



**8-MAY 2024**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE**

**FANWOOD  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
COMMISSION**

**2023**

**INTRODUCTION**

As noted in previous Annual Reports:

Under the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law, each municipality in New Jersey is empowered to form an environmental commission via ordinance. Fanwood created its Environmental Commission circa 1972. Under the enabling legislation a commission can have up to seven regular members and two alternates, which are

appointed by the mayor. A member of the commission is to be appointed to the municipal planning board. The mayor and council also select a member of the council to be the liaison between the commission and the town government. A commission may also name “associate members”—that is, people with no formal responsibility with the commission, but who have worked with the commission as volunteers and have performed special and/or unique services for the commission and the town’s environment.

### **Commission responsibilities**

The Commission is an advisory board to the Mayor and Council and the town in general for environmental issues. The Commission is in charge of keeping a town’s Open Space Inventory and for preparing an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), which the Fanwood Environmental Commission (FEC) has done several times (1976, 2007, and the latest edition in 2018). The FEC also reviews development plans from the Planning & Zoning Board and provides comments on environmental concerns. The FEC can also accept land and easements in its name on behalf of the Borough and can suggest ordinances and related regulations for environmental and health protection of its citizens. The Commission can also apply for grants to help with various projects.

In Fanwood, the FEC also works with Borough officials to oversee the 8-acre Nature Center located between Cray Terrace and LaGrande Avenue. The Nature Center provides an opportunity for recreation in a “green” and “quiet” setting for hiking, bird watching, plant observation, photography, educational programs in an “outdoor” classroom, and similar activities. The Commission provides guidance and direction for the Nature Center Caretaker. Further, the FEC often works with Girl and Boy Scouts and other civic groups on environmental stewardship projects in the Nature Center and elsewhere in town which may include spreading wood chips on trails, removing invasive plants, erecting informational signs, repairing or constructing boardwalks, creating pollinator habitats, and so forth.

### **Commission members—2023**

Eric Gaulin —Chair

Gary Szelc –Vice Chair

Margaret Chowdhury

Phyllis Sandroek

Sandy Redder

David Schwartzberg

Andrea Parra—Alternate 1 (Liason to Green Team)  
Suzanne Custons-Sanschagrín—Alternate 2  
Leslie Krone-Speck—Planning Board Member  
Katherine Mitchell—Council Liaison  
Erin McElroy Barker—Council Liaison

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**Meetings**—Commission meetings are held the third Thursday of every month starting at 7:30 in the Carriage House. They are open to the public.

[Note: Because of the construction at the Carriage House many meetings in 2023 were held in Council Chambers as an alternative location.]

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **Winter Sowing Workshop Jan. 12, 2023**

Members of the Commission along with the Fanwood Gardeners presented a Winter Sowing Workshop. It was held at the Carriage House and over 20 people attended. It was very well received from the participants. Native plants seeds were distributed and planted by the participants.

**Earth Day/Clean Communities Day (April 22)** - As it does every year, members of the Commission participated in the annual event hosted by the Borough of Fanwood. A member of the FEC also participated on the planning committee.

### **Pollinators and Borough Gardens May, 2023**

A member of the FEC gave a garden tour and talk on pollinators and our Borough's gardens.

## **NATURE CENTER**

**Construction Projects** – 2023 was a monumental year at the Nature Center as two new bridges were installed over the creek, all of the walkways were leveled, and gravel was spread. Accessibility to various areas of the Nature Center was increased as a result of this project.

**Service Projects** - Several service projects were conducted in particular Scouting projects. These covered such activities as extending the pathway boardwalk in wet areas, planting of native vegetation, and related projects.

**Boardwalk Reconstruction** - Boy Scout and Eagle Scout Candidate Ethan Ho completed a project to reconstruct a large section of boardwalk within the Nature Center that had deteriorated and was a safety hazard. See photos at the end of this report.

**Birdhouse Project** - Two Girl Scouts (Addie Bozetarnik and Julianne Ho) from Troop 40206 are working on a project to install multiple birdhouses within the Nature Center as their Silver Award Project. The project was presented and approved at the November meeting. Installation is expected to be spring 2024.

## **OTHER**

**Borough Master Plan** - The Environmental Commission provided comments to the Master Plan being completed during 2023. Members of the EC participated with the consultant hired by the Borough to update the master plan as well as at the October 2023 public meeting.

**Zoning Variance Request Reviews** - The EC reviewed nine sets of plans before the Planning Board during 2023 and provided recommendations to the Board. Several sets of plans were reviewed multiple times including the major project of Carano Square.

**Borough Hall Gardens** - The EC continues to maintain the Borough Hall gardens and advocate for the planting of native species on property owned by the Borough.

**Long Term Volunteers** - Multiple members of the EC were recognized by the Mayor and Council as long-term volunteers in the Borough. Six members have provided between 14-24 years of service.

**Nature Center Anniversary** – The Nature Center will be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on Sept. 11, 2024. The EC is preparing a series of activities in 2024 to highlight the Nature Center and its role in the Borough.

## **Other Acknowledgments and Supporters**

Fanwood Public Works Department—PW personnel were invaluable in helping the Commission with several projects including labor and supplying tools.

Fanwood Gardeners – Local gardeners are a huge help in maintaining the Borough Hall gardens.

**Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)**—The FEC is a long-standing member of ANJEC, the umbrella organization for environmental commissions throughout the state. The FEC has participated in workshops, the annual meeting, and other educational events sponsored by ANJEC.

**Rahway River Watershed Association**—As a good part of the Borough is within the Rahway River watershed, the Borough through Environmental Commission is a member of this organization. The RRWA conducts a number of events and programs to which the Borough is invited.

## PHOTOS



