

From: *Susan Robertson, Chair*

To: *Mayor Carolyn Dempsey and Chatham Borough Council*

Chatham Borough Environmental Commission Annual Report 2024

The Chatham Borough Environmental Commission (CBEC)

- held nine monthly meetings in 2023 (August was not noticed, April and December were cancelled), and kept minutes, agendas, and other related documents on the Borough's webpage.

- worked with other Borough committees, organizations, and municipal departments, maintaining official liaisons with the Planning Board, the Green Team, and the Borough Council.

Returning members were Susan Robertson (Chair), Patricia Soteropoulos (Vice-Chair), Rozella Clyde, Yana Doyle, Allison Slater, and Joseph Treloar. Nicholas Eck, Lisa Allocco, and James Cashel joined following the January 2023 reorg meeting. Susan Robertson returned as Planning Board representative, and Karen Koronkiewicz represented the Borough Council.

In October 2023, Rozella Clyde and Yana Doyle retired. Their invaluable service to the Borough was recognized by Council resolution.

We have been busy with many programs continuing from previous years and at least six new initiatives in 2023.

CONTINUING PROGRAMS IN 2023:

The Tri-Town, Town-Wide Yard Sales were held in April and October 2023. This is a continuing collaboration between CBEC, CTEC, Madison EC and the Great Swamp Water Association (GSWA). For the convenience of shoppers, GSWA posts a map of participating households. Approximately 88 households in April and 78 households in October registered to join the map, resulting in \$1,770 in donations to our nonprofit partner. A random survey of buyers revealed people traveling from PA, upstate NY, Staten Island, and shore towns. Since the partnership with GSWA started in 2021, the sales have raised \$5,420 for the GSWA and kept hundreds of items out of the landfill.

GSWA Pollinator Plant Sale is masterminded by a multi-town group and directed by the Native Plant Society of NJ. During February and March each year, we advertise the sale and promote the accompanying webinars which educate the public about the benefits of native plants. The sale opens in April and plants are distributed in May. The 2023 sale was extremely successful, selling out all 26,000 plants within 2-3 days. 26,000 plants yield many square yards of native habitat. The Borough had high sales – more than 25 flats of plugs, taking up two carloads. Next year, the pollinator group is ordering 27,000 plugs.

Joint Meeting Solar Project. CBEC has been involved in an advisory capacity in the project to position solar arrays at Joint Meeting on Passaic Avenue. To date, the solar provider has been chosen and the contract signed. The next step is the issuing of state permits to allow the installation.

Sustainability Fair and EV Expo: We again ran the Fair and EXPO – the 2023 event followed the same format as previous two years. The Sustainability Fair featured vendors and exhibitors from many areas of “green” interest. The Fair ran concurrently with the Farmers Market and featured entertainment by the students from School of Rock.

We also hosted our 4th Electric Vehicle EXPO at the same location. Our partners this year for the EXPO included the Central Jersey EV Association. Tom Salvus was on hand to take photographs. Despite heavy rain, there was still a good turnout from the green exhibitors, fewer cars from dealers, but some owner-drivers came for National Drive Electric Week and to pick up the EV giveaways. The highlights were the energy of the School of Rock musicians rocking out under a canopy and the awesome Rutgers University Solar Car.

The following programs were also repeated or ongoing from previous years.

- The EC and Green team are assisting the Borough in preparing the application for recertification with **Sustainable Jersey**. The working draft indicates 850 possible points for Borough's actions (350 are required).
- Continued our support for the **Friends of Drew Forest** by attending meetings inc. those with Open Space Commission and others. The Forest is a critical recharge for the Buried Valley Aquifer. The trees sequester the carbon and purify our drinking water. The loss of Forest puts more strain on our water source and those of 30 other towns.
- Quarterly newsletters and monthly Green Events guide.
- We worked on grants for native plants, community composting, and for the ERI.
- Running the EC's social media on Facebook and Instagram.
- Participation at the Borough's **Fishawack Fair** at the station parking lot in June 2023.
- Promoting the Chatham Borough **Home Energy Insight Program**, on EC media and partnering with chosen provider, Ciel Power, at three events in 2023. This has resulted in 60 home energy audits and seven 7 "refits" to improve efficiency, cost, and nature of home energy.
- Presenting to the Borough Council about EC projects.
- Undertaking site reviews and providing comments on environmental aspects of plans before the **Planning Board**.
- Attending Sustainable Jersey Summit, ANJEC Open Day, and various training sessions and webinars.

