatly appreciate the efforts of first Chairperson Marie Springer, whose passion started the ball rolling, former Mayor Michael Kaplan, who understood and supported the cause, the extremely dedicated, knowledgeable and passionate former and current commission members and countless others, for protecting and preserving our open space, the character of our town, the quality of our air and the clarity of our water. We look forward to protecting more of the town's remaining open space and continuing other important environmental initiatives. Much work is still to be done!

The Egg Harbor Township Arboretum and Nature Center

An abandoned dump, an alternative high school and a hawk. Together they worked to create a Tree Preserve, Botanical Garden and Learning Center for Egg Harbor Township.

Approximately 14 acres, the site once was a dump for yard waste and building materials. Since its closure about 30 years ago, much of the area has gone back to nature -- trees have grown, natural wetlands have flourished, and a meadow has grown. But the area was unappreciated and not used to its full potential.

The Egg Harbor Township Environmental Commission asked a simple question, "What can we do with this area that will preserve it and yet open it to the public to enjoy?" One way was to dedicate it as an arboretum. The Commission envisioned a park built by volunteers, rustic but with a few amenities such as a basic learning center. They would plant memorial trees to establish a park. Residents, particularly the children, would learn the value of trees, which plants are native to our area, and natural landscaping ideas for their homes, and have a quiet place to walk or meditate.

To make its dream a reality, the Commission reached out to the Eagle Academy, the Township's alternative high school. By building a park, the students would learn work skills, such as construction and horticulture, and life skills like problem solving and perseverance. The young people cleaned the area, planted 200 seedlings and built a simple shed as a learning center. Although they worked with no power tools, they met the deadline. And the following year, the students built a handicap-accessible overlook. To establish a water source, the Commission and students installed a solar-powered well, and they added a composting toilet.

The Commission has done the project in phases. It rehabilitated the landscaping with native plants and established a certified Monarch Butterfly Way Station. A Township resident has built and maintained a series of bluebird houses. Most recently, they replaced the original shed with an open air pavilion for classes and lectures.

This project's success is due to the fact that it uses partnerships on every level - public, private and non-profit – and involves people of all ages and skills. It teaches young people valuable lessons, both practical, such as construction, landscaping and communication skills, and more

esoteric, such as the importance of giving back to the community, using alternative energy sources, preserving nature and giving wildlife a helping hand.

And what did the hawk have to do with it? It was just there. Each and every time you go to the Arboretum, you can look up and the hawks are floating on the wind, a reminder of why we do this, and an inspiration to do more.

- Janis Hetrick, Chair, Egg Harbor Township Environmental Commission

Highland Avenue Woods Environmental Education Reserve and Nature Center

The crowning achievement of the South Plainfield Environmental Commission (SPEC) has been its successful work to preserve 35 acres that seemed doomed for development. This site is now known as Highland Avenue Woods Environmental Education Reserve.

The interest in this property, surrounded by light industry, split-level homes, strip malls and Route I-287, began in the summer of 1991. While investigating a prehistoric Native American campsite on the property perimeter, SPEC member Larry Randolph recognized its unique archaeological, geological and biological resources. Upon his recommendation, the SPEC conducted an environmental inventory, discovering healthy upland woods and sensitive wetlands that provided diverse habitats in a compact area. Among its assets are a mosaic of streams, a native wildflower community, over 80 species of birds, and unique glacial pingoes.

In 1992 the Mayor and Council agreed to SPEC's request to protect the first 20 acres, which the Borough already owned. Then the SPEC applied for and received a \$2,000 Green Community Challenge Grant from the NJDEP to construct and plant berms at the trailhead. With a Green Acres grant/loan approved in 1993, the Borough began buying privately-owned in-holdings and adjacent parcels. The next year the SPEC obtained a Freshwater Wetlands Permit that allowed it, with the aid of volunteers and high school students, to build two footbridges over the drainage ditch that divided the property. They removed tons of garbage and blazed and maintained trails for visitors. On June 11, 1994, the reserve was officially opened. Free weekly nature walks were offered in 1996 with guest guides speaking on a variety of subjects. The Board of Education acknowledged the reserve as a cooperative venture with the Borough, as an outdoor educational field trip destination for district schools.

