



# ANJEC REPORT

Local Environment Matters

SPRING 2022

## Inside:

- Special Issue – cutting plastic pollution in NJ
- NJ agriculture's triple threat
- Top 2021 legislative wins for NJ's environment





## Director's Report

New Jersey is leading the way to a plastic-free future. The more than 130 local plastic reduction ordinances supported by environmental commissions (ECs) across New Jersey have initiated a sea change of actions to end plastic pollution.

This spring, ANJEC is supporting what we hope will be the third in a trifecta of plastic pollution bills to be passed by the New Jersey Legislature and sent to Governor Murphy's desk. We have heard ECs concerns loud and clear that you want to improve NJ's recycling system. That's why we are thrilled to be working with the Senate Environment Committee Chair, other supportive members of the Legislature, the recycling industry and others to support policies that advance extended producer responsibility (EPR).

EPR is a lifecycle approach that shifts responsibility for the environmental impact of a product to the manufacturer rather than the consumer. There are multiple components of a strong EPR bill, including bottle bill return systems, reducing plastic packaging, and eliminating toxins from packaging. Neighboring states to the north, including New York, Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine, have passed bottle bills that require certain products to be produced in returnable and refillable bottles. More advanced examples of EPR laws shift the responsibility of materials collection and recycling from the public sector and taxpayers to manufacturers.

Maine passed an EPR law in 2021 for a single-use plastic packaging program. Producers of plastic products will pay into a

fund based on the amount and the recyclability of packaging associated with their products. It requires plastic manufacturers to bear responsibility for the full lifecycle of the single-use plastic materials they produce by requiring those manufacturers to pay for the recycling of their products. In New Jersey, the cost of recycling is borne by municipalities and, ultimately, taxpayers. EPR shifts the responsibility for the cost of ending single-use plastic pollution to those causing the problem.

### Advancing the fight against plastic pollution

EPR legislation in NJ will build upon the *Plastic Pollution Reduction Act* signed in 2020 and the *Recycled Content Law* signed in 2021. The former goes fully into effect on May 4 and bans all single-use plastic bags (with minor exceptions for items such as newspapers, dry cleaning, and transporting your goldfish), and prohibits the use of polystyrene food containers (with minor exceptions for pre-packaged, shelf-stable food).


The law also bans paper bags for stores that sell food and are larger than 2,500 sq. ft. So, your local pizza and sandwich shops can still use a paper bag, and there is also an exemption that permits pharmacies to use paper bags to carry prescription medications. The reason paper bags are banned in most cases is because they have a large carbon footprint – one of the *Act's* goals is to advance climate change goals.

The *Recycled Content Law* will go into

effect in five years. It will require that a large array of products be manufactured using post-consumer, recycled content. This law includes items such as: plastic trash bags, contractor bags, glass and plastic beverage bottles and rigid plastic containers like those often used for take-out food. The *Recycled Content Law* increases manufacturer demand for post-consumer recycled content, and therefore sets the stage for the EPR legislation.

We look forward to working with ECs on the implementation of the existing and new legislation to lead the way in ending plastic pollution. Please read on page 7 to see how NJ towns are fighting plastic pollution, and visit [NJNoPlastics.org](http://NJNoPlastics.org) for more information on how you can help ensure these laws are successful!

  
Jennifer M. Coffey  
Executive Director



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**565 MUNICIPALITIES ..... ONE ENVIRONMENT**

Executive Director ..... Jennifer M. Coffey  
Editor ..... Julie Lange Groth

The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions is a private, non-profit educational organization serving environmental commission and open space committee members, concerned individuals, non-profits, and local officials. ANJEC's programs aim to promote the public interest in natural resource preservation, sustainable development and reclamation and support environmental commissions and open space committees working with citizens and other non-profit organizations.

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# In this issue:

- 2 Director's Report
- 4 Ready for takeoff – NJ's plastic bag ban
- 6 Plastic ban resources for towns
- 6 Why you should visit the ANJEC YouTube channel
- 7 New bill transforms recycled materials to valuable resources
- 9 Reaching into the heart of communities to improve water quality
- 11 Candace McKee Ashmun Memorial Fund
- 12 Acting Locally
- 15 NJ agriculture's triple threat
- 18 Eight basic steps to establish a stormwater utility
- 20 Green infrastructure is sprouting up all over South Jersey!
- 22 Green Infrastructure at work in NJ communities
- 24 ANJEC announces 2022 Open Space Grant program
- 25 What communities can do now to address the climate crisis
- 27 Environmental wins of the 2020-2021 legislative session
- 28 Self-care for frazzled EC members
- 30 Let ANJEC help with your next event
- 31 Lechner Scholarship

*On the cover: Azaleas bloom in a community garden in Hamilton, NJ. Photo by Autumn's Memories*

# Ready for takeoff

## ECs are helping to implement the new plastic pollution law

By **N. Dini Checko**, ANJEC Project Director

*Beginning May 4, 2022, New Jersey's new plastic pollution law ( P.L. 2020, c. 117) prohibits all stores (including retail, food service businesses and grocery stores) from selling to, or providing their customers with, single-use plastic carryout bags, with certain exceptions. In addition, grocery stores larger than 2,500 square feet may not provide or sell single-use paper carryout bags, and instead may provide or sell only reusable carryout bags. The new law also prohibits selling any polystyrene foam food service product and prohibits all food service businesses from providing any food in a polystyrene foam food service product.<sup>1</sup>*

**E**nvironmental commissions have led the way to get this bill passed, and their efforts to reduce single-use plastic have helped to remove more than a half million plastic bags annually from the waste stream. But the fight is not over! Local action will be key to successfully implementing the new Law, starting with education and outreach. Secaucus and Lambertville have already made a strong start in getting the public and local businesses on board.

### Secaucus building on a strong record

Secaucus has been at the forefront of regulating single-use plastics for over a decade. The town passed a resolution in 2011 banning polystyrene foam food service products, commonly known as Styrofoam. This activated community education and outreach and encouraged removing Styrofoam lunch trays from schools. The town again was at the vanguard with their plastic bag ordinance

that went into effect in February 2020 banning single-use plastic carryout bags and instituting a 10-cent fee for paper bags. “We’re proud to help lead the change,” said Jennifer Schneider, Environmental Director, Secaucus Environmental Department. With over a decade of experience in education and outreach on single-use plastics, the town’s Environmental Department and green team continue to use a multipronged approach. Here are some approaches that have worked for them:

- tabling at the Secaucus Green Festival, a landmark community event that attracts thousands of people annually;
- using large, stand-up easels to explain the new law at store fronts, such as the front entrance to the busiest Walmart in the country;
- displaying banners on major roadways, including the Route 3 bridge;
- giving away reusable bags or bamboo utensils to residents at Town Hall and other events;
- making robocalls to remind residents to bring their reusable bags when shopping;
- providing Spanish/English educational materials via township newsletters, press releases, videos and municipal calendars;

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<sup>1</sup> NJ Dept of Environmental Protection website providing plastics law fundamentals: <https://www.nj.gov/dep/plastic-ban-law>

- proactively speaking with business owners/managers about the local ordinance and State law;
- recognizing businesses through the community's Green Restaurant Certification program.

## Planning is key in Lambertville

Similar to Secaucus, the City of Lambertville used a thoughtful communications plan to educate and empower the community about their 2018 single-use plastics ordinance. The Lambertville Environmental Commission promoted their Ditching Disposables campaign using a fantastic video. ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvNCdcGPbks](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvNCdcGPbks)) The concepts conveyed in the video could be implemented in other communities to educate residents and businesses about the new plastics law:

- Community Canvassing Day – volunteers going door to door to explain the new ordinance and give away reusable bags and door hangers;
- hosting a Sustainable Business Forum to highlight what local sustainable businesses are doing and discuss alternatives to plastics;
- upcycling old T-shirts into reusable bags and then giving them to local food pantries through a T-shirts to Totes program;
- educating and engaging students with a book reading of *One Plastic Bag* by Miranda Paul and designing their own bags as a craft activity (<http://oneplasticbag.com>).

