

City of Summit Environmental Commission Minutes, May 12, 2025

Participating: Donna Goggin Patel, Francie Cho, Dan Crisafulli, John Kilby, Mimi Zukoff

Council Rep: Michelle Kalmanson

Guests: Fred Blau, George Drossinos, Kathy Head

Donna Goggin Patel called the meeting to order at 8:07 PM. The April minutes were approved.

Additional Earth Day Clean-Ups: Donna Goggin Patel

The April 27 clean-up at the Clearwater Swim Club trails organized by Mandana Arvandi was successful. About 30 people helped to pick up trash there. On May 4, a group from Congregation Ohr Shalom cleaned in the Passaic River Trails and collected 6-7 bags of trash.

“Tiny Forest” Reforestation: Donna Goggin Patel

The small, species identification signs for the Tiny Forest are in production. Donna, Francie Cho and Mimi Zukoff met a group of four people from Hackensack on Friday, April 18. They have created rain gardens and are interested in creating a microforest. Mimi reached out to Tekla Pontius-Courney for advice on next steps with the redbuds (which are experiencing disease), and she understands how to check if we are concerned that any of ours are diseased.

Donna met Irvy Pinzon and Dwight Hiscano from The Summit Conservancy and Christina Perez there on April 28 to discuss a new bird monitoring project. The Summit Conservancy approved an “Echoes of the Forest” pilot to install a bird house in the Tiny Forest and video equipment to monitor a species. The city is on-board with this. Irvy and Dwight are coordinating with Jenny Hoff and Megan Trindell to advertise an “escape room”-type game where residents can answer questions correctly for a chance to vote on which species of bird they would like to see targeted with the bird house. The choices are the Black-Capped Chickadee, Eastern Screech Owl, and Northern Flicker. Francie, Mimi and Donna met Irvy and Christina on May 5 to examine weeds and assess potential invasive species in the Tiny Forest.

Rahway River Watershed Association will be hosting an event at the Tiny Forest on Saturday, June 14. Donna and others will be leading tours from 9-10 am and 10:15-11:15 am. If you want to join, register [here](#) for the 9 am slot and [here](#) for the 10:15 slot. The Essex County chapter of the Native Plant Society is scheduled to visit the Tiny Forest on Saturday, October 4, in the morning. Please let Donna know if you are available to lead small group tours for either date. The Union County chapter of the Native Plant Society is interested in touring this summer, too. They may plan a separate date in July or join one of the other scheduled events.

Last year, Mimi spoke at the Little Sprouts program at the Library and conducted a trash audit with the children. The facilitator asked Mimi to speak again this summer. The plan is for Mimi to speak to the Little Sprouts on August 6 and then have the Little Sprouts visit the Tiny Forest on August 13.

Community Energy Plan: Donna Goggin Patel

Donna and Dan Crisafulli continue to gather information and support the city staff in implementing the steps for various Community Energy Plan (“CEP”) action items. In positive news, there are now 5 Community Solar projects available to JCP&L electricity customers in Summit. The projects are coordinated by Solar Landscape and EverSolar. Residents are receiving flyers about these. Donna is in touch with the Housing Authority, to see if we can revive the talks about signing up the Senior Housing for Community Solar.

Environmental Resource Inventory: Chantal Landman

Summit is revising its Environmental Resource Inventory (“ERI”). Chantal, Donna and Rachel Rillo spoke to The Land Conservancy of New Jersey (TLC) on April 24. We will continue to meet periodically with TLC as they work on the ERI and expect a first draft in mid-July.

Shade Tree Advisory Committee: John Kilby

STAC held an Arbor Day planting on April 24 at Summit High School. STAC is working on providing increased information on the city’s website and is working on a “Welcome Wagon” digital email for new residents. The STAC plans for the rest of the year include a joint talk with Reeves-Reed Arboretum in the Fall and more outreach and education about the Summit Suckers volunteer program. John mentioned that Jeff Hankinson had requested approximately 20 chestnuts to be planted along the Park Line. But John is worried that they may not have been tested for fungus, and he is concerned about finding suitable chestnut saplings.

Update on Grants: Donna Goggin Patel

Summit applied for a \$2,000 grant to go toward a solar array at the DPW Sheds (41 Chatham Road). But we were notified that we did not receive the grant.

Sustainable Jersey Certification: Donna Goggin Patel

In 2025, Summit is due to renew its Sustainable Jersey certification. The remaining Sustainable Jersey certification cycle dates are May 16 and July 31. We applied for over 700 points, and we already qualify for Silver certification (as we were approved for 475 points from the first round). Donna, Mimi, Francie, Dan, Lara Mendenhall, Helen Campanha, Chantal and Melissa Spurr all

worked on action narratives with help from many city employees and community volunteers. We are working on revisions from those comments for this Friday's deadline.

Recycling Advisory Committee: Mimi Zukoff

The city published both the "[Think Before You Buy](#)" and the "[Recycling Beyond the Basics](#)" flyers on its website and Facebook. Recycle Coach has been updated by George Drossinos (thanks!). And it can now be updated on a rolling basis as anything needs editing. Mimi has requested that City Communications roll out a publicity blitz about Recycle Coach now that it is accurate. BookSmiles will pick-up excess books after the May 10 Summit Free Market. As part of the Sustainable Jersey legwork, Mimi learned that in the past year, DPW collected ten 60-gallon containers of lights, which are now included in metal recycling.