A 1997 Watchable Wildlife grant of \$5,000, awarded by ANJEC, provided funds to install trail markers, a work table and a trailhead bulletin board. Volunteers wrote, illustrated and published a self-guided trail guide with a map and an inventory of plants and animals. As a result, the 1998 *New Jersey Wildlife Viewing Guide* highlights the Reserve.

The last addition to the Reserve's land inventory occurred in 2001, but that was not the last improvement. In 2006, the SPEC opened The Nature Center, a classroom and activity center built with a Middlesex County recreation grant, at the trailhead with minimal impact on the Reserve's land. The Friends of the Woods maintain the center and trail system, and provide educational guidance for hundreds of school, scout and public visitors yearly. More information is at <http://geocities.com/friendsofhighlandwoods>

-- Dorothy Miele, Chair, South Plainfield Environmental Commission

Ringwood Outdoors

The Ringwood Environmental Commission created and manages the program *Ringwood Outdoors* to encourage residents to enjoy, preserve and protect the town's abundant natural beauty. The Commission presents a variety of activities, both challenging and kid-friendly, including leisure walks, scenic hikes and bike rides. Anyone who completes three activities from one category receives a special certificate as an "R.O.C." -- a Ringwood Outdoors Champion. Group events are presented frequently, including walks and bike rides near the Botanical Gardens, historical Skylands Manor and Ringwood Manor, and Weis Ecology Center.

Launched in spring 2008, Ringwood Outdoors already has more than 100 members. Three group events in 2008 attracted a combined attendance of nearly 200 and had coverage by the *Suburban Trends* newspaper.

The Commission is proud that it has encouraged Ringwood residents to better enjoy and appreciate the outdoors, which will help foster an attitude of caring for and protecting open space in the future. In addition to environmental benefits, the program has helped families get more active and take part in these activities together.

The Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck

In 1994, Michael Hakim, a landscape architect and environmental commissioner from Harrington Park, suggested that a Hackensack River Greenway in Teaneck would complement the plan for one that he had just completed in Hackensack. He recommended that the Teaneck Environmental Commission, with approval of the Township, apply for a NJDEP grant for a planning study, which Teaneck received.

The Commission formed a subcommittee to work with Mr. Hakim. It was chaired by S. Frederick Guggenheim, the Commission's vice chairman, and included members from the Parks, Playground and Recreational Advisory Board, and the public.

The committee decided that Teaneck's greenway, in contrast to the one in Hackensack, would be for walkers only, and it would emphasize the river bank's natural features. A plan was drawn up and the committee was given official status as "The Hackensack River Greenway Advisory Board." The Board continues to meet and deliberate about the best means of effecting the plan, which includes purchase of properties and obtaining easements, when possible.

A "Friends of the Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck" also was formed as a separate not-for-profit corporation. The Friends have weekly walks, spring through fall, and provide planting and maintenance. Eagle Scout candidate Gabriel Schoenberg, of Boy Scout Troop 226, Teaneck, blazed pathways with colored markers to make it clear where the walking path went.

The Township's master plan revision of 2007 designates a River Zone, which must be kept free of commercial enterprise, and limits residential use to single family. The Commission's early recognition of the importance of preserving the natural features and restoring the river bank to its

original condition, to the extent possible, has been the overarching goal of this activity and continues to drive it to this day. The Commission hopes that someday a continuous walking path along the Teaneck side of the River will connect with similar pathways in neighboring towns.