## Recycle the rest

Even when single-use plastic shopping bags are eliminated, there's still a lot of plastic packaging going into the waste stream. Both Lambertville and Secaucus actively participate in the Trex Plastic Film Recycling (<https://recycle.trex.com>) program, which takes back plastic film and bags and exchanges them for a sturdy bench made



*Promoting reusable bags at Secaucus Green Fair*

of recycled plastic for the community or school. This program helps bring awareness about the large quantity of plastic consumed on a daily basis.

ANJEC has been hosting a series of webinars for environmental commissions, green team members and municipal officials to help educate their communities about the new Law. On February 8, JoAnn Gemenden, Executive Director of the NJ Clean Communities Council, offered the following education and outreach recommendations from BagUpNJ ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmxBw3EXCBo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmxBw3EXCBo)):


- Use the free multi-language resources provided by BagUpNJ, such as tent cards, videos and social media content ([www.bagupnj.com](http://www.bagupnj.com)).
- Partner with your local Clean Communities Coordinator to provide reusable bags.
- Proclaim May as BagUpNJ Month. (A model municipal resolution is available on their website).
- Send out press releases and write articles – samples available on the website.
- Stay informed: sign up for the NJ Clean Communities monthly newsletter at [www.njclean.org](http://www.njclean.org).

Remember, there's a lot of information and tools available and ready to share! 💧

# Plastic ban resources for towns

*Many tools and resources are available to help NJ towns promote plastic alternatives.*

You don't have to start from scratch when you're planning your awareness campaign for the new single-use plastic bag law. Here are some great sources to help you get the word out.

- NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection supplies basic information on the new plastics Law at [www.nj.gov/dep/plastic-ban-law](http://www.nj.gov/dep/plastic-ban-law).
- NJ Business Action Center offers roundtables and a vendor clearing house for alternatives at <https://business.nj.gov/bags/plastic-ban-law>.
- NJ Clean Communities provides free education and outreach materials, such as multi-language, downloadable social media kits, cling artwork, web banners, sandwich boards, tent cards, flyers, sample public service announcements and press releases/articles at <https://bagupnj.com>.
- NJ Dept. of Health is a good source for Straws-Only information and enforcement at [www.nj.gov/health/ceohs/phfpp/retailfood/singleuseplasticstraws.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/health/ceohs/phfpp/retailfood/singleuseplasticstraws.shtml).
- ANJEC's NJ No Plastics website includes flyers and FAQ's <https://njinoplastics.org>.
- Social media – Follow and reshare ANJEC Facebook and Twitter posts (FB: @ANJEC; Twitter: @ANJEC tweets). Also follow BagUpNJ on Facebook @BagupNJ. 



## Why you should visit the ANJEC YouTube channel

You can find recordings of ANJEC webinars, workshops and trainings from the past two years, including Environmental Congress presentations, on ANJEC's YouTube channel - ANJEC Views. This is your opportunity to:

- view presentations you may have missed;
- provide training for new environmental commission members; or
- share valuable content with municipal officials.

You can find it all at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCCEuWtY-juaDStB-2zS5SpQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCEuWtY-juaDStB-2zS5SpQ).



# New bill transforms recycled materials to valuable resources

## New Recycled Content Law will revitalize recycling

By **Alex Ambrose**, ANJEC Policy Associate

In Trenton, there are often bills passed that on the surface seem mundane and even boring – and many of them are. When a New Jersey resident reads the title of a bill that says “Establishes Post-Consumer Recycled Content Requirements,” I can picture their eyes glazing over. However, this bill (S2515/A4676) has huge implications for the production of plastic, glass, and paper in the State, and therefore on the health and safety of our environment. It requires that instead of using virgin materials, manufacturers must use recycled material to make their products.

This is a HUGE step forward for New Jersey, where our recycling markets are struggling.

Overseas countries are no longer taking our waste, and the sight of a plastic bottle on the side of the road is still all-too familiar. Instead of our plastic bottles and paper bags sitting in a landfill, they should become usable materials for companies to give a second life.

The NJ Legislature learned from states like California – where a similar law is already in place – what works and doesn’t work. One of the benefits of this legislation is that it will revitalize the struggling

recycling system by mandating the use of recycled content in making new products, which would then stimulate demand for recycled materials while reducing pollution such as marine litter and microplastics.

### What’s in the bill

The law says that after two years, if it is sold in the state of NJ:

- All rigid plastic containers must be made of at least 10 percent recycled content, increasing every year with a cap of 50 percent.
- All plastic beverage containers must be made of at least 15 percent recycled content, increasing every year with a cap of 50 percent (an exemption for hot beverage containers only requires 30 percent).
- All glass containers must be made of at least 35 percent recycled content.
- All large paper carryout bags must contain at least 40 percent recycled content.
- All plastic bags must contain at least 20 percent recycled content, increasing until it reaches 40 percent recycled content.

There are many more specific provisions and examples in the law

([www.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2020/S3000/2515\\_R5.HTM](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2020/S3000/2515_R5.HTM)), and these will be made clear when the Department of Environmental Protection begins its rulemaking process. One seemingly small but extremely impactful part of the bill is the prohibition of polystyrene loose-fill packaging, also



*NJ's recycled content bill aims to reduce the amount of plastic waste generated by manufacturers.*



known as packing peanuts. With so many more environmentally friendly and economically practical alternatives out there, it seems like a no-brainer to ban these wasteful and frankly, irritating products. Can you remember the last time you opened a package and were happy to see packing peanuts?

## A trifecta of pollution prevention

ANJEC has been advocating for a "trifecta" of legislation to address a wide swath of single-use plastic pollution. The three pieces of legislation include:

- *Plastic Pollution Reduction Law*, which was passed and is going to be fully implemented on May 4, 2022.
- *Recycled Content Law*, which was passed in January and will begin its ramp-up in two years.
- *Extended Producer Responsibility bill*, which is ANJEC's number one legislative priority this session.

These three pieces of legislation will make a huge impact on the effects of single-use materials, particularly plastic, in our State. The *Plastic Pollution Reduction Law* cuts consumption of single-use plastic products and helps consumers learn the importance of reusable bags and containers; the *Recycled Content Law* takes our single-use materials and turns them into useful resources for production; and the *Extended Producer Responsibility bill* asks

industries that make single-use products to take responsibility for the entirety of the life cycle of their products. This can be done in a variety of ways, including removing toxins from and reducing the amount of single-use material in their packaging.

For too long the burdens of the single-use plastic and the recycling crisis have fallen on consumers. It's time for the industries who make these materials to bear some of that burden as well.

Imagine a world where you go to the store and buy a frozen pizza knowing there are no toxins in the plastic wrap, no extra pieces of packaging, and that the cardboard box you will use once will have many other lives after you recycle it. Imagine a world where your children, your nieces and nephews, and grandchildren don't have to see plastic bags stuck in a tree on every street corner of their neighborhood. Imagine a world where the companies that mindlessly pump out single-use plastic materials actually take responsibility for the harm they are causing. That is the kind of world we at ANJEC want, and thanks to members like you, we are even closer to achieving it. And who knows – maybe the polymers in that Snapple bottle you picked up at Wawa once were held by Bruce Springsteen himself! 🌊



# Reaching into the heart of communities to improve water quality

## One environmental leader's approach in the face of environmental inequity

By **Amanda Brockwell (she/her)**, ANJEC Director of Development and Donor Relations

The Lower Raritan Watershed is situated in the densely populated central corridor of New Jersey, spanning four counties and parts of fifty municipalities. It has a long history of urban development along the Raritan River and connecting waterways with significant water quality challenges. Heather Fenyk, Ph.D., AICP/PP, Founder and Board President of the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership (LRWP), was faced with the seemingly overwhelming challenge of determining where to begin in restoring the watershed.

