



20-FEB 2025

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE**

**FANWOOD
ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMISSION**

2024

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—2024

Sandy Redder —Chair

Gary Szelc –Vice Chair

Carol Chimento

Suzanne Custons-Sanschagrin - Secretary

Phyllis Sandroek

David Schwartzberg

Mary Ann StaRosa

Andrea Parra—Alternate 1 (Liaison to Green Team)

Leslie Krone-Speck—Planning Board Member

Patricia Walsh—Council Liaison

Meetings—Commission meetings are held the third Thursday of every month starting at 7:00 in the Carriage House. They are open to the public.

[Note: Because of the construction at the Carriage House some meetings in 2024 were held in Council Chambers as an alternative location.]

ACTIVITIES

Great Backyard Bird Count February 2024

Members of the Commission participated in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count at the Fanwood Nature Center. Twenty-three species of birds were identified during the four day event. Data was logged and shared with the event sponsors as well.

Earth Day/Clean Communities Day (April 20) - 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. Photo below.

First Annual Trail Maintenance Day May, 2024— The Commission held its first annual trail maintenance day at the FNC to ensure that the area was ready for the spring and summer seasons as well as all of the activities scheduled as part of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of FNC. Over thirty local volunteers participated in the cleaning/clearing of benches, signs and trails. Seven species of native plants were installed as well. Photo below.

Guided Meditation July 2024

As part of the 50th anniversary of the nature center, commission members arranged for a guided meditation session led by the monks of the Dhammakaya International Meditation Center. Approximately thirty local residents attended, ten of which had never previously visited the nature center.

Birdhouse Building Contest Sept. 2024 – A bird house building contest was held in September and winners were announced at Fannywood Day. A total of nine entries were submitted, displayed at the library and will be placed in FNC this spring.

Youth Day at FNC October 2024 – The commission presented a fun filled day at the nature center for local youth designed for those ages 3-14. Youth who participate in one of the Scouts BSA or Girl Scouting programs had the opportunity to earn try-its, badges or belt loops depending on their age. Multiple stations were set up throughout the nature center including hiking and outdoor safety, endangered species, bird feeder construction, nature drawings and a photo scavenger hunt. The commission was assisted by members of Scouts BSA Troop 33 of Fanwood and the Biter Aiders (youth members of the Edison Environmental Commission). Photos below.

NATURE CENTER

Construction Projects – A ribbon cutting was held on October 7th for the two new bridges were installed over the creek in conjunction with a re-dedication of the FNC. 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 several Scouting projects. They covered such things as extending the pathway boardwalk in wet areas, planting of native vegetation, and related projects. Several additional projects are being planned for 2025 as well. Projects related to the installation of bicycle racks at FNC, additional boardwalk replacement at FNC, and the re-creation of the rain garden between Borough Hall and the Carriage House are all in planning discussions with local residents at this time.

Borough Hall Gardens Plant Identification – Eagle Scout Eli Krantz of Scotch Plains' Troop 104 prepared an invasive plant species brochure to assist with

the education of Fanwood residents about this important topic. His project also included creating and installing plant identification guides for all native species planted in the Borough Hall Gardens.

Bat Box Project – Boy and Eagle Scout Matthew Mui of Fanwood’s Troop 33 completed a full replacement of the four bat boxes that are present within the FNC. The previous bat boxes had deteriorated over time with exposure to the elements.

OTHER

Borough Master Plan - The Environmental Commission provided comments to the Master Plan being completed originally targeted for completion during 2023-24. Members of the EC participated with the consultant hired by the Borough to preliminarily update the master plan as well as at the October 2023 public meeting. Additional activity is expected in 2025 now that the latest affordable housing mandates have been released by the State of New Jersey.

Zoning Variance Request Reviews - The FEC reviewed twelve sets of plans before the Planning Board during 2024 and provided recommendations to the Board. Several sets of plans were reviewed multiple times.

Borough Hall Gardens - The FEC continues to maintain the Borough Hall gardens and advocate for the planting of native species on property owned by the Borough. The FEC gave the public a tour and information session on the gardens, plants and pollinators on June 22nd.

Long Term Volunteers - Multiple members of the FEC were recognized by the Mayor and Council as long-term volunteers in the Borough. Four members have provided between 15-25 years of service.

Nature Center Anniversary – The Nature Center celebrated its 50th Anniversary on Sept. 11, 2024. The FEC held a series of activities (see above) in 2024 to highlight the Nature Center and its role in the Borough. A re-dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony was held on October 7th to celebrate.

Other Acknowledgements and Supporters

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

Fanwood Borough Staff – Staff members have provided considerable assistance to the FEC over the past year.

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 (RRWA)—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

Clean Communities Day



Trail Maintenance Day



Meditation Day



Youth Day



Ribbon Cutting