RECYCLING

Ever since towns first created environmental commissions, they have been involved in recycling. In the early years, the commissions ran the recycling programs for their towns, smashing glass and stacking paper. When the state passed its mandatory recycling legislation requiring greater municipal and county involvement in recycling, commissions took on a strong supporting role.

Computer Recycling in Shrewsbury

Each year, the Shrewsbury Environmental Commission holds its Computer and Electronic Recycling Day in conjunction with Earth Day. The Commission has collected over 14,500 lbs of electronics, saving the Borough tipping fees. In addition, by creating a recycling event in a Green Fair atmosphere, the Commission has been able to foster Green Initiatives and promote Educational Programs.

The event includes environmental games, environmental literature handouts, and displays from environmental vendors. Many local businesses donate food and drink to help make the recycling drive a success. Community participation includes Shrewsbury Borough School's Green Team and Environmental Club, Red Bank Regional High School's Environmental Club, the Department of Public Works' Recycling Truck, Garden Club, Master Composter, Girl Scouts, Shade Tree Commission, and Native Plant Society. Shrewsbury Borough School's Environmental Club displayed a giant mosaic footprint made of plastic bottle tops and asked visitors, "How are you going to reduce your carbon footprint?"

Shrewsbury is well on the way to "going green." The day has become a focal point in creating community awareness, participation and pride in Shrewsbury's Environmental Programs. --
Patricia Kurdyla, Shrewsbury Environmental Commission

Paper Recycling in Verona Schools

Verona's elementary schools have been teaching recycling since 2003. Due to fiscal constraints, the Verona Environmental Commission (VEC) faced an uphill battle in getting the school board to implement actual recycling in the schools.

The VEC began its quest in early 2004 by creating an eight-page guide based on the "New Jersey School Manual on Recycling" and presenting it to the Board of Education's Business Administrator and Operations Manager. Wary of costs, the Board agreed to a pilot program at one school. The VEC gave donated bins and the recycling guide to the school, launching the successful program in October 2004.

One year later, two VEC members approached the principal of a second elementary school, the Township's largest. While the principal was enthusiastic, the School Board continued to be reluctant. So the VEC sought and received Township approval to use its monies to purchase recycling bins for the school. The program removed approximately two tons of paper from the trash stream.

The VEC then sought to expand recycling to the other two elementary schools, the middle and high school. The School Board had ongoing concerns regarding the cost of the program. Undaunted, the VEC lent its support to a recycling effort at the high school in which students managed collection and transported the recyclables to the town recycling center. In 2007, with assistance of the town manager, the VEC and BOE finally were able to utilize the Township recycler.

By the spring of 2008, the school programs were so successful that the School Board asked the operations manager to look into school-wide recycling. The VEC helped vet the paper recycler and met with the schools to discuss new collection and pick up procedures. By October 2008 every Verona school was recycling paper. The VEC is now looking to add aluminum and glass recycling at the schools.

When asked what they have learned, the Commission answers that persistence and persuasiveness are key to getting separate entities of government to work together, and that communication pays off in the end.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Millburn AquaFest

AquaFest is the Millburn Township Environmental Commission's (MEC) annual water education program for the Township's public elementary school students. Martine Redman Donofrio, former Chairwoman of the MEC, initiated the program in May 2004 to educate students about water and how to be better stewards for clean water and the environment in general.

The MEC, with the Millburn High School Environmental Club, has presented Aquafest every year at a different Township elementary school, with the exception of 2007 due to Martine's untimely death. It serves about 250 students each year, and local media cover the event. During the three-hour program, elementary students in grades three through five experience six to eight guided activities and interactive displays. Students learn:

- how stormwater is processed,
- what effects different contaminants have;
- how the proper and improper handling of the water table affect flora and fauna;
- why conservation of water is important and some ways they can conserve;
- how drinking water is processed, tested and distributed;
- treatment of grey water; and
- the relationships between land, oceans, lakes, rivers and reservoirs.