For Heather the approach seemed clear. "I routinely ask myself – where is the greatest need?" she explained. For the past seven years she has convened a group of dedicated board members and volunteers who now work together toward the shared vision of restoring and enhancing the Lower Raritan Watershed through science and stewardship. Heather also served on the New Brunswick Environmen-

tal Commission for 10 years and she credits the experience with helping to sharpen her skills in building relationships with the City Council, the Planning Board, and other decision-making bodies.

The LRWP leadership team uses US Census data with an emphasis on life expectancy and flooding as a crucial tool in targeting where to begin addressing the complex puzzle of improving water quality in the urban and suburban landscape.

"Low life expectancy and flood data often correspond to the location of contaminated sites, lower socio-economic communities, and historically disadvantaged areas where people live," Heather explained. Health issues

*Heather Fenyk*



stemming from environmental contamination can contribute to shortened life expectancies in low-income and minority communities. In other words, the data is used to paint a picture showing where the environmental inequity is greatest.

The data, however, are just the first ingredient in an ever-evolving recipe for community engagement that applies Heather’s natural talent for reaching into the heart of communities to effectuate change. Establishing and growing relationships with community members, particularly those where generational environmental injustice or a language barrier may exist, is not accomplished without creativity and perseverance. Although Heather warns that there is no template for achieving meaningful engagement in the community, she offers the following tips.

**Top three tips for equitable community engagement:**

**1. Demonstrate a commitment to collaboration without predetermined outcomes.** Admittedly, it can be difficult to make the initial contacts necessary to connect with the community. Reaching out to environmental commission members, neighborhood watch groups or other committees is a good place to start. Then listening becomes crucial, even when you don’t like what you might hear.

**2. Create opportunities to engage around the environmental issue through shared purpose and a level playing field.** For example, the shared experience of working side by side on a cleanup within an overburdened commu-

nity (pulling out tires and garbage from the muck) opens an opportunity to build trust and respect that can become a foundation for continued collaboration. Similarly, learning the lay of the land together through an organized walk of the area allows for sharing historical knowledge. This can have important environmental implications (the location of an underground stream, for example). Don’t forget to invite the elders and historians in the community to capture many voices and perspectives.

**Environmental equity**

means protection from environmental hazards as well as access to environmental benefits, regardless of income, race and other characteristics. Creating environmental equity is the objective of the environmental justice movement.

“Many poor, brown, and black communities throughout New Jersey are saddled with disproportionate legacy contaminant issues in their water and soil. They face greater flood risk, have fewer opportunities for buyouts from flood risks, and have less access to nature, parks, and outdoor space compared with wealthier communities. With respect to legacy contaminants, even when laws are on the books to clean up our waters, soils, and sediments, time and again the poorest communities are overlooked, with priority given to wealthier watersheds.”

– Heather Fenyk, April 2019

**3. Leverage the power of storytelling.** For example, the LRWP and the South River Green Team cohosted a community discussion to capture stories about the different ways water matters to people living in the community. Participants contributed their water stories, which became part of a public statewide archive and digital exhibition that creatively visualizes, interprets and maps New Jersey water stories and the waterways that inspired them. LRWP also offers a blog series called “Voices of the Watershed” that invites an array of perspectives to be shared regarding the complex history and relationships that people have with the land and waterways.


What not to do

1. **Don't be deterred by a lack of immediate results.** Like many experiences in life, things often don't go as planned. Be open for unanticipated results to emerge. For example, during Raritan River cleanups the LRWP discovered a large number of metal figures of Lord Ganesh polluting the river. Recognizing the large Indian-American community living in the area, they learned that the placement of the figurines of the Hindu god in the river stemmed from the celebration Ganesha Chaturthi, a tradition to commemorate rebirth. Through listening and learning about the tradition and understanding the symbolic importance of immersing Ganesha in water, a strategy emerged around using chocolate Ganesha's immersed in milk to maintain the symbolic heart of the tradition while reducing pollution of the waterways. Heather is quick to recognize that,

**What is an overburdened community?**  
As defined by law, any US Census block group where at least 35 percent of the households qualify as low-income, at least 40 percent of the residents identify as minority, or at least 40 percent of the households have limited English proficiency.

despite the educational efforts and chocolate alternative provided by LRWP to reduce the number of metal Ganeshes polluting the river, some statues are still found in the streams and rivers. However, the unanticipated result that emerged is the engagement of as many as 80 Indian-American youth who began participating in the river cleanups.

2. **Don't forget to follow-up with new contacts.** Sustained engagement with the community is a critical and not following up with an individual after they've participated in an event can be a missed opportunity. A thank you isn't enough. Heather emphasized


the importance of tapping into what motivated them to come out and inviting them to the next event or creating another opportunity for engagement, which can lead to future community participation. 

Candace McKee Ashmun  
Memorial Fund

The ANJEC family honors the memory of our founding executive director, friend, colleague and mentor Candy Ashmun, who was our most loyal supporter and volunteer right up to her last days.

ANJEC has established the Candace McKee Ashmun Memorial Fund in her honor. Donations to the fund are used to support the ANJEC Open Space Stewardship Grant Program, an annual program for municipal environmental commissions to carry out local stewardship projects.

Candy's support of ANJEC's mission and her unwavering belief in the power of the local environmental commission makes this program a perfect way to remember her legacy for years to come.

**To donate,** mail a check to ANJEC, PO Box 157, Mendham NJ 07945. 



# Acting Locally



By **Stephen Carroll**, ANJEC volunteer;  
**Barbara Patrizzi**, Cherry Hill Environmental Board; and  
**Michele Gaynor**, ANJEC Resource Center

## Smashing pumpkins – Having fun while doing good

Bernards Township's first Pumpkin Smash event on November 5 was designed to dispose of leftover pumpkins in an environmentally sustainable manner while providing entertainment for the community. It was held locally at Dogwood Farms and sponsored by Bernards Township Environmental Commission (EC), Bernards Township Library, Dogwood Farms, Bernards Township Municipal Alliance & Youth Services Commission, the Governor's Council on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse and the Somerset County Board of County Commissioners.

The event's dual goals were to reduce the number of pumpkins going to landfills, where they emit methane, and to provide a pandemic pressure release for the community. This goal was aptly described in the event advertisement flyer as follows:

"Looking for something to do with your old Halloween Pumpkins! Don't trash it! Smash it! Join us for a Pumpkin Smash! Bring your old pumpkins to the Dogwood Farms, and smash/throw the pumpkins for a constructive way to relieve stress!"

On the day of the event, aluminum bats were available for the participants, who ranged from young children to grandparents. Families brought their pumpkins and each participant was led one at a time (for safety) to a tree stump next to a fence around the farm's pig pen. When the pumpkins were smashed the remains were thrown over the fence and the pigs enjoyed

their dinner. The event was a "smashing success" and the Bernards Township EC plans to make it an annual event.

– Stephen Carroll

## Cherry Hill certified as Habitat Community

Worldwide, wildlife habitat is shrinking, fragmented and under pressure from human activity. At the same time, we are increasingly aware that all life forms benefit each other in a healthy environment, and a healthy environment must support native wildlife.



