

Environmental Commission Annual Report for 2017

Throughout 2017, the City of Summit Environmental Commission (EC) worked to promote sustainability efforts in Summit through community projects, outreach and events, as well as by coordination of activities with community organizations.

As dictated by state law, the EC has seven appointed commissioners and two alternates. Ruth Gais resigned her position this year and was replaced by Donna Patel. Marjorie Fox had to give up her position after being elected to Council and has been replaced by Chris Sprague. Currently, there is one open position due to Jeff Wagenbach's resignation from the Planning Board. State law requires that there be a liaison from the Planning Board on the Environmental Commission, so the Planning Board will need to decide who will fill that role on the EC in the coming year.

All EC meetings are open to the public and generally several non-members attend meetings on a regular basis. In addition, Council liaison Richard Sun attended several EC meetings in 2017.

2017 Projects

Sustainable Jersey: The EC was responsible for preparing the application for Summit's re-certification with Sustainable Jersey with input from all City departments, the Recycling Advisory Committee, the Shade Tree Advisory Committee, Summit Downtown, Inc., and others. Summit submitted a strong application garnering 625 points (only 350 points were necessary for re-certification), and was named the Sustainability Champion in the mid-size municipality category for having been awarded more points than any other mid-size NJ municipality. This was the fifth time Summit has won that award.

At the NJ League of Municipalities Convention in November, EC Chairperson Beth Lovejoy was asked by the Sustainable Jersey staff to sit on a panel, which was moderated by Mayor Radest, to describe Summit's process and outreach with the low-cost home energy audit program with Ciel Power under the [BPU's Home Performance with Energy Star Program](#).

EC member Donna Patel has begun meeting with school officials to get Summit schools registered and involved in the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program.

Home Energy Audits: With the help of City Administrator Michael Rogers and his staff, in late 2015 the City issued an RFP for Home Performance with Energy Star-certified contractors to be available to residents to do home energy audits at a reduced price. Ciel Power, LLC, committed to offering audits at \$49 a home, a substantially reduced price from the \$250-500 contractors usually charge, and to funding a mailing about the program that went to all Summit homeowners. The City goal was to have 150 homes audited prior to the end of 2017. As of the end of 2017, about 210 homeowners had completed Ciel energy audits. The arrangement with Ciel will end in June of 2018. EC members, Mayor Radest and the Public Information Office promoted the program online and at various events.

Annual Earth Day Clean-Up: The EC members organized and managed the annual Earth Day Clean-Up, which took place in April at a number of different spots in Summit. Overall, 222 volunteers of all ages collected 1500 lbs of trash and recyclables, removed invasive plants, and cleaned and woodchipped trails in six Summit locations.

Rain Gardens: In 2016, EC member Marian Glenn organized the installation of three rain gardens on City property, one at City Hall and two at the library, with experts from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension, who designed and installed the rain gardens with the assistance of the City Public Works Department. In 2017, interpretive signs, designed by Rahway River Watershed Association member Clea Carchia, were installed and Mayor Radest presided over a ribbon cutting for the rain gardens, during which EC member Marian Glenn explained how rain gardens work and their use in managing storm water.

Passaic River Trails: The EC was awarded a small grant (about \$1000) by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) for the extension and refurbishing of a steep set of steps along the Passaic River trails. EC member Jeff Hankinson prepared the plan and has done the bulk of the work. The steps are about two-thirds complete and will be finished in the spring. Jeff also worked with groups as part of the Earth Day Clean-Up to clean up parts of the Passaic River trails.

Review of Master Plan: EC members and members of the new Green Team (see below) have begun work on a memo with suggestions for the City based on targeted areas in the new Master Plan ReVision. In particular, discussions are underway with the Shade Tree Advisory Committee and the Planning Board on suggestions for strengthening Summit's tree ordinance. Summit's tree canopy is below where it should be, due mainly to losses that occurred in recent years due to storms. Also, the Emerald Ash Borer will soon make its way into Summit and it is likely that the majority of Summit's ash trees will either have to be removed or will die due to this pest. Members of the EC will attend a Planning Board meeting early in 2018 to discuss ways that the EC and Planning Board can work together.

Review of Plans for the Planning and Zoning Boards: EC member and New York City architect Rick Bell, on behalf of the EC, has reviewed more than 50 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. The main comment he made relates to the lack of a landscape plan in the applications, specifically to address what trees and other landscaping will be removed and what will be added to make up for the removals.

Community Outreach

New Green Team: The most exciting development in 2017 relates to a new group comprised primarily of younger Summit residents, who are independent of the EC but coordinating with the EC, to promote green practices on a more personal level in Summit. They meet monthly and have held a number of grass roots events including small group gatherings in individual homes and MONDO to discuss composting, zero waste lifestyles, vegan cooking, and carbon footprints. They also had informational tables at the Summit Farmers Market in June and October, and arranged with MONDO and The Film Society of Summit to have a showing of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Sequel*, with a post-film discussion. They have an excellent website -- <https://www.greensummitnj.org/> -- and Facebook page -- <https://www.facebook.com/greensummitnj/> -- and Instagram account -- @greensummitnj -- as well.

Communications: Many green-related posts have been made to the EC's [Summit, NJ: Talking Green. Living Green Facebook page](#), and the [Recycling Advisory Committee's Facebook page](#), as well as the [City of Summit Facebook page](#). In addition to green tips and advice, there was substantial publicity about the Ciel low-cost energy audit program, work on the Passaic River trails, the Summit Free Market spring and fall events, and the Annual Earth Day Clean-Up, including newspapers (online and print), Facebook and Twitter. Thanks to Amy Cairns and Megan Trindell for their substantial help in outreach endeavors.

Summit Garden Club Conservation Meeting: Mayor Radest, Beth Lovejoy and Marian Glenn were the speakers at the Summit Garden Club's annual conservation meeting in February. They were asked to address a number of conservation and sustainability issues specific to Summit. There was particular interest in the loss of trees in Summit due to storms and construction.

Educational Tables at Events: Celgene invited the EC to have informational tables at their Earth Day Fairs at both of their locations in April, which were manned by Beth Lovejoy and Patti Schneider Smith. There were about 150 visitors to the EC tables at those events. John Kilby, Lauren Gonnella, Patti Schneider Smith and Beth Lovejoy manned a table for the EC and the Shade Tree Advisory Committee at Community Night on the Green

in July. The EC also provided information for the Department of Community Services tables at National Night Out and the Fire Department event.

Recognition: EC member Beth Lovejoy received the Union County Environmental Hero award at the Union County EarthFest in April for her efforts on Summit's Environmental Commission.

Please join the Summit, NJ: Talking Green, Living Green Facebook open group page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/184758811555182/>.

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 in the Whitman Room, except as noted below, at 8 PM; they generally last about an hour. A list of 2018 meeting dates appears below.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Lovejoy, Chairperson
City of Summit Environmental Commission

2018 EC meeting dates:

All meetings take place at 8 PM in the Whitman Room at City Hall except the November 12 and December 17 meetings.

1/11

2/12

3/19

4/16

5/22 This is a Tuesday because no rooms were available on Monday, 5/21.

6/18

No meetings in July and August

9/18 This is a Tuesday because no rooms were available on Monday, 9/17.

10/15

11/12 Large Conference Room

12/17 Large Conference Room