NEW IN 2023:

Year-long Waste Reduction Campaign: The Borough's new garbage contract for 2024 required residents to choose a can sized to suit their family's needs. This presented an opportunity for the EC to undertake community outreach highlighting ways to reduce garbage generation and thereby elect for a smaller can. The EC embarked on a year-long campaign to show by effective recycling, composting food scraps, reusing and refilling household cleaners, detergents and toiletries, shopping locally and on consignment to reduce packaging and shipping materials, it was possible to significantly reduce the amount of garbage a household produced.

We showed that choosing a smaller garbage can save money and the amount of trash going into the landfill. During these presentations and initiatives, we took the opportunity of promoting local resources, such as Java's curbside compost pick-up service and the shared Styrofoam recycling program at Madison DPW, the bi-annual Tri-Town Yard Sale and the Recycle Coach app.

"Take One Step to Reduce Waste": CBEC, the Green Team, CHS Green Team, Chatham Borough Mayor and Council, and Madison Mayor and Sustainability Committee implemented a campaign entitled "Take One Step to Reduce Waste". Social media posts throughout Earth Month featured prominent members of the community taking one step towards waste reduction, supplemented by educational

slides and resource guides. These posts proved extremely popular with many views, clicks, reactions, and shares. For example, over 500 people watched Mayor Bob Conley dropping off his compost and there were 600+ views of the EC Chair recycling Styrofoam.

These posts showed different “green steps” and were designed to educate and promote sustainable best practices at the individual, business, school, and municipal levels. The social media campaign directed residents to attend an **Earth Day Fair** on April 22, 2023, where they could meet vendors and exhibitors to discuss the Take One Step content in person.

Environmental Resource Inventory: The year started with the formation of an EC sub-committee working on re-write of the ERI. This is the document that municipalities choose to adopt to help with planning/zoning/policy adoption. It sits alongside the Master Plan, Open Space Plan, etc. The Borough’s existing document has not been completely rewritten for several years and is out of date. Additionally, new GIS technology is now available to create data-driven maps and tables.

The sub-committee devised an outline for the new ERI and interviewed consultants. We also looked closely at funding. A Council Resolution to launch the ERI project and to apply for a grant from Sustainable Jersey was passed in February 2023. A memo of recommendation to appoint the Land Conservancy was sent to Borough Administrator and Council on 7/25/23 in time for a resolution of Council in August approving a contract with the Land Conservancy.

To date, the EC has received the first three chapters for review and comment from the Land Conservancy together with searches of the Natural Heritage Database and the Landscape Project. The consultants checked the Landscape Project habitat mapping and the Biotics Database for occurrences of any rare wildlife species or wildlife habitat in the Borough and for occurrences of rare plant species or ecological communities.

Work is proceeding well, and the document promises to be informative and attractive. Later this year, a public event is planned whereby residents can contribute their own input into the ERI. We are looking for contributions from local birders, beekeepers, gardeners, and hikers. In addition, the Land Conservancy will give a presentation when the document is finished outlining important data and conclusions.

Land Use Board – and the EC’s site review process: In January, the EC Chair and Vice-Chair participated in a Northern Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance (NJSMA) mini-group review of land use board processes with Chatham Township, Morris Township, and Madison. It transpired that Borough’s site review process with the Zoning/Planning Board is not as useful for environmental review as other towns. The EC is involved too late in the process to provide effective recommendations. Since January 2023, there is ongoing work at the Borough with the land use boards to streamline the process by electronic communications, and introduce an earlier review process for HPC, Shade Tree, and the EC.

To this end, the EC Chair provided a draft environmental checklist to be included in applicant packet, together with examples of recommendations for applicants to include strong stormwater systems, solar panel readiness, building electrification (heat pumps for heating and cooling), native plant habitat and reduced impervious paving and lawn areas. Applicants would also be provided with a “Plant This, not That” guide to native and invasive plants. To date, these changes have not yet been implemented and it is hoped that these initiatives will be taken up again in 2024.

Native Garden Demonstration Project: This is a collaboration between various entities in Chatham Borough; namely the Community Services Department, the CBEC; Town & Country Garden Club of the Chathams (T&CGC), and Dirt Diva Gardens, (a local full-service garden design company).