Green Bucket continues to collect the food waste from the Transfer Station. In April, they collected 3 buckets each week for a total of 4,100 lbs. (possibly because there were 5 pick-ups). RAC held a Spring tabling event at the Transfer Station on May 10. It was a quiet day there. Rob Lubin, a former RAC member who works in the waste and recycling industry, gave RAC an update about the food waste recycling industry. A \$450 million facility (Linden Renewables) in Linden is planning to open in June 2026. It will have state-of-the-art technology and be able to handle 1,500 tons/day. He believes the new facility would be interested in working with and investing in Summit's Transfer Station. Rob offered that his colleague would be happy to arrange a site visit.

Adam Selig has been working with Jenny Hoff on the "quick tip" recycling videos. There will be a series of short videos filmed on May 15 for later, sequential release on topics including placing your recycling out for collection "loose" or not in plastic bags. Dan mentioned that he saw the recycling vendor leave plastic bags of recycling behind during the collection this week, so perhaps the video can warn residents that this may happen if they continue to bag their recyclables. (Plastic bags can gum up the conveyors at the recycling facility, so the entire bag (with the recyclables) is often removed from the stream and therefore not recycled.)

Mimi suggested a screening to the Summit Public Library of the disturbing but scientific film, "Plastic People," about how much plastic is getting into our bodies. The hope is to screen this 2024 film in the Fall. Lois Kraus from Beyond Plastics NJ (and Westfield's Green Team) will lead a discussion about the concerns it raises after the film is shown.

Summit Free Market: Mimi Zukoff

For 2025, residents should expect Summit Free Market events on the second Saturday of each month from 8AM-3PM and the fourth Friday of each month from 12-2PM. The next event is

Friday, May 23. The next WasteWise Business Network webinar on May 6 featured Chistine Lijoi talking about the Summit Free Market.

Multi-Town Environmental Commission Meetings: Donna Goggin Patel

The 5th Great Swamp Watershed Association Native Plant sale was a success. They sold nearly 27,000 plants to 600 customers across 130 different towns. Mimi suggested they add a “keystone species” kit to next year’s sale, which was a well-received suggestion. Thank you to all of the Summit volunteers who helped by sorting at the GSWA Headquarters, transporting Summit’s orders from GSWA to Summit, and distributing the purchased plants!

Green Schools: Donna Goggin Patel

The Green Schools parents will meet on Friday, June 6, at 8:45 am. If you would like to join the green parent group, please email greensummitnj@gmail.com. The Earth in the Classroom lessons were taught successfully across all 5 elementary schools by parents on April 25. Green Schools is promoting Walk/Bike/Carpool to School week from May 12-16. Also, please note that Washington School has several recycling opportunities available to the community. There are bins for sneakers (in any condition) and reusable bags outside the entrance to the school under the awning.

In addition to the idea Lara raised at last month’s Environmental Commission meeting for greening birthday parties, Mollie Siebert questioned whether there have been efforts to decrease or eliminate the extra “goodies” given at the class parties, such as Valentine’s. Franklin had eliminated anything but the Valentine card itself a few years ago, but that has been lifted and parents complained of the number of “goodies” that likely become trash.

GreenFaith: Mimi Zukoff

The GreenFaith global organization is encouraging a nationwide Day of Action on September 21, 2025, in advance of the United Nations Climate Conference. They are calling the mobilization *SUN Day* and encouraging individual GreenFaith chapters to hold events the weekend of September 20-21, 2025. This is intended to be more of a mobilization event than one large rally held in New York City.

New Business: Everyone

Donna will be speaking about the Environmental Commission and our projects to the participants in the Youth Climate Leaders program at Reeves-Reed Arboretum on Tuesday, May 13. Donna also reported that Sustainable Jersey reached out to say she is being named its Sustainability Hero for May. The accompanying PDF is [here](#).

Dan followed up on the idea he raised in March about using found objects, and especially recyclables, in art. He is working on an idea to focus on recycled art across Summit for Earth Day 2026. He has spoken with Mel Cohn from the Visual Arts Center and Vivian Furman from Summit Public Art, who both are interested. Jackie Kondel from Reeves-Reed Arboretum also supports the idea. And Karen Forgione (the Arts Supervisor for Summit's schools) was excited about the idea, but she explained that she is leaving the District shortly but would pass the idea along to her successor. Dan envisions this to include a series of events in April 2026 which include art creation, art display and education about how this relates to littering and our environment.

At last month's meeting, Mimi raised the issue of the Martin's Brook Park invasive species and if we can get Union County to help us evaluate the invasives and prioritize how to attack the invasives. Donna contacted Union County for advice on next steps. Robert Berns explained that he is willing to schedule a work day. Based on schedules, June looks promising, with the exception of June 4, 5, 12, 20 or 26. If you are willing to help learn about invasives and how to remove them with the group, please let Donna know.

We discussed the creation of a beautiful, new path at Martin's Brook Park on April 27 as an Eagle Scout project by SHS student Karun Jain. Shockingly, someone vandalized the path following its completion by removing the logs lining the path and stacking them as a barricade at the entrance along Butler Parkway and then removing the logs. The city is aware and is looking for replacement wood from the Transfer Station. The scout leader will be filing a police report. Hopefully, this behavior will not be repeated. The city plans to post a warning near the entrance.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Donna Goggin Patel.

Dates for the 2025 Environmental Commission Meetings

All meetings will be held in the Whitman Room in City Hall unless noted. These are typically the 3rd Monday of the month. Any changes to that schedule or location are noted:

June 16 (Large Conference Room)

No meetings in July or August

September 15

October 20

November 17

December 15