Through Aquafest, students learn to decrease their environmental impact (especially on water), and are introduced to the study of water and other aspects of environmental science. Indeed, many of the current High School Environmental Club members have stated that Aquafest piqued their interest in the environment, which they have sustained through participation in the Club.

Bradley Beach Environmental Commission

The Bradley Beach Environmental Commission (BBEC) has played a significant role in educating residents and local schoolchildren and spearheading changes in Borough policies and procedures that impact the environment. The BBEC has an established liaison with the Elementary School and its Environmental Club. Over the years the students have volunteered to plant dune grass, help at town-wide garden plantings, sweep the beaches, and work at the town's greenhouse. Students not only recycle ink cartridges, cell phones and plastic bottle caps, but also host the annual Arbor Day celebration. The children also raise funds to protect the rain forests and endangered animals. Most recently they spearheaded in the "Earth Hour" initiative. The BBEC and the students each benefit from this relationship - BBEC mentors the students and the students provide fresh ideas, enthusiasm, and energy.

In 2008, the BBEC, with the Department of Public Works (DPW), School Board, Shade Tree Commission, and the school's Eco-Club members, constructed a 1400 square foot rain garden and outdoor classroom on the border of the school's playground. It treats up to 250,000 gallons of stormwater annually. Asphalt removal and excavation were completed in July and planting was performed in September. The Monmouth County Master Gardeners provided the design and incorporated students' ideas that included a butterfly sanctuary, rain gauge, solar bird bath, bird feeder, a stepping stone path, and two picnic tables. Informative signage will also be added.

The Commission also participates in local festivals and other public events with informational tables/displays that highlight its projects and recruit volunteers for current and upcoming activities. At each informational table, the BBEC provides kid-friendly activities and handouts and showcases various initiatives. For 2009, the BBEC is coordinating with ANJEC in an effort to launch a green awareness initiative and intends to rotate one of the four ANJEC Green Displays at each of our events.

This busy commission has also created the first successful dune system composed of Christmas trees in New Jersey, did storm drain labeling, purchased dedicated recycling containers for the beachfront and Main Street, got a Clean Energy Grants from the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) to install solar electrical systems on four buildings in the municipality and initiated a mutt mitt program that educated pet owners on the importance of cleaning up after their pet. Based on efforts by the BBEC, Bradley Beach was selected to participate as one of three beach municipalities in New Jersey in the five year monitoring program of ocean debris. The study revealed an annual increase in debris of 22.5%, with the leading source of debris being land-based. The Commission hosts the local Clean Ocean Action Beach Sweeps in the spring and fall to pick up and catalogue marine debris on the beaches.

-- Aleksandr Modjeski, Bradley Beach Environmental Commission

Contests Help Commission Create Environmental Concern

Organized on March 25, 1975, the Caldwell Commission has been active ever since. The Commission has involved local schools to help get the environmental message out. Caldwell was the second municipality in Essex County to institute a recycling program for its residents. To promote the program, along with Earth Day 1981, the Commission initiated a poster contest for the school children in Caldwell. The contest has remained an integral part of the Commission's work. Starting with "The Importance of Recycling" in 1981, subsequent themes have included

"Ways to Stop Global Warming," which coincided with Mayor Susan Garland's signing of the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement in April 2007. In 2008, the theme "Transform Your Trash" had students creating sculptures from materials that could be recycled. These activities engaged students and their parents in the green movement. The theme for this year's contest is "Green Your House" to encourage residents to collectively reduce their carbon footprint by planting trees or constructing a "rain garden" on their property. The Commission's goal is to meet the community partnership and outreach component of Sustainable Jersey. The invited students from Caldwell College to participate by showing how they are greening their dorms. The winner of the college section is eligible for a gift basket, while the K-12 students receive cash awards plus certificates. All winners are acknowledged at a Caldwell Borough Council meeting and at the same time the Arbor Day Tree Planting is announced. The Caldwell Library displays the winning entries of the contest and helps give out information on the contest. Recently, winning entries have also been displayed at the Commission's annual Green Living Fair in September- another method for educating Caldwell about how to become "green".

The contests for students have given the Caldwell Environmental Commission the recognition and platform to help Caldwell deal with its present and future environmental challenges. By creating contests that reflect the issues the town faces, the Commission feels that it has been able to muster support when needed. For example, the citizens passed the referendum for an Open Space Trust Fund in November 2008 by a 2-to-1 margin.

-- Ann Marchioni, Chair, Caldwell Environmental Commission

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Commissions do a wide range of other activities, advising their local governments and advocating on important issues. Examples of these projects follow.

Cranford's Regional Planning for the Rahway River

The Township of Cranford is a suburban community in central Union County. Over its almost 40-year history, the Environmental Commission has had many accomplishments, but the one of which they are the most proud is an on-going project of regional planning for the Rahway River.

The 4.79 square-mile Township is nearly completely developed. About five miles of the 30-mile Rahway River snake through the Township. The River rises in central Essex County and flows south past Rahway, eventually into the Arthur Kill.

While the River is a source of enjoyment and pride for Cranford residents, it has also been the source of significant flooding, principally the result of a large increase of stormwater runoff caused by the rapid development of the area. During Hurricane Floyd in 1999, the Township experienced severe damage to houses and businesses, with many residents being evacuated from their homes by boat. Over the last few decades, the Township has completed many projects aimed at reducing the amount of flooding.

In spring 2004, the Commission began to discuss the concept of regional planning to help reduce flooding and improve water quality through stormwater management and litter control. Cranford lies downstream from most of the 18 towns along the River. If the Commission could heighten the awareness of all of the River communities to the flooding problems and water quality, the town could achieve significant reductions in flooding.

While the idea of regional planning was not new, nothing of note resulted from earlier efforts. Nevertheless, with the Township Committee considering a new flood project, the time was right for another effort. Over the course of 2005 and 2006, with the support of the Township Committee and State Senator Kean, the Environmental Commission held a series of meetings, attended by more than 50 mayors, municipal engineers and environmental commissioners from ten communities, many of whom attended more than one meeting.

As a result, the Commission agreed to work with the Rahway River Association (RRA) and its Executive Director, Dennis Miranda, to create a program of community involvement and education. The Association designated the year as “2007: Celebrating the Rahway River,” and made similar designations for 2008 and 2009. Activities include monthly walks and hikes and educational presentations in Rahway River watershed towns. Ten communities held watershed-wide cleanups in celebration of Earth Day each year. Over 90 people from many of the watershed towns attended a State of the Rahway River Watershed Conference in January 2008. Another conference, The State of Biodiversity on an Urban Landscape, is scheduled for May 8, 2009. A group of environmental commissioners and other representatives from watershed towns has met frequently over the past three years. The efforts of the Cranford Environmental Commission and the RRA inspired a 90-page Rahway River Greenway Plan released by the graduate Comprehensive Planning Studio at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University in February 2009.

The Commission hopes that a newfound appreciation of the Rahway River prompts the communities to strive to protect its open spaces, improve the water quality, increase public, value its rich fauna and flora and protect the Rahway River and from further human abuse.

-- Nelson Dittmar, Chair, Cranford Environmental Commission

Cape May Point Landscape Ordinance

Cape May Point received the Conservation award from the NJ Audubon Society in September 1990 for the landscape ordinance completed earlier that year. The impetus for the ordinance came from Cape May Point being the last “gas station” for migratory birds and butterflies before crossing the Delaware. The town needed to preserve vegetation and trees as a source of food and shelter. The Commission drafted an ordinance requiring that, before a zoning permit can be issued, a landscape plan must be submitted and approved by the Zoning Officer. At least 60 percent of the lot must be left in its natural state and any trees cut down must be replaced.

