**2021 Environmental Commission Report to Mayor & Borough Council Atlantic Highlands, NJ**

**Regular members:** Blake Deakin, Larry Goldberg, Ellen O’Dwyer, France Karras, Linda Peng-Grooters, Paul Wright

**Alternate members:** James Krauss

**Planning Board members:** John McGoldrick, Brian Dougherty (alternate)

**Council Liaison:** Brian Boms

Meetings were conducted primarily virtual during calendar 2021 (with some in-person meetings toward the end of the year), which seemed to provide a small (but consistent) increase in public participation throughout the year.

Lenape Woods - Ellen Yung O’Dwyer took over as the Lenape Woods Steward from Blake Deakin and reported out regularly on the status of the trails. Ellen was able to work with our borough administrator to acquire some donated paint to repaint the entry kiosk at Ocean Blvd and East Highland Avenue. In addition, at that entry, the Environmental Commission heard a request to install a driftwood art sculpture of an anthropomorphic bear provided by artist Brian Boyle. This was approved by the council as well as subsequently by the Mayor & Council, including relevant design immunities.

Waterfront - Linda Peng-Grooters remained as Waterfront Steward during 2021 and reported regularly on the state of the Henry Hudson Trail on the waterfront. In addition, Linda and Brian Dougherty participated as captains for Clean Ocean Action beach cleanups twice during the year. Linda and Brian reported multiple times on the successes of the beach sweeps including numerical analyses of items and quantities of trash collected during these cleanups.

Bayshore Watershed Council - Throughout the year Larry Goldberg attended multiple Bayshore Watershed Council meetings and kept the environmental commission apprised of their agenda, including waterfront seining, ongoing concerns related to local horseshoe crab population, avian (particularly osprey) concerns, and other matters.

Parking - Throughout the year, the commission received regular updates on parking from Mark Fisher, chair of the parking committee. These included planned development to Hennessy Blvd parking as well as addressing parking concerns in the borough more broadly.

New Jersey Natural Gas Phase 5 Remediation - This was a recurring topic at the environmental commission; earlier in the year some resident concerns were fielded related to the project and directed to appropriate professionals at the borough.

Monmouth County Environmental Council - We received multiple updates from France Karras regarding the activities of the MCEC. These included promoting awareness of items such as joint land use studies and potential projects in the vicinity of NWS Earle.

McConnell Tract - Throughout 2021, ongoing discussions related to the proposed Denholtz project occurred at the environmental commission, with information shared that was not privileged by executive session. The environmental commission maintained a position throughout the year supporting the acquisition of open space as part of the project.

Plastics - The commission participated in the Atlantic Highlands Arts Council’s microplastics event, preparing a brochure about the impact of microplastics on our local ecosystem, as well as to attract members of the public to participate (providing our meeting schedule).

Reusable Bags - The Environmental Commission distributed the remaining AHEC reusable bags and then ordered another set to be distributed in 2022.

Atlantic Highlands Day - The commission exhibited at Atlantic Highlands Day.

Natural Resource Inventory - Later in the year, it was discussed that the borough’s Environmental Resource Inventory had not been updated in 20 years, where the recommendation is for it to be updated every 10 years. The commission discussed the importance of beginning the process of updating this document and strategized on how to do so, with the intent to form a subcommittee in 2022.

Planning Board Matters - Throughout the year there were discussions of various proposed developments in town, including the Third Avenue Church redevelopment application which included the removal of trees and the increasing of impervious surface. The commission contributed to dialogue related to this application.

Stormwater Ordinance - The requirements for a new stormwater ordinance were discussed early in the year. Ellen Yung O’Dwyer led the development of an Atlantic Highlands-specific stormwater ordinance, which was passed and then subsequently adopted by Mayor & Council.

Circle Hooks - Around midyear 2021 there was a discussion of the NJ DEP rule regarding circle hooks, but it was ultimately concluded that action or opinion was not needed by the environmental commission.

Knotweed infestation - Knotweed was a recurrent topic through much of 2021, with resident concerns raised around knotweed proliferation, specifically in the area of the Henry Hudson Trail. After study, the environmental commission largely concluded (without taking formal action) that there are limited options to deal with knotweed. Knotweed clearing by the county around the Henry Hudson Trail was observed and remarked upon by commission members.

Climate Change - This was an ongoing discussion at the commission throughout 2021, and discussions around taking formal action were contemplated. No formal action was taken in 2021, under advisement of the borough administrator that the commission should only act when it is ready to make recommendations that could have some concrete impact.

Empire Wind project - Throughout the year, the fact that BOEM was leasing multiple offshore locations and that the first location had been acquired for the Empire Wind project (located between the NJ northern coastline and Long Island) was discussed. The environmental commission was registered as a consulting body and continues to be made aware of ongoing developments.

Climate Resiliency - The commission held ongoing discussions related to climate resiliency, and referred back to the Bloustein school study of adjacent towns (“Adapting to Climate Change in Coastal Monmouth County”) to understand the municipal revenue impacts of 5-, 20- and 100-year storms under various scenarios. The commission received a guest presentation from Christine Symington, a representative from Sustainable Princeton.

Electric Vehicles - The Environmental Commission hosted a “Chalk Talk” to explain the benefits of electric vehicles to residents; there were also extensive discussions throughout the year around the acquisition of electric vehicle chargers, including engagement with some outside vendors to discuss proposals. There was also discussion of the statewide EV ordinance later in the year.

Arborist Ordinance - Early in the year the arborist ordinance was approved by Mayor & Council and then sent along to the planning board for consistency review.

Ongoing issues: Several issues remain “on radar” for the commission going into 2022, including (non-exhaustive):

* Electric vehicle chargers
* Updating the borough’s ERI/NRI
* Climate resiliency
* Ongoing remediation of Many Mind Creek
* Opportunities to enhance the existing stormwater ordinance
* Preparedness for the upcoming state-wide single use plastic ban