Photo by Barbara Patrizzi

*Angee Akeh shows off her coneflowers.*

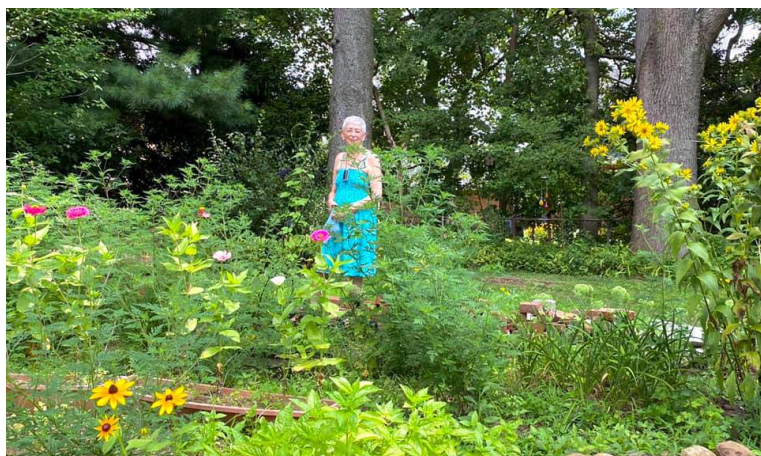


Photo by Barbara Patrizzi

*Bernadette Exley shows off her backyard habitat.*

Simply by planting native shrubs, trees or flowering plants and reducing lawn and hardscaping, we can provide needed food, shelter and cover for wildlife while reducing water runoff and harmful chemical use. By doing so, we are helping to restore a balanced ecosystem, cleaner air and purer water.

During the pandemic, the Cherry Hill Environmental Board urged residents to come together in a true community effort to bring nature home to their Township, one yard at a time. Hundreds of residents certified their yards as wildlife habitats through the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) Habitat Program.

Others volunteered at socially distanced trail cleanups, or removed invasive species from the community's green spaces. Still others planted and cared for pollinator-friendly community gardens.

The many volunteer hours and habitat certifications culminated last September when the municipality met all of the requirements necessary to be named as a NWF Certified Habitat Community.

Cherry Hill is the first town in Camden County to have achieved this distinction, joining only 150 other towns

in the US, and five in New Jersey, that are recognized by the NWF as leaders in suburban wildlife habitat restoration.

– Barbara Patrizzi

## Liberty student gets international recognition for light pollution efforts

Maria Scricco, a Warren County resident and currently a college student, approached the Liberty Township Environmental

*Antoinette Chance chooses pollinator-friendly plants.*

Photo by Barbara Patrizzi



Commission a few years ago to share some research concerning the impacts of light pollution on wildlife and the dangers of losing our natural night sky.

Maria discussed her personal project to address light pollution with the EC, who helped her locate resources within the Township and offered to support her efforts. She encouraged the EC to consider a local ordinance to preserve the rural beauty of the night sky and to prevent the adverse effects that light pollution can have on wildlife and the health of people. The EC submitted a proposed night sky ordinance to the Mayor and Council, who declined to pass it.

Maria had attended a program in Washington, DC, called Girls Nation, where she was able to campaign on a national level for more recognition of light pollution issues. She also worked for the creation of a mock federal light pollution bill. Maria said, "It was such a unique opportunity, where I was able to meet with 100 other girls from each state around the nation and discuss these ideas, was able to go into the White House and Senate buildings, and meet the Vice President."

Maureen Bonner, a member of the Liberty Twp. EC, was impressed by Maria's work on light pollution and in 2021 she nominated her for the Rising Star Award offered by the International Dark Skies Association (IDA), which works to protect our dark skies for present and future generations. The award honors students of any grade level who demonstrate an enthusiasm for, and commitment to, dark sky conservation or research into natural darkness and light pollution. Maria was awarded this honor along with five other students from around the world.

For more information on the IDA visit [www.darksky.org/](http://www.darksky.org/). – Michele Gaynor



*Maria Scricco*

## Preservation plans come together in Somerset County

Somerset County is believed to be the first NJ county to incorporate three separate plans for open space, farmland and historic preservation into one single *Preservation Plan*. The components include: an *Open Space Preservation Plan* and a *Farmland Preservation & Agricultural Development Plan* – both of which are updates to existing plans and required to qualify for State funding to support land preservation – as well as a new *Historic Preservation Plan*. Together, these three elements are intended to provide comprehensive and integrated strategies for land use, funding, and partnerships affecting preservation across all three issues in Somerset County.

The *Plan* states that "...it is possible for Somerset County to look forward to continued prosperity not only through growth, but also because of the preservation and conservation of the County's many assets associated with its natural resources, recreational opportunities, farms and history."

Last August a draft of the *Plan* was posted on the County's website and residents were encouraged to participate in any of four virtual public meetings held in September and October with public comments accepted through October. Adoption of the *Plan* is expected early this year.

– Stephen Carroll



# NJ agriculture's triple threat

By **Randi Rothmel, PhD**, South Jersey Project Director

In just 15 years (2001-2016), 11 million acres of US agricultural land was lost to urban development, according to the 2020 American Farmland Trust report, "Farms Under Threat: The State of the States." That is equivalent to losing 2,000 farm acres a day. While praising New Jersey as a national leader in farmland preservation, the report ranks NJ as the third highest state regarding threats to farmland – losing 9 percent of its agricultural land to urban development. Today, there is a triple threat to farmland: residential development, large-scale solar fields and warehouses.

## Threats from residential development

New Jersey lost more than 300,000 acres of farmland to development between

1978 and 2012 according to the US Department of Agriculture 2017 Census of Agriculture – an area the size of Morris County. This land use change can be visualized in the NJ Map Land Change Viewer – [www.njmap2.com/landchange/](http://www.njmap2.com/landchange/).

Development in the post-WWII period, spurred by the baby boom, first pushed homes just outside of cities. With infrastructure and highway system expansion, suburban sprawl then moved further into rural NJ. Now housing subdivisions and mixed-use developments occupy many former farm fields. While growth occurred within every county, it was concentrated in outer-ring suburbs, coastal communities and the central Jersey corridor between Philadelphia and New York. Growth rates that significantly fell after the 2008 recession have begun to rise again.





*Large-scale solar installations don't belong on preserved farmland.*

Then the COVID pandemic saw city dwellers flock to suburbs seeking space to get away, increasing the housing demand with a 37.7 percent statewide increase in real estate closes in 2020, according to NJ Realtors. Though housing sales are shifting back to more urban areas as people go back to work, demand remains high and inventory shortages persist, putting more pressure for new construction on open space and agricultural land.

## Threats from solar fields

Solar projects are needed to meet New Jersey clean energy goals, but siting these projects on productive farmland threatens the long-term viability of agriculture. While the *Solar Act of 2021* (P.L.2021,c.169) provides some protection by preventing large-scale solar projects on preserved farms, it allows (with a waiver) for up to five percent of unreserved farms in State Agricultural Development Areas to install solar grids greater than five megawatts. This conflicts with the State Agricultural Development Committee target of preserving 500,000 acres of farmland. To date 243,543 acres have been preserved; leaving over 256,000 acres vulnerable to this five percent allowance for solar siting – nearly 13,000 acres, equivalent to 175 average sized farms covered in solar panels.

Dual-use solar or agrivoltaic farms present another issue. A legislative bill introduced in 2020-2021 (S-3484/A-5434) would have established a dual-use solar

pilot program on unreserved lands, while maintaining their eligibility for farmland assessment. Phillipsburg has agreed to an agrivoltaic farm project, but some farmers are concerned, as noted by Jeff Tober in a recent op-ed: "Farming that can take place around and under solar arrays is in fact quite limited."