Garden Park features new basketball courts, renovated tennis courts, and a contemplative space with benches and a summer awning enhanced by beautiful kiosks detailing the area's history as a former rose growing farm and natural pond. The hardscaping and benches were installed in 2022, but there was no money left from that municipal project to fund any plants or landscaping.

Another beautification project selected by T&CGC was a neglected memorial "rock" garden situated outside the town's Library at Memorial Park. The EC has been looking for a permanent site to plant some demonstration gardens to provide information and education on the use of native plants in areas readily accessible to residents, professional landscapers, and municipal grounds people.

T&CGC Club member, Caitlin Boyle, owner of Dirt Diva Gardens, offered her design services *pro bono* and Joseph Treloar of the EC, a self-taught native plant expert, helped select the plants.

The Community Services Department coordinated the voluntary efforts of the various parties to bring the creation of these two new gardens to fruition. On March 13, 2023, Mr. Treloar, Ms. Boyle, and Ms. Joyce of the T&CGC presented the garden initiative to the Council, a Resolution passed authorizing the writing of a grant for funds towards the costs of plants.

The objective of these two demonstration gardens is to present, promote and educate the public about the benefits to our environment of gardening with plants native to New Jersey. We hope to showcase how beautiful, hardy, and interesting native plants can be, as well as educate residents about the environmental benefits of "going native".

Information will be provided via QR code markers linked to the EC webpage which shows a photographic history of the project, and plant lists.

The gardens were installed in April by volunteers from Garden Club, EC, and the DPW. A spigot to aid with plant watering at Garden Park will soon be installed and a formal ceremonial ribbon-cutting will take place in spring 2024 when the QR plaques will be installed.

In January 2024, Congresswoman Mikie Sherrill convened an expert panel on native plants and wildlife habitats to promote new legislation she had sponsored on creating wildlife habitat on Federal properties. We were thrilled when she chose to highlight the two new 100% native pollinator gardens in the Borough as part of her presentation.

Be Bear Aware

In December 2022, NJDEP estimated that the population of black bears in northwestern counties, including Morris County, to be approximately 3,000 bears and growing. Given the increase in human-bear interactions and cull concerns, CBEC partnered with CTEC and Morris County Outdoor Education to provide an overview of the lifecycle, eating and breeding habits, environmental threats to traditional bear habitats, and dangers posed by and to bears in a suburban environment. Particular attention was given to personal safety in unexpected encounters with bears. The presentation was given at the Chatham Library and was well attended and very informative.

Other outreach included:

* Chamber of Commerce Secretary Allison Slater organized a phenomenal Taste of Chatham event in October. She extended the work she does for the EC on composting by having all the leftover food from the TOC removed for composting – keeping a total of 120lbs of food waste out of the landfill.

*The Ivy, River Road – We acted in an advisory capacity regarding the proposed solar installation and landscaping scheme.

* We continued to collaborate closely with Madison and the Township during Earth Month by promoting a Home Energy Summit at Madison Arts Center featuring discussions on energy efficiency, heat pumps, solar panels, healthy home air, and green building, and an EV Expo at Sunday Motor Co in April.

Goals for 2024

*Green Infrastructure program

*Electric Vehicle Chargers in Borough Public parking lots.

*A plan for the eventual electrification (or alternative fueling) of emergency fleet and DPW equipment, school bus rentals, and associated charging points at DPW, Borough Hall, and Chatham High School.

*Solar project with BNE-funds.

*" How Green Are You?" green business pledge. This program started in 2022 and requires extra work to finalize the Green Business registry on the Borough's webpage. Plans to work with the Chamber of Commerce to get this project finished.

*Climate Action Goals – These would be written in conjunction with 2025 Master Plan.

*School/Community Composting program.

*Christmas toy drive

*Wildlife habitat landscaping at Stanley

*Repair café – this collaboration with Madison stalled last year. There are repair experts looking for another venue, so hopefully this can become a reality in 2024/25.

*Celebrate Trails Day. This will take place on April 27th in collaboration with Community Services. Plans include a ribbon-cutting, trail clean-up and invasive plant strike force for the woodland trail at Shepard Kollock Park.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Robertson

Chatham Borough Environmental Commission, Chair