

Bloomfield Environmental Commission Annual Report - 2020

2020 Roster:

- Oliver Young
- Rich Moseson
- Flint Kinkade
- Cailyn Bruno
- Greg Babula
- Matthew Sweet
- Councilman Nicholas Joanow

Introduction

2020 was a year of both challenges and opportunities for the Bloomfield Environmental Commission (BEC). Despite the limitations due to the COVID pandemic, BEC continued to meet virtually via Zoom throughout most of the year and make progress on planning for an increase in 2021 activity once normal business and community activities are able to resume. In many ways, 2020 was a year for planning and membership growth as the committee focused on how to best accomplish mission objectives and the specific projects upon which we would like to invest our time and efforts. The mission of BEC remains the same, to foster a sustainable community, promote green initiatives throughout the town and to aid the planning and zoning boards and Township Council on actions and policies of sustainability

There was a total of nine meetings in 2020, which were open to the public and joined by several non-member guests who attended on a regular basis. In November, the Commission added its first high school student intern.

Following is a summary of the primary projects and actions undertaken during 2020.

Projects

Sustainable Jersey:

A new subcommittee was established in February to focus on Bloomfield's recertification. Greener Bloomfield members joined BEC as part of this effort. Sustainable Jersey ultimately pushed recertification by one year, from December 2020 to December 2021 due to the pandemic's many setbacks. The subcommittee first met in July to break down the action categories and discuss where to focus the group's efforts. Funding for the municipality to implement any actions is tight due to the pandemic. Members narrowed down and vetted the actions to see what is attainable for this recertification. Further meetings ensued and the recertification process is moving in the right direction for 2021.

Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI):

This past year furthered the efforts of the Environmental Resource Inventory Subcommittee, a group previously established, and allowed BEC to continue to advocate for the ERI.

The commission reviewed the drafted RFP in January, which was submitted to the Planning Director the following month. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic the township was in a wait and see pattern, withholding 15% of budget due to the ongoing public health emergency, and the request for the funding for the ERI was unable to be fulfilled.

A grant provided by Sustainable Jersey for this ERI was withheld as a result of the township's budget issues. This left the grant at risk of expiring since there was no budget for this initiative established. In November, the commission requested Sustainable Jersey to extend the grant deadline, which was approved and extended to May 2021.

N.J. Food Waste Assembly Bill #2371:

In April 2020, the N.J. Legislature and Governor Murphy passed the Food Waste Assembly Bill to take effect in October 2021 which requires large generators of food waste – such as hospitals, prisons, restaurants, and supermarkets – to recycle food waste rather than send it to incinerators or landfills. All applicable food waste generated within each municipality must be kept within 25 miles for composting or reuse.

The BEC set in motion ideas to proactively address waste from the municipality, given that $\frac{1}{3}$ of municipal garbage is attributed to food waste. Options such as an anaerobic digester were discussed that could cut disposal costs by significant amounts. In August, Councilman Joanow proposed a virtual meeting to educate other environmental groups within the town on the bill and the idea of anaerobic digestion, presented by an expert on the subject matter, Dr. Sebasto Smith. This educational presentation was held in September, focusing on rotating composting digester drums as an alternative to transporting the township's food waste to a local area for processing. This disposal alternative would be coordinated with private entities at a cost.

Plastic Bag Ban Ordinance:

While the Statewide plastic bag ban was stalled in Trenton, towns and local governments had been passing local ordinances in advance. BEC advocated for such a ban for Bloomfield in a number of ways. In 2020, BEC began work to draft a proposed ordinance to present to the Mayor, the Bloomfield Center Alliance, and the Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce for consideration.

In conjunction, several actions were planned such as:

- A survey the impact of the Montclair ban on the businesses in their town,
- Setting up counting stations at large grocery stores in Bloomfield to collect data on the number of plastic bags versus reusable bags already in use
- Initiating a number of publicity events such as an official “ribbon cutting” launch event, the distribution of reusable bags with a Bloomfield logo, and a Buzz article.

The Commission consistently advocated for Statewide enactment of a ban and supported the lobbying efforts of ANJEC. In November, the state legislature passed a state-wide ban beginning in May 2022. Single use plastic straws may be provided only by request beginning November 2021.

Milkweed Promotion / Pollinator Pathways:

With the continued goal of promoting native plantings as pollinators and to help develop a chain of gardens and parks as a pathway for butterflies and other species, BEC assisted in the distribution of milkweed plants from 71 Locust Street, a planned development on a former industrial site. Between 75 and 100 plants were removed from the Locust Street site and replanted throughout the township. A large number were planted at the Watessing Butterfly Garden and over three dozen citizens took plants for their gardens (over 75 residents registered for the program). Eggs, caterpillars, and monarch butterflies were observed in the transplanted milkweed by the end of August.

BEC plans to continue monitoring the progress, promote more plantings of native milkweed and ask citizens to help collect data on and caterpillars in future. There is a pending federal bill to provide funding for state and local governments to add pollinator pathways along roadways.

Essex-Hudson Greenway:

Planning for the new Greenway proceeded and there was much press about the regional project throughout the year. Five miles of the 11-mile trail runs through Bloomfield. The township passed a resolution to apply for grant money for funding of this project. The owner of the railroad line property has agreed on a purchase price with the Open Space Initiative and now the focus for the stakeholders overall is on the financing. BEC drafted a letter of support for the project and provided it to the Essex County Commissioners.

2021 Initiatives / Upcoming Projects:

With a renewed focus on the environment and sustainability at the Federal level, the Bloomfield Environmental Commission is eager to re-engage with the township's citizens on a number of new initiatives in 2021.

- The Essex-Hudson Greenway can become New Jersey's own High Line and the largest urban greenspace in the country. But time is of the essence in the purchasing of the land. This is a project that must be a priority for our community.
- The Commission looks forward to review and input on the revised Stormwater Management Ordinance, which is required by the NJ DEP to be updated by March 2021.
- The potential Civic Center-Library Redevelopment Project is an opportunