

2019 Achievement Awards

Environmental Commissions Category

Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission: Berkeley Heights Vegan Fest 2018

The Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission sponsored a three-day long Vegan Fest that was free and open to the public. Through attendee education and participation, the event aimed to provide residents with tools to incorporate healthy living into their daily lives. The EC used Vegan Fest as a vehicle to increase people's awareness and mindfulness about their daily routines and choices, particularly their food selection and exercise regimen. There were a number of events, from yoga and tai-chi to expert panels on health and sustainability to a vegan cooking contest. By enabling the public to hear and interact with experts having medical, exercise and wellness, and legal backgrounds, the EC educated people about the health and environmental impacts of their diet. Hundreds of people, babies through seniors, attended the series of events.

Cherry Hill Environmental Board: Conservation Community Service Project

Cherry Hill took an innovative approach and focused on providing volunteer opportunities for community groups and individual groups to help improve public lands. They established a recruitment and volunteer coordinator who broke down their volunteer projects into organizational, national, and individual intensive categories and tailored projects to meet the needs of the volunteers so that they could have team building opportunities. Through establishing a recruitment and volunteer coordinator, the conservation projects worked on and completed one or more of the following:

- a. Connection of people with nature
- b. Erosion prevention or control
- c. Litter and debris mitigation
- d. Invasive species removal
- e. Sustainable trail use of open space lands

Closter Environmental Commission: Closter McBain Farm

The Closter Environmental Commission started a farm project which began when a land exchange, initiated by the borough, preserved five and a half acres of farmland that has been tilled since the early eighteenth century. The original and on-going mission of MacBain Farm is to introduce Closter families to fresh produce - how it is planted, grown and harvested, without pesticides. Closter residents are permitted to pick one bucket full of veggies each day the farm is opened (presently three days a week) at no cost. Residents are encouraged to volunteer at the farm to help with weeding, in addition to welcoming visitors and learning and teaching about what happens at the farm.

Delaware Township Environmental Commission: Meadow Trail

Delaware Township had a subdivision which resulted in the donation of open space acreage, located between homes on one side of the subdivision and the Delaware Township School (DTS) on the other. The donation included the stipulation that a trail be constructed from the subdivision to the school property for the children from the subdivision to walk to school. The Delaware Township Environmental Commission took advantage of this opportunity to restore the wetlands and the surrounding area back to its native habitat for use as a community resource, transforming it into an outdoor STEM classroom for the 400-500 students at the adjacent school and an open space stewardship education site for the greater community.

Hackensack Environmental Commission: Hackensack Community Garden

The Hackensack Environmental Commission (EC) was re-formed in 2018 and among one of their duties is to research the use and possible use of the open land areas of the city. The EC located an area of land that was being under-utilized and had become a storage place for Department of Public works equipment which was not an optimal use of the land. With a recommendation from the EC, the City Council passed a resolution designating that area of land along with the greenhouse to be designated as green space. The garden has become a community hub and provides educational opportunities for residents. Planting the community garden there has refocused attention on this unused resource.

Hopewell Township (Mercer) Environmental Committee: Out of the Ashes and the American Chestnut

The Hopewell Township Environmental Committee conducted an inventory of ash trees when the loss of tree cover due to the Emerald Ash Borer became apparent. They then proposed a two-pronged approach to deal with the loss. The Hopewell Valley Arts Council worked with The Howell Living History Museum and arranged for a sawyer to mill the wood of felled ashes. The Arts Council then utilized some of the wood by "upcycling" the wood in the construction of educational art installations in the Township.

The EC also has committed to reforestation throughout the Township with an innovative partnership with the American Chestnut Foundation and several area environmental groups. The EC identified sites for chestnut planting throughout Hopewell Township. Orchards of chestnut trees have been planted, highlighting the efforts to restore this iconic and economically important American native tree which is in danger of extinction due to the chestnut blight in the first half of the 20th century.

Madison Environmental Commission: Plastic Free Week

To help create momentum for a Single-Use Bag ordinance, the Madison Environmental Commission launched a Plastic-Free week and urged residents to take seven voluntary actions. The campaign enabled them to make a presentation to the Borough Council on the hazards of plastic pollution. They had events geared for people throughout the town, from students to seniors, from businesses to town employees. They conducted reusable bag giveaways, pledge and giveaway events where people took the pledge and received a free, native pollinator plant or a free reusable bag. They did a great deal of education and outreach groundwork and an ordinance was introduced in Madison and the Chathams last week. Best of luck to you!

Waterford Twp. Environmental Commission: Recycling Sticker Project

Waterford Township Environmental Commission members attended recycling workshops in neighboring towns. They created flyers and social media posts and then collaborated with neighboring Berlin Township to create recycling stickers for all of their residents. EC members and township employees then canvassed their town to place recycling stickers on all recycling bins. They also distributed stickers and explanatory information during National Night Out and via a tax bill insert.

Non-Profit Category

Rutgers Center for Environmental Exposures and Disease: Countdown to Cleaner Air: Street Scientists and the Fight for First Street

Local community members, in partnership with community -based organizations, churches, Rutgers University and elected officials took action in Elizabeth NJ that led to cleaner air by banning container trucks in their neighborhood. Deacon Walter Leak of the Mt. Calvary United Church on First Street in Elizabeth makes his living driving tractor trailer trucks and led the fight for cleaner air in the First Street neighborhood. Residents conducted a truck count that revealed more than 50 trucks per hour during a typical weekday morning. Air monitoring results showed spikes in black carbon with each passing truck, an indicator of diesel exhaust pollution. The City of Elizabeth Council then unanimously passed an ordinance to restrict traffic on First Street to vehicles under four tons, essentially banning tractor trailers. Follow-up study found that there was an 86 percent reduction in truck traffic and an 80 percent reduction in black carbon and ultrafine particle counts.

Rowan GeoLab, The Nature Conservancy & NJ Conservation Foundation: The New Jersey Conservation Blueprint Phase II -- Protecting New Jersey's Land and Legacy

The Conservation Blueprint Phase II represents a major overhaul and rebranding of the web site completed in June 2019. The web mapping interface was completely redesigned to be more intuitive, efficient and elegant. Multiple technical enhancements improved functionality and search capabilities. The initiative also included a major redesign and rebranding of the landing page including new icons and logos for the various themes.

Conservation Blueprint Phase has received feedback from many constituents and users who have indicated that they regularly use the Blueprint and that it has proven valuable for conservation and environmental activities.

Sustainable Essex Alliance Energy Procurement Cooperative: Community Choice Energy Aggregation for Five Essex County Towns

The towns of Maplewood, South Orange, Montclair, Verona, and Glen Ridge contracted for a third-party electricity supplier which resulted in favorable bids for their residents. Each of the towns held town hall meetings after the contract was awarded to inform residents about the program and their right to opt out if they chose. About 85% of the eligible residents remained in the program which will run through December 2020.

The winning bid and the resulting contract is expected to save residents about 10% of the supply price, averaging about \$150 per residence. The provisions require that the supply include 20% more Renewable Energy Certificates than required by New Jersey law and marks the communities' commitment to encourage a rapid transition to renewable electricity supply.