In the meantime, massive solar projects on unreserved, prime farmland are being scrutinized. A proposed 800-acre solar project in Pilesgrove was rejected and an approved 600-acre project in Harmony Township is being challenged over land-use approvals prompting a lawsuit. While only three utility-scale solar arrays have been completed on farms, according to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection GIS data (<https://gisdata-njdep.opendata.arcgis.com/>), new applications are certain to be filed.

## Threats from warehouses

Warehouses have been sprouting like weeds throughout NJ. They are big business thanks to the Port of New York and New Jersey – the second busiest in the country. Growth of international trade and online shopping is fueling the high demand for warehouse space and the scarcity of locations along major thoroughfares has developers searching for alternatives – including farmland. In the Pennsylvania Lehigh Valley, warehouse sprawl consumed 25 percent of farmland between 1997 and 2015.

As NJ towns search for ratables, farmland is being designated as “in need of redevelopment,” like a 225-acre horse farm in Manalapan, now allowing for warehouse development. Franklin Township (Gloucester) recently attempted but failed to designate a 100-acre farm in need of redevelopment. A developer in Pilesgrove seeking a zoning change on unpreserved farmland pulled its application due to public outcry.

To stop rural sprawl of warehouses, Mansfield Twp. (Burlington) recently passed an ordinance banning new warehouse development as a permitted use. The township now wants to quickly update its *Master Plan* reflecting this ordinance to defend against legal challenges. A legislative bill (S4067/A5793) introduced in 2020-2021, would have excluded farmland as a redevelopment or rehabilitation area under the *Local Redevelopment and Housing Law*.

As warehouse development moves farther away from highway access, it puts more trucks on local roads not equipped to handle them - bringing noise, light pollution and stormwater runoff issues to local communities. In a recent NJ Future article by Tim Evans, one recommendation proposed was to develop a statewide warehouse plan establishing criteria for identifying suitable warehouse development locations

- Is this a permitted use or was a variance granted or zoning changed?
- Are there other environmental impacts to the surrounding area?

Proceeding with caution in considering development on productive farmland is key to maintain NJ as the Garden State.

#### References:

- US Department of Agriculture. 2020. Summary Report: 2017 National Resources Inventory, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, DC, and Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/nra/nri/results/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/nra/nri/results/)
- Op-Ed: Large-scale solar projects threaten New Jersey's shrinking farmland, Jeff Tober, *NJ Spotlight*, July 2021; [www.njspotlightnews.org/2021/07/large-scale-solar-projects-threaten-nj-shrinking-](http://www.njspotlightnews.org/2021/07/large-scale-solar-projects-threaten-nj-shrinking-)




## What EC's can do?

In reviewing any site plan for a development on farmland, an environmental commission should ask the following questions to guide them in making recommendations to their land-use boards:

- Are there prime soils, or soils of State importance?
- Is this farm targeted for farmland preservation?
- Does the application comply with the local master plan, open space plan or farmland protection plan?
- Does it meet new stormwater management requirements?

*farming-some-crops-might-flourish-but-major-limits/*

- Warehouse Sprawl: Plan Now or Suffer the Consequences, Tim Evans, 2021; [www.njfuture.org/research-reports/warehouse-sprawl-plan-now-or-suffer-the-consequences/](http://www.njfuture.org/research-reports/warehouse-sprawl-plan-now-or-suffer-the-consequences/) 



# Eight basic steps to establish a stormwater utility

By **Sheila Baker Gujral**, ANJEC Resource Center Director, along with *New Jersey Future*

In 2019, Governor Murphy signed the *Clean Stormwater and Flood Reduction Act* into law. Since that time, municipalities around the State have been investigating the opportunity this legislation provides to have an equitable and stable funding source to help manage the increasing stormwater threats that we face in New Jersey. Now 41 other states are already using this tool to help plan for and manage stormwater. If your community is curious, here is a breakdown of the steps to take.

## ***1. Vet the concept with top local officials***

Having an initial discussion with your local officials offers an opportunity to establish a high-level understanding of the “stormwater utility/user fee” concept and to explain how it differs from a tax and what the key benefits and challenges are. This stage ends with a decision point: should we create a local study team to examine the opportunity?

## ***2. Establish a core team of internal experts***

Create a small study team of key local staff (e.g., public works director, town engineer) and meet with an expert (i.e., consultant) who can explain stormwater utilities in depth. The decision point here is: should we present a proposal to the mayor/county executive or utility director?

## ***3. Engage the mayor, county executive or utility director***

Arrange a meeting between the mayor/county executive or utility director, the study team, community representatives and a consultant to review any existing stormwater programs as well as future needs, the pros and cons of a stormwater utility, and the path from concept to launch. If the decision is made to formally study the proposal, including hiring a consultant and creating an external Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) of “trusted voices” (e.g., local business and civic leaders, community representatives), the next steps are:

- Notify the municipal council/county freeholders and/or utility board.
- Educate the general public about why a stormwater utility is needed and that it is under study.

## ***4. Authorize a feasibility study to identify options that best suit the community***

In this step, you undertake a feasibility study to examine the issue in-depth, identifying an approach that best fits local circumstances. These types of studies have two phases: financial issues and utility operations. Determine whether to do this work in phases, focusing first on the financial aspects to enable a quick decision on whether it’s an appropriate tool, or conduct a full study of all aspects of both financial issues and utility operations. Typically, a consultant would be hired at this time.

## 5. Educate and solicit input

Educate SWAC members on the key aspects of the study and forward any of their recommendations to the mayor/county executive or the governing body, as necessary. This is vital public outreach. Determine how to respond to the committee's recommendations.

## 6. "Go" or "no go" decision

After an internal review of the feasibility study findings, alert the council/county commissioners about a decision. A "go decision" triggers the implementation phase, which may involve procurement of another consultant. A "no go decision" ends any further evaluation.

## 7. Implementation phase

The final phase involves all the tasks required to implement the program:


- Hold open house events for the general public.
- Conduct targeted outreach to stakeholder groups, such as businesses and nonprofits.

- Approve and adopt a stormwater utility ordinance.
- Develop credits and appeals programs.
- Create a billing mechanism: develop, integrate and test.
- Train staff: customer service, billing and technical personnel.

## 8. The final launch

When you launch your stormwater utility, you will notify your customers and share FAQs about the program, including fee structure, dedicated revenue and projects.

