

Environmental Commission Annual Report for 2024

Throughout 2024, the City of Summit Environmental Commission (EC) worked to promote sustainability efforts in Summit through community projects, outreach, events, and coordination of activities with other organizations. As dictated by state law, the EC has seven appointed commissioners and two alternates. Donna Goggin Patel is the appointed chairperson. For 2024, Rick Bell was the Planning Board representative to the EC, member Mimi Zukoff was chairperson of the Recycling Advisory Committee (and the EC representative to the Summit Free Market Steering Committee), and EC member John Kilby was chairperson of Summit's Shade Tree Advisory Committee. All EC meetings are open to the public and several non-members attend meetings on a regular basis. In addition, Council liaison Kevin Smallwood attended several of the EC meetings in 2024.

Many EC members are members of other groups interested in sustainability. Jeff Hankinson is on the Park Line board. Donna Goggin Patel is a trustee of Reeves-Reed Arboretum, and she leads the Green Schools parent green team. Mimi Zukoff is active in the Summit Area GreenFaith Circle.

2024 Projects

Annual Earth Day Clean-Up: The EC organized and managed the annual Earth Day Clean-Up which took place on April 13-14 at ten different spots in Summit. Over 240 participants collected 1,200 lbs. of trash and added wood chips at Martin's Brook and Wilson Parks. EC members Helen Campanha, Francie Cho, Dan Crisafulli, Jeff Hankinson, Lara Mendenhall, Donna Goggin Patel and Mimi Zukoff ran sites for the clean-up.

Tiny Forest: The Tiny Forest now contains over 700 plantings of over 50 native species of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. CivicStory featured the Tiny Forest in a video feature about microforests around the state which is available to watch [here](#). ANJEC also featured the project on page 9 of its [Spring Report](#). The Tiny Forest is a multi-layered forest of native plants that is designed to become self-sustaining after 2-3 years and to become a fully-developed forest in 20-30 years. During 2024, dozens of volunteers watered and weeded as needed (as part of the maintenance), and performed other tasks, such as adding wood chips to the path and around the plantings. Over the summer, the middle school rec campers helped every Thursday morning as a volunteer opportunity. The EC added three large educational signs with funds from a family foundation. EC members Francie Cho, Lara Mendenhall, Donna Goggin Patel and Mimi Zukoff have taken the lead on this project with assistance from the rest of the EC. They led tours of the Tiny Forest or answered questions on calls from Environmental Commission and Shade Tree Committee members from Spring Lake, Princeton, and Morristown, NJ; residents of Winchester Gardens in Maplewood, NJ; and even from San Antonio, Texas. Locally, Mimi and Lara provided tours to representatives from Christ Church and Beacon UU Church and aided with plantings and garden designs at these locations and at the Community Center in Elizabeth.

On October 18, the city and the Shade Tree Advisory Committee celebrated Arbor Day at the Tiny Forest with a proclamation read by Mayor Fagan. Two new serviceberry trees were donated this year by GRACE (planted May 21) and the city (planted October 17). The EC continues to partner with the Summit Free Public Library to provide seeds from several Tiny Forest wildflowers to the Library's Native Seed Library. Mimi led two learning sessions at the Library to teach volunteers how to sort and label the collected seeds for distribution.

ANJEC Grant: The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) awarded Summit \$1,500 in May 2023 for the completion of the fencing at the Park Line's Butterfly Garden. EC member Jeff Hankinson, along with resident volunteer Jay Cho, completed the fencing, recorded this as a Monarch Way Station and added signage. We held a ribbon cutting for the Butterfly Garden on May 28.

Sustainable Jersey Grants: Sustainable Jersey awarded Summit a \$10,000 grant in May 2024 to create a revised Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI). An ERI is a compilation of text and visual information about the capacity, characteristics, and features of the municipality's natural resources. The revision will be used to inform

the next Master Plan (2025/2026) and serves as the first step to protecting and preserving the natural resources within a municipality. Sustainable Jersey awarded Summit a \$2,000 grant in May 2023 for on-going projects. In 2024, the remainder of this grant funded materials for the Tiny Forest and the new signage at the entrance of Martin's Brook Park (for which Jeff Hankinson and Jay Cho completed the wooden posts). Donna Goggin Patel and Dan Crisafulli continue to work on the Community Energy Plan proposed actions from a 2021 Sustainable Jersey \$10,000 grant, including support for municipal electric vehicles (EVs), EV chargers and solar arrays.

Membership in Union County Hub & the Northern Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance Group (NJSMA): The EC is in contact with its counterparts and Green Teams of neighboring towns to share resources and information about successful initiatives. Helen Campanha attended a Union County Hub meeting. Mimi Zukoff and Francie Cho led Summit's coordination with NJSMA for the fourth year to hold a successful native plant sale in partnership with the Great Swamp Watershed Association that will be continued. In addition, Mimi spoke to a Marlboro green team member about organics composting. Mimi and Donna Goggin Patel met with a Chatham Township Environmental Commission member about food waste composting.

Planning and Zoning Board Work: Throughout 2024, the EC reviewed more than 40 plans under review by the Planning and Zoning Boards, and has provided suggestions, which usually relate to planting native species, addressing storm water runoff, and green building practices. This work was done by Francie Cho, Lara Mendenhall and Donna Goggin Patel on behalf of the EC. Dan Crisafulli also compiled suggested edits to the Development Regulations Ordinance related to the provisions covering solar and electric vehicles.

Community Outreach

Communications: Many relevant posts have been made to the EC's [Summit NJ Environmental Commission Facebook group](#), the [Recycling Advisory Committee's Facebook page](#), and the [City of Summit Facebook page](#) and local newspapers. Thanks to Amy Cairns and Megan Trindell for their substantial help in outreach.

Cosponsored Community Events: With coordination by EC member Mimi Zukoff, the EC, Summit Area GreenFaith Circle, and the Summit Free Public Library cosponsored two events this year. The first was a Native Plant talk with Tekla Pontius-Courtney and Jessica Miller on February 29 on tools to design a native plant garden and to grow plants from seed. The second was an October 17 screening of the documentary, "American River," about the Passaic River and held a Q&A with filmmaker Scott Morris. The Library has a copy of the movie on DVD to borrow for anyone who missed the screening.

Educational Tables at Events: EC members Donna Goggin Patel, John Kilby and Mimi Zukoff and volunteer Sharanya Kumar manned a table for the EC at Community Night on the Village Green on July 23.

Speaking Engagements: EC member Donna Goggin Patel spoke about the Tiny Forest to the Summit Old Guard on April 23 and to the Hunterdon County Master Gardeners on October 9.

The EC welcomes suggestions and comments from the Mayor, members of Common Council, city staff and the community. EC meetings are open to everyone and take place typically on the third Monday of the month at 8 PM in the Whitman Room; they generally last an hour. A list of 2025 meeting dates appears below. Please join the [Summit NJ EC Facebook group](#).

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Goggin Patel, 2024 Chairperson, City of Summit Environmental Commission

2025 EC meeting dates (8 PM in the Whitman Room at City Hall unless otherwise noted): 1/21 (3rd Tuesday in Large Conference Room), 2/24 (4th Monday in Large Conference Room), 3/17, 4/21, 5/19, 6/16, 9/15, 10/20, 11/17, 12/15. There are no meetings in July and August.