

City of Summit Environmental Commission Minutes, June 16, 2025

Participating: Donna Goggin Patel, Helen Campanha, Francie Cho, Jeff Hankinson, John Kilby, Mimi Zukoff

Guests: Rick Bell, Fred Blau, George Drossinos, Jocelyn Modesto, Sid Oberoi, Mollie Siebert

Donna Goggin Patel called the meeting to order at 8:03 PM. The May minutes were approved.

Additional Earth Day Clean-Ups: Donna Goggin Patel

The Summit Conservancy is interested in hosting a clean-up in the Fall (September or later) at Hidden Valley Park. Donna is in touch with them about permissions and potential dates.

“Tiny Forest” Reforestation: Donna Goggin Patel

The small, species identification signs for the Tiny Forest were delivered on Thursday, June 12. Donna, Francie Cho and Mimi Zukoff started installing the signs. CBS News came to the Tiny Forest on June 13 to film footage and conduct interviews. The reporter spoke to Donna and resident Mary Tarashuk (who frequently walks her dog there). We will share the clip when it is available.

Donna met with a potential high school volunteer on June 1 to discuss her creating scavenger hunts over this summer. Donna also met with Alison Barnes from Livingston’s Environmental Commission and three teenagers for a tour on June 4. Livingston High School students created three inspirational murals and they are looking for corresponding projects to connect to the art works. A microforest could be one such project. Donna and Francie led a tour for Summit Seniors in conjunction with the Department of Community Programs on Wednesday, June 11. Thanks to Chantal Landman for suggesting the EC offer a tour after working on a Sustainable Jersey action related to Seniors in Summit.

Rahway River Watershed Association will be hosting an event at the Tiny Forest on Saturday, June 28 (rescheduled from June 14 because of the rain). Donna and Francie 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. The Union County chapter of the Native Plant Society is interested in touring this summer, too.

Donna also met Tim Van Epp from Westfield at the Tiny Forest on June 16. Tim is a former Green Team member. Several Westfield Green Team members are emailing with questions, too.

### Invasive Species Removal/Restoration Work: Donna Goggin Patel

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. Robert Berns from Union County met Mimi, Francie, Donna and Richard Leister from Berkeley Heights at Briant Park on June 16 to evaluate the invasives and suggest tips for removal.

We found invasive species everywhere that is not the lawn. There is pervasive Japanese knotweed (which should be cut at the ground) and mugwort (which can be pulled by hand). There are also a lot of invasive vines (like Japanese or Chinese wisteria) growing up along the trunks of native trees in ways that are harmful to those trees. There is a potential group at Kenvue who is learning about invasive removal and could help. There is also potentially an interested resident near Briant Park that Donna emailed. Some ideas are (1) trying to cut the vines to protect the larger trees; (2) removing mugwort in small sections at a time; (3) removing the invasives in one patch near Briant Park Drive and coming up with native plantings for that area; and/or (4) creating a meadow in a part of the lawn. In thinking about next steps, we think it may make the most sense to try to free the trees of these vines in the Fall.

### Community Energy Plan: Donna Goggin Patel

Donna and Dan 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. There is also a possibility for the city to enroll in Automatic Enrollment Community Solar if there are 100+ qualifying households. Donna listened to a webinar on May 21. Donna is also attending a Senior Fair on June 25 at the Senior Housing building to meet Solar Landscape reps.

### Environmental Resource Inventory: Chantal Landman

Summit is revising its Environmental Resource Inventory ("ERI"). We will continue to communicate periodically with TLC as they work on the ERI and expect a first draft in mid-July.

### Shade Tree Advisory Committee: John Kilby

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 Landmark Trees in Summit. STAC also will be handing out the literature about the Fall 2024 street tree plantings in July.

Sustainable Jersey Certification: Donna Goggin Patel

Summit is renewing its Sustainable Jersey certification this year. We applied for over 670 points in the second round, and we already qualify for Silver certification (as we were approved for 630 points so far from the second round). Donna, Mimi, Francie, Dan Crisafulli, Lara Mendenhall, Helen Campanha, Chantal Landman and Melissa Spurr all worked on action narratives with help from many city employees and community volunteers.

Recycling Advisory Committee: Mimi Zukoff

Recycle Coach has been updated by George Drossinos. The city publicized it through social media and [TAP](#). RAC has been working with city Communications on the “quick tip” recycling videos. Four RAC members filmed a series of short videos on May 15 for later, sequential release. These each promote Recycle Coach at the end. BookSmiles last collected excess books on June 3.