On September 9th 2008, the town’s ordinance was amended, adding language describing the intent of the ordinance. It now states that the ordinance continues the “history of coexistence of human habitation with natural habitat that supports legendary concentrations of migrant and resident wildlife.... The trees on both private and public lands are crucial to the continued ability

of the Borough to support a world-class migration spectacle.... The maintenance and replacement of the excellent variety of trees is necessary to retain what is effectively an arboretum and a premier nature sanctuary.”

-- Sally Sachs, Chair, Cape May Point Environmental Commission

Borough of Beachwood - A Push for Clean Energy

The Borough of Beachwood’s Environmental Commission contacted Principal Paul Gluck of Toms River Intermediate South School to ask the school to host a biodiesel truck, “Rolling Sunlight,” which was part of the Global Warming Story Tour 2008. The school is close to the Beachwood Elementary School, one of seven schools in the Toms River Regional School District with solar panels. The biodiesel truck with its 256 square feet of solar panels was located in the school parking lot and powered laptops and a stereo playing Bob Marley.

Principal Gluck said the event tied in to the eighth-grade environmental science unit, and 150 eighth graders participated, learning more about renewable energy. “Middle school is the perfect age (to see this) because this is when they start paying attention, asking questions and want to make a difference,” Principal Gluck said. “It just re-emphasizes to parents that we do need alternate sources of energy.”

Robert Clark, chairman of the Beachwood Environmental Commission, Mayor Ronald W. Jones, Jr. and Councilwoman Katina L. Clark attended to show the town’s commitment to renewable energy. Robert Clark said he wants the federal government to put the same amount of effort into the development of renewable energy as Beachwood. Mr. Clark also said those efforts, which are saving money and aiding the environment, should be coming from the top levels of government down, not from small government and up.

Mayor Jones added “We have a plan to make Beachwood the greenest community in the state of New Jersey”. Councilwoman Clark added that the Environmental Commission hopes to add solar panels to a new first aid building and make sure that all new public buildings in the borough are built “green”.

The Toms River Intermediate South School was the only New Jersey stop on the three-month Global Warming Story Tour. *The Press of Atlantic City* and the *Asbury Park Press* published articles about this event.

Hammonton Specimen Trees Project

A few years ago, Joanna Conn, a member of the Hammonton Environmental Commission, took on a "search for specimen trees" project in the town. Usually these trees stand alone as a focal point in the landscape. Her mission was to raise awareness about large, old trees that are unique in size, age and beauty.

Joanna’s committee consisted of another Commission member, Kathy Sedia, a professor of Biology at Stockton College, and Terri Caruso, a long-time Commission member. They set the

criteria that trees must be healthy and measure larger than 12 feet in circumference, with a single trunk at the point of measurement.

They selected three trees: a European purple beech, a swamp white oak, and a tulip poplar with an entwining wisteria vine. These trees are indeed treasures, and preservation of their existence adds character to the community. Plaques placed on each tree state the common name, botanical name, estimated age, girth, and name of the property owner. Joanna judged the beech as the most magnificent tree in town. It is estimated to be over 150 years old. The oak is the fifth largest on record with the NJ Community Forestry Program. It also is estimated to be over 150 years old, and was saved from a chain saw years back when the property owner wanted to enlarge his home. The poplar has a wisteria vine, measuring two feet in diameter, wrapped around its trunk, which gave Vine Street its name. With an estimated age of 115 years, it is situated across the street from a school, and has been admired by many students over the years.

The Commission encourages the residents of Hammonton to reflect on the long-term effects of removing trees. A 50-year-old tree will take another 50 years to be replaced. Joanna reminds us of the words of Thomas Jefferson, "Too old to plant trees for my own gratification, I shall do it for my posterity."