For more information:

- NJ Future Stormwater Utility Resource Center (<https://stormwaterutilities.njfuture.org/>)
- NJ Future SWU Decision Tree (<https://stormwaterutilities.njfuture.org/basic-decision-tree/>)
- Flood Defense NJ (<http://flooddefensenj.com/>)
- NJDEP Stormwater Utility Guidance ([www.nj.gov/dep/dwq/SWU\\_stormwaterutility.html](http://www.nj.gov/dep/dwq/SWU_stormwaterutility.html)) 





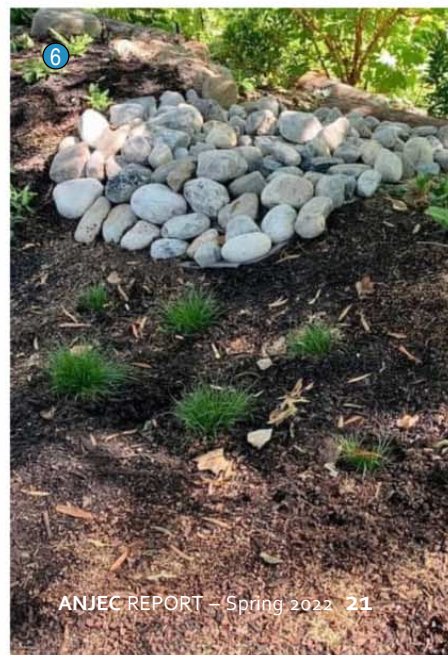


1. Pilesgrove Twp. Building & DP
2. Rain garden at th
3. Volunteers plant
4. Rain garden bor
5. Two rain garden
6. Rain garden at re
7. Homeowners rain
8. and 10. Environn
9. Volunteers help i





## Green infrastructure is sprouting up all over South Jersey!



Mayor Eachus with Cub Scouts assisting with rain garden planting at the Municipal  
 W complex – Upper Salem River Watershed  
 the main entrance of Quaker Friends Village in Woodstown – Upper Salem River Watershed  
 rain gardens at the Vineland Public Library – Menantico River Watershed  
 dering six-space porous parking lot at Garrison Memorial Veterans Park in Woodstown; A  
 garden at this site is next to a steep slope adjacent to headwaters of C-1 waterway. – Upper  
 watershed  
 is installed at the entrance to Vineland Business Administration Building – Menantico River

residence known as “Azalea Gardens” that homeowners offer to local community for  
 y visits & weddings (placed at steep slope leading to C-1 waterway to stop runoff and  
 er Salem River Watershed – Landscape Makeover Homeowners Rebate Program  
 n garden in Woodstown – Upper Salem River Watershed – Landscape Makeover  
 Rebate Program  
 mental Science students care for a stream buffer at Woodstown Middle & Regional High  
 s and Sports Complex – Upper Salem River Watershed  
 install rain garden at Pittsgrove Twp. Municipal Building and DPW Complex – Upper Salem  
 ed



# Green Infrastructure at work in NJ communities

## Addressing stormwater management, protecting drinking water, supporting wildlife and pollinators

By Cheryl Reardon, ANJEC Project Director



Over the past several years, ANJEC has been partnering with Rutgers Water Resources Program, several conservation nonprofits and community groups, environmental commissions and local municipalities to educate the public on opportunities and benefits of green infrastructure. This work is part of the four-state (NY, PA, NJ, DE) Delaware River Watershed Initiative ([4states1source.org](http://4states1source.org)) funded by William Penn Foundation (WPF) and National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

As New Jersey communities deal with more frequent heavy rain events, often resulting in flooding that causes damage to homes, businesses, infrastructure and community amenities, residents are increasingly aware of the worsening situation and asking, “What can be done?” Although there is no silver bullet, green infrastructure is a solution that yields benefits now and for the future.

One green infrastructure technique municipalities and residents can use to make a difference is with rain gardens that capture stormwater runoff from rooftops and impervious surfaces, naturally filtering out toxins while releasing it into the ground and recharging the aquifer. The cumulative impact can be great. Rain gardens are planted with native vegetation that provides added benefits of being well-suited to local soils/conditions, thus requiring less water. They provide wildlife habitat along with necessary food

sources for dwindling pollinator populations, thus supporting biodiversity in local ecosystems.

### How communities are working together

Let’s look at recent green infrastructure and rain garden projects in the Upper Salem River watershed of the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer: Using WPF and NFWF grant funding, ANJEC worked with Rutgers, the Woodstown-Piles Grove Joint Environmental Commission and local partners installing rain gardens at the Piles Grove Twp. Municipal Building, Woodstown Borough Hall and the Upper Pittsgrove Twp. Municipal Building. In addition to collecting and filtering stormwater runoff, the rain gardens also provide educational opportunities where planning decisions and development application reviews take place. In addition to these projects, a rain garden along with a porous asphalt parking lot was installed at Veterans Memorial Park at the headwaters of the Salem River, which is also the location of an active eagle’s nest.

As schools are also an important part of the community equation, two rain gardens were installed at the Mary Shoemaker Elementary School, along with a 1000-foot stream buffer filtering stormwater runoff from Woodstown Middle and Regional High School buildings and parking lots before it entered the C-1 protected waterway. Over 300 students participated in planting, and the projects will be used for outdoor science

education classes for years to come. Directly across from the high school, a rain garden was installed in front of the Woodstown Public Library, collecting rooftop runoff and again providing many educational opportunities to community members of all ages.

A rain garden was also planted at Auburn Road Vineyard & Winery to collect runoff from the winery's tasting and entertainment room and the parking lot. This rain garden also supports pollinators that are essential to the vineyard and surrounding farmland.

Two rain gardens were also installed at a Quaker assisted living facility, Friends Village, located adjacent to the high school property. One is located at the main entrance and the second is located just outside the large dining/gathering hall, where residents and guests enjoy the colorful native flowering plants with lots of bee, butterfly and dragonfly activity.

## Leave a lasting legacy

Show your commitment to protecting the environment while meeting your financial and estate planning goals by making a lifetime or testamentary gift to ANJEC.

There are many ways to incorporate ANJEC into your financial and estate planning:

- a bequest by will or living trust
- a gift of a life insurance policy
- a gift of retirement plan assets
- a charitable gift annuity
- a charitable remainder trust
- a charitable lead trust
- directing mandated IRA distributions to ANJEC.

For more information on how you can create a legacy of support and protection for NJ's environmental future, visit <https://anjec.org/planned-giving/>.

And, last but certainly not least, area residents planted rain gardens as part of NJ's Landscape Makeover Homeowners Rebate Program. As part of this program, homeowners attended an informational presentation (held virtually during the pandemic) and then a design session with Rutgers staff that included site drawings sized to accommodate the available space and volume of rooftop runoff.

Homeowners received a native plant/shrub list for their property's specific light and soil conditions. Once residents completed their rain gardens, team members met with them to inspect the project, review maintenance information and approve their \$500 rebate.

## Partnerships work

Communities spanning rural, suburban and urban areas of NJ have green infrastructure work taking place at municipal properties, DPW garages, firehouses, police and emergency buildings, parks and recreation areas, schools, libraries, senior living centers, lake communities, businesses and residential properties. Such community collaboration shows that partnerships work and that community members, when offered education and guidance, will choose to be part of the solution.

You can see photographs of several green infrastructure projects on pages 20-21 of this issue. For more information on using green infrastructure to address impacts of stormwater runoff in your community, contact ANJEC's Resource Center at [info@anjec.org](mailto:info@anjec.org) and ANJEC's website ([www.anjec.org](http://www.anjec.org)), as well as our YouTube channel (@ANJEC Views) where you can view and share recorded webinars. 🌱

# ANJEC announces 2022 Open Space Grant program

By **Elizabeth Ritter**, ANJEC Deputy Director

**A**NJEC is pleased to announce the continuation of the ANJEC Open Space Stewardship Grant program, now in its ninth year. One-year grants of up to \$1500 will be available to environmental commissions (ECs) in New Jersey whose applications are selected in 2022. No cash match is required.

Grant applications are due on Monday, May 2, 2022, at 4:30 PM. Successful applicants will be notified by May 20.

Suitable projects on preserved open space include, but are not limited to:

- pollinator gardens or habitats
- trail restoration, maintenance, signage
- inventories of open space or trails
- open space or trails assessments, plans, maps
- multi-town plans to link open space or trails
- conservation easement inventories, monitoring, outreach, education
- management of invasive species
- habitat enhancement on open lands
- restoration or maintenance of riparian areas within preserved public open space
- educational stormwater management projects on preserved public open space.