RAC is taking a field trip to visit the Bayshore Recycling Plant in Keasbey, NJ on June 24 at 11:00 am. There are still a few slots available if anyone would like to join.

Green Bucket continues to collect the food waste from the Transfer Station. In May, they collected 3 buckets each of 4 weeks for a total of 3,560 lbs. The schools concluded that the prep kitchen does not generate enough waste to compost. One the SHS reps to RAC created a visual entitled “Treasures at the Transfer Station” to educate students about the Book Barn, the Food Waste Composting and the Summit Free Market. It was placed in the SHS morning announcements.

RAC is testing the non-toxic suggestions for a “Use This Not That” flyer presenting non-toxic alternatives to hazardous household products, especially cleaning products.

Mimi believes that the Summit Public Library is planning a screening of the film, “Plastic People,” about how much plastic is getting into our bodies. The hope is to screen this 2024 film in the Fall of 2025. 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

Saturday, June 14. The remainder of the summer dates are Friday, June 27; Saturday, July 12; Friday, July 25; Saturday, August 9; and Friday, August 22. As the Summit Free Market is often short of volunteers in the summer, please feel free to volunteer if you are available. You can simply show up, and you will be told what you can do to help.

There are spots on the Summit Free Market Committee for both an EC rep and a RAC rep. Right now, Mimi is filling both slots. Would anyone else from the EC like to join the Free Market Committee and take a larger role in the Free Market?

Green Schools: Donna Goggin Patel

The Green Schools parents will meet next on Friday, September 12, at 8:45 am. If you would like to join the green parent group, please email [greensummitnj@gmail.com](mailto:greensummitnj@gmail.com). The Earth in the Classroom lessons were taught successfully across all 5 elementary schools by parents on April 25. Green Schools also promoted Walk/Bike/Carpool to School the week of May 12-16. 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.

GreenFaith: Mimi Zukoff

The GreenFaith global organization is teaming up with 350.org and Third Act and 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. To learn more, visit this [site](#). GreenFaith has a new liaison, Tracey Stephens.

Solar Panel Recycling Facility Tour: George Drossinos

George toured a new solar panel recycling facility in western NJ named Commercial Solar Panel Recycling. It opened in 2024 with a ribbon cutting in 2025. The company recycles panels or resells them in the secondary market with about 70% of the panels being recycled and 30% being resold. Panels may come to the facility with reduced power capabilities but still enough power to be reused. Such early loss of the panels can occur if newer models come on market or as a result of natural disasters, like the California wildfires. Without a facility like this, discarded solar panels are sent to landfills. Some states have tried to encourage recycling. New Jersey has a bill in the Senate (SB 3399) proposed by Senator Bob Smith which would mandate end-of-life recycling for panels.

The panels are mostly glass cells inside an aluminum or steel frame. There is a plastic layer on top of the panel to protect the glass cells. A machine at the facility separates the frame from the cells. The company then takes the glass and downcycles it to make bike and bus lanes. The remainder of the panel material goes into making polymer concrete. Through this process, 95-98% of the panel is kept out of landfills. They only remove the frame at this facility. The rest of the process is dealt with off-site. When they resell panels, the per-panel cost is low (maybe only \$50/panel), but these are not uniform manufacturers or specs. An electrician would be required to install resold panels and get them up and running.

George wants to know the age of the current residential solar arrays in Summit to see if any panels are close to the 20-30 year life and may be recycled. Donna emailed Aaron Schrager, who connected her with Ralph from the construction office. Based on the numbers of residential panels, Donna thinks it may make more sense to ask Union County about collecting these as part of the household hazardous waste collections a few times a year. She or Mimi will connect George with Stuart Newman from Union County. Rick Bell suggested that the Permanent Free Market building might be a site in Summit that could use resold panels as a demonstration project as it does not use much power.

#### New Business: Everyone

Community Night will be held on Tuesday, July 22, on the Village Green. The Environmental Commission plans to host a table at the event. Thanks to John Kilby and Helen Campanha for offering to host the table.

Members of the Summit Conservancy told Donna recently that the bike depot is close to opening. She discussed with them Jeff's idea of having specific, encouraged routes from the elementary schools as something to promote along with biking generally. The city shared new Police Department flyers today about the e-bike and e-scooter ordinances which prohibit these on all sidewalks. And advertised the new restrictions against riding any wheeled items (electric or not) on certain downtown sidewalks.

Mimi mentioned that replacing the Book Barn's roof could be a potential future Summit Conservancy project. She is speaking to Mike Caputo about what the steps would be to replace that roof.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 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:

No meetings in July or August

September 15

October 20

November 17

December 15