Red Bank Commission Helped to Establish a Shade Tree Committee

In 2003 several members of the Red Bank Environmental Commission observed that the trees of the Borough were not being adequately conserved, and decided to advocate for the establishment of a Shade Tree Committee. Commission members wrote a sample ordinance and approached the Mayor and Council to suggest its adoption. In 2004, after several months of discussions with the Commission, the Council passed an ordinance creating a Shade Tree Commission (STC). That ordinance was an important accomplishment, which has subsequently been improved by amendments.

After the STC was formed, the Mayor appointed five members, one of whom is also a member of the Environmental Commission. The STC has been active in preserving and enhancing the trees of the Borough. It has worked with the Neighborhood Preservation Department, and obtained grants and donations to plant about 400 trees. It works with the Borough Arborist, the Department of Public Utilities, and volunteers to plant and maintain trees and remove hazards. In addition, both the EC and the STC review the landscape plans of development applications, and often suggest additional tree plantings and more appropriate species.

Long Hill Township's Applicant Handout

In 2006, the Long Hill Township Environmental Commission recognized that many homeowners came before Township boards with plans that were inconsistent with sound environmental practices and the municipal ordinances that support them. This often resulted in time-consuming and expensive revisions of their projects before returning to the Board. The Commission worked with the Township Engineer, Township Planner and the Planning Board to develop an *Applicant Handout for Homeowners* that addresses these issues in simple, non-technical language. It asks about the proposed development's impact on environmental features such as stormwater runoff, steep slopes, bedrock, or surface waters. It requests that the applicant assess site

conditions for presence of rare or unusual plants or animals and mature trees. It also asks what are the proposed changes to the property, including buildings, plantings, presence of any hazardous or toxic substances, or construction of roadways.

The brochure is handed out with each application packet and the Commission has already seen an improvement in the environmental details of applications.

-- Leonard W. Hamilton, Ph.D., Chair, Long Hill Environmental Commission

Tenaflly Borough Goose Project

The Borough of Tenaflly worked with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Water Resources Program to improve local water quality by planting a buffer of native plants around the town pond at Roosevelt Commons. Abundant geese had been a pollution problem for years at the pond and adjacent school playing fields. Rutgers provided a landscape design plan and technical expertise, and the Tenaflly Department of Public Works prepared the site. Between 70 and 90 residents and Borough officials spent June 14th planting and laying seed to create the vegetative buffer. The program successfully eliminated the presence of the goose population, thus improving the overall quality of the pond water that feeds the Tenakill Brook, a C-1 waterway that flows into the Oradell Reservoir.

--- Sandra Divack Moss, Chair, Tenaflly Environmental Commission

Westville Environmental Commission

Westville established its Commission in 1987 and appointed Commissioners who were members of a Citizen Group that actively opposed the siting of a Resource Recovery Facility within 1200 feet of residential homes. The Commission was charged with monitoring and ensuring strict compliance of DEP regulations for this and other industries whose operations could impact the health and safety of Westville's residents. Our first success was in securing a DEP PM-10 Air Monitoring Station, which was positioned at our elementary school.

In 1989, Texaco proposed a co-generation facility with the intent of placing high-power transmission lines within 100 feet of residential yards. After an intensive review of the health effects associated with continuous exposure to electro-magnetic field radiation, the Commission deemed this an unacceptable risk. The Commission's request for underground transmission was considered too expensive and after several months a compromise was reached. The lines were routed further north across the parking lot of a former school building, currently occupied by the Iron Workers Union. The Borough relinquished its intent to build a strip mall along the highway, and the Union was paid a fee for access. It was a win-win agreement.

In September 1992, a private owner attempted to re-zone an area on Big Timber Creek from Parks Recreation to Commercial/Residential use. The Environmental Commission effectively drew public support, forcing a change of venue to the school auditorium. The Commission's report and request for Environmental Impact Studies were instrumental in stopping the project and the Borough eventually purchased the property to become a beautiful landscaped park dedicated to a former Mayor.

-- Joyce Lovell, Chair, Westville Environmental Commission