## Spotlight on ECs

The primary objective of the Open Space Stewardship Grant Program is to increase community awareness and appreciation of local open space, ultimately increasing public support for open space stewardship and local funding. Another objective of the program is to highlight the ECs who accomplish untold amounts of important work in their towns, but often operate under the radar.

Grantees are required to include community outreach and promotion/ marketing of their projects through activities such as



*ANJEC's Open Space Stewardship grants help support creation of bird habitat in Allamuchy.*

press coverage, social media and website postings, event attendance, signage, brochures and other efforts to bring attention to the projects. It is essential for commissions to continually affirm their value as a community resource, so their towns will trust and support EC efforts and programs.

Application materials are now available on the ANJEC website at <https://anjec.org/action-alerts/>. For more information, please email ANJEC at [info@anjec.org](mailto:info@anjec.org).

ANJEC's Open Space Stewardship 2022 Grant Program is underwritten by the Candace McKee Ashmun Grant Fund, established in 2020 with funds raised in the memory of ANJEC's first executive director and by generous donors like you. 🌊



*Howell's Community Garden expansion team*



# What communities can do now to address the climate crisis

By Jennifer M. Coffey (she/her), ANJEC Executive Director

The climate crisis is our greatest shared challenge. Climate change affects everything. It is causing unprecedented floods and droughts. Our ability to grow food and live in places inhabited for thousands of years is rapidly changing. We are witnessing mass species extinction at a rate our planet has not witnessed in its 4.5-billion-year history. There is growing acceptance of what science has told us for more than a half century: humans are causing the climate crisis and we are at a tipping point.

We absolutely must reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that we can sustain the Earth's water, climate and biological systems. As a race, we have both created and solved phenomenally difficult environmental challenges before. We no longer have rivers and lakes that glow orange or spontaneously combust, as we once did. While we still have a thin ozone layer in some places on the globe at certain times of the year, the ozone hole no longer poses the existential threat that it once did. The good news is that we can also do something about the climate crisis. The bad news is that we are acting much, much too slowly.

## Local action key

The large international conferences on climate change generate the most press, but we know that local action is the true path to tangible climate benefits. In consultation with environmental commissions and climate scientists, ANJEC has developed a shortlist of the most pressing climate actions municipalities can take right now. These actions are designed to address

the two most urgent climate issues:

(1) reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that we can keep the impacts from growing exponentially worse, and (2) improving resiliency so that we can prepare our communities for the impacts that we cannot prevent.

- **Conduct a municipal climate hazard vulnerability assessment** – All NJ municipalities must now conduct climate mitigation hazard assessments for inclusion in their land use plans in accordance with new requirements signed into law by Governor Murphy in 2021. ANJEC assisted the NJ Office of State Planning in developing municipal planning resources to aid municipalities in performing this assessment. We understand that passing a law and ensuring that it is implemented are two separate challenges. Environmental commissions (ECs) should ask their local elected officials and land use board members about when and how the municipality will proceed, and also ask to have a representative participate in the assessment. <https://nj.gov/state/planning/assets/pdf/resilience-plan-guide.pdf>

- **Enhance flood hazard area protection** – ECs should review local zoning and land use ordinances in light of current and future floodplain projections. NJFloodmapper.org and the pending Protecting Against Climate Threat rules from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) have data that accounts for sea level rise and increased flooding. We know that the past is no longer a predictor of the future because of climate change. We need to protect floodplains by





environmental inequities. Fracking waste is converted from gas or liquid to solid plastic products in factories known as “cracking” facilities because they

adjusting local zoning and State policies to prohibit inappropriate development in places that will flood in the near future. We need to stop putting people and places in harm’s way.


- **Promote use of electric vehicles and expand the charging network** – ECs should ensure their municipalities are implementing the requirements of the new statewide electric vehicle ordinance by installing electric vehicle charging stations and making EV parking spaces ready with certain types of new development (generally in development that creates more than 25 parking spaces). ANJEC worked with the State to develop the model ordinance ([www.nj.gov/dca/dlps/home/modelEVordinance.shtml](http://www.nj.gov/dca/dlps/home/modelEVordinance.shtml)) to ensure that every municipality incorporates these requirements into its land use codes and development checklists. ECs should also work with their local officials to ensure that new municipal fleet and police vehicles are electric.

- **Reduce plastic pollution** – Approximately 90 percent of single-use plastics are made from fracking byproducts. Fossil fuel advocates testify that reducing single-use plastics threatens the fracking industry’s economic viability by reducing the demand for fossil fuel extraction, which produces climate-heating greenhouse gases (GHGs).

In addition to avoiding GHG emissions, reducing single-use plastics also combats

break or crack hydrocarbons into simpler components that can be more easily manipulated into additional products, such as single-use plastics. These cracking plants are almost always located in communities with a preponderance of residents who are from minority groups, have low incomes and/or speak English as a second language. Reducing the use of single-use plastics is an essential component of improving water quality and habitats, addressing the climate crisis and fighting environmental racism.

ANJEC built a website ([njnoplastics.org](http://njnoplastics.org)) to support the rollout of *NJ’s Plastic Pollution Reduction Law*, which includes single-use bag bans, prohibits most polystyrene food containers and requires that plastic straws are available only upon request in restaurants, bars, and other places where food is served. Communities can ensure full implementation of this new law through community outreach and education. (See page 4)

The goal of all these actions is ultimately to address the climate crisis; however, even with wild success, we will continue to see the impacts of climate change throughout our lifetimes. There is a lag time between the emissions we produce or reduce and the impact they have on the climate – our climate doesn’t refresh as instantly as our internet browsers. But the actions we have laid out here will help us begin to make our communities safer as we weather the increasingly larger storms to come. 

## Environmental wins of the 2020-2021 legislative session

By **Rebecca Hilbert (she/her)**, Policy Associate, New Jersey League of Conservation Voters

The environmental community in New Jersey is celebrating major policy victories accomplished in the State's 2020-2021 legislative session. With the support of our partners, volunteers and donors we've helped pass bold environmental legislation in a bipartisan fashion that will have an impact on New Jersey for years to come.

One of the most notable legislative wins was the *Plastic Pollution Reduction Act*, which will reduce the 4.4 billion single-use plastic bags and paper bags equivalent to 1,300 football fields worth of trees that New Jerseyans use every year and will help protect our waterways and ecosystems.

New Jersey also took major legislative steps to modernize and electrify the transportation sector with an electric vehicle bill that seeks to electrify New Jersey Transit's bus fleet by nearly 2040 and creates a rebate program for the purchase of qualifying electric vehicles. This means cleaner air for all New Jerseyans, especially our most overburdened communities that live near transit hubs and dense, high-traffic areas.

We are extremely excited about the *Cumulative Impacts Bill*, a new comprehensive environmental justice law that addresses environmental racism and seeks to limit pollution in overburdened communities. We

congratulate the environmental justice advocates that led the charge for over a decade on this public health equity issue. It is the strongest action ever taken to limit the cumulative impacts of pollution on low-income individuals and communities of color in the nation.

We are also celebrating the passage of the "Save the Bees" Bill. This will help eliminate unnecessary uses of neonicotinoid insecticides ("neonics"), which are harming bee colonies throughout the State. New Jersey's pollinators are disappearing, with beekeepers losing between 40 and 50 percent of their colonies annually for most of the last decade.

An appliance efficiency standards bill was also approved by the New Jersey Legislature. Considered the best energy, water and climate policy never heard of, the new appliance efficiency standards are a prime opportunity to reduce energy use, costs and emissions for all rate payers, especially renters and low-income communities, who suffer from the highest energy burdens in our State. New Jersey's standards have not been updated legislatively since 2005. If New Jersey had adopted updated standards in 2021, savings could have reached over \$130 million annually by 2026.


**And there's more...**

*Safeguarding clean drinking water is a top environmental priority in NJ.*



In addition to these legislative priorities, environmental groups worked together to champion laws that:

- require all public water systems to inventory and replace their lead service lines within 10 years;
- make electric vehicle charging easier and more accessible throughout the State;
- expand the opportunities provided by solar energy through creating a grid-scale solar program,
- create avenues for towns to electrify their vehicles and school buses, and
- require all new warehouses to be built solar-ready.

We will work to keep this momentum going, as we push bold action to make New Jersey the most environmentally friendly State in the nation. We look forward to working with Governor Murphy and the newly elected leaders in the Legislature to tackle some of our most pervasive environmental issues, such as climate change and environmental racism. Preserving our beautiful State for our children and grandchildren has to be a top priority for all of us. 

# Self-care for frazzled EC members

By **Julie Lange Groth (she/her)**, *ANJEC Report* Editor

If you're a member of an environmental commission (EC), there likely aren't enough hours in your day. Protecting the natural resources in your town is a huge responsibility, with many facets and frequent crises. How do you balance the pressures of your personal and professional life with your volunteer obligations? Read on for a few suggestions.

## 1. Learn how to say no.

Taking on too many projects or responsibilities is a disservice to yourself and others. You get overwhelmed and burned out while your teammates are deprived of the opportunity to rise to new challenges. Figure out how much time you can devote to EC activities and then negotiate with the commission chair to determine which tasks you can reasonably accomplish in the time you have available.

## 2. Share the load.

The mayor needs a report by tomorrow's council meeting, a grant proposal is due by end of week and now an upset resident is

bending your ear over trees being clearcut in a new development. What to do first? Close your eyes; take a nice deep breath. Then, reach out to other team members and figure out how to prioritize and divide the work. (Just remember not to have conversations with groups of EC members that constitute a quorum unless you're at an advertised meeting.) And if there's too much work for the seven (or nine) members of your commission, consider adding subcommittees of community volunteers.

## 3. Take time to socialize.

Chatting with community colleagues about how you spent your weekend may not seem like good time management, but it can be relaxing as well as fruitful. Sharing stories helps build rapport, strengthens relationships and greases the wheels of cooperation and collaboration. Friendly conversations can often uncover hidden issues and reveal unexpected resources and opportunities for successful endeavors.

#### 4. Boost your confidence.

The demands of the job can leave any EC member feeling inadequate and unprepared. There's so much to know and it's hard to keep up with the evolving environmental field. Boost your knowledge and effectiveness by taking advantage of ANJEC's robust program of workshops, webinars and training for municipal officials. And stay informed on the latest environmental news with the online ANJEC News, a biweekly news digest specifically curated for your needs as an EC member.

#### 5. Spend time in nature.

It may seem obvious to environmental activists that the natural world is the perfect antidote to stress. But sometimes we get so caught up in the fight to protect the environment that we forget to go out and enjoy it. Scientific research has shown that being in nature not only contributes to emotional well-being, but it also helps reduce blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and the production of stress hormones. ([www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing))

#### 6. Think positive.

A positive outlook won't stop habitat loss or slow down climate change. But it can make problems seem more manageable and help you approach adversity in a more optimistic and productive way. It's also beneficial for your health. Optimistic people have a significantly lower risk of

dying from: heart disease, stroke, cancer, infection and respiratory diseases. ([www.healthline.com/health/how-to-think-positive#tips](http://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-think-positive#tips))

#### 7. Begin a personal peace practice.

Try to set aside a little time each day to nurture you mind, body and spirit. There are plenty of free online resources available to help ease your stress. Here are just a few examples:

- Meditation or quiet contemplation can help manage anxiety, increase self-awareness and gain a new perspective.
- Yoga, tai chi and other movement practices not only improve physical conditioning but fight stress and improve mood.
- Make a collection of inspirational quotes and post them around your personal space.
- Put on some favorite music and sing along or cut loose and dance. It's impossible to be in a bad mood when you're singing or dancing!

#### 8. Up your SQ (sleep quotient).

The quality and quantity of your sleep make a big difference in how your day goes. Poor sleep takes a toll on memory, alertness, decision making and problem solving. It also can leave you cranky and less effective when dealing with others – and can seriously compromise your health. But when you're lying awake at 3 a.m., a

restful night may seem like an impossible dream. Here are twelve tips for a better night's sleep. (<https://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/getting/overcoming/tips>)

*Spending time in nature is beneficial to body, mind and spirit.*





# Let ANJEC help with your next event

By Elizabeth Ritter, ANJEC Deputy Director

## Table displays and games

ANJEC offers a variety of different displays and games available on loan for use at local events:

- Plink the Plastic game – Surprising facts about plastic pollution;
- Passaic River display – Get to know, love and protect the Passaic watershed;
- Stormwater display – Why stormwater is important and how to manage it;
- Climate Change Pin Ball – Challenge yourself on how to address climate change;
- Carbon Footprint, Water Footprint Wheel of Knowledge – Choose between two fun game wheel themes;
- EQ Energy Challenge – How to save energy at home;
- Habitat Protection game – How to live with the plants and animals in our world;
- Green Infrastructure display – What is green infrastructure and why you need to know.

Each display comes with one or more handouts suitable for photocopying. Be sure to contact us early to reserve a display for your event. Email [info@anjec.org](mailto:info@anjec.org).

## ANJEC Resource Center handouts:

Duplicate these informative fact sheets and brochures.

- Anti-Idling pledge;

- Balloons Blow flyer;
- Clean Water for Our Town brochure;
- Environmentally Friendly Lawn Care Guide;
- Fertilizer brochure;
- EQ Challenge brochure;
- Easy Energy Action Plan;
- Green Infrastructure Guidance;
- Habitat Protection brochure;
- Landscaping for Wildlife brochure;
- Pet Waste flyer;

• Walk & Bike to School events checklist.  
Email [info@anjec.org](mailto:info@anjec.org) to get these and other available handouts.

## Film loan library

ANJEC also has a library of documentary films available on loan for public screenings, including:

- **A Plastic Ocean** – 20-minute educational version;
- **Bag It – Is your**

**life too plastic?**

- **Poisoned Waters** – Examines the kinds of pollution contaminating America's waterways;
- **Groundswell Rising – Protecting our children's air & water;**
- **Flow – How Did a Handful of Corporations Steal Our Water?**
- **Kilowatt Ours – A Plan to Re-Energize America.**

Contact ANJEC [info@anjec.org](mailto:info@anjec.org) for a full list of available documentaries and to arrange to borrow one. 🌊



*ANJEC game wheel*


## Lechner Scholarship

for a student in the environmental field

ANJEC will award a \$1200 scholarship to a New Jersey college student entering his/her junior or senior year. The scholarship is granted to encourage qualified students to pursue a career in a field related to environmental protection. The Lechner Scholarship Fund is a living memorial to Hermia Lechner in recognition of her many years of dedicated service and contributions to the preservation of open space and natural resources in New Jersey.

### An eligible student must:

- be a New Jersey resident;
- attend an accredited New Jersey four-year college or university;
- be entering his/her junior or senior year in the fall of 2022;
- be majoring in natural resources, parks and recreation, environmental law, environmental sciences or a related field;
- have a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better;
- have demonstrated an activist role in the preservation of open space, wildlife or water resources in NJ; and
- submit a completed Lechner Scholarship Application to ANJEC by May 9, 2022. (application and information at [www.anjec.org](http://www.anjec.org))

The Lechner Scholarship will be awarded by June 1, 2022. The winner will be recognized at ANJEC's annual Environmental Congress on October 14, 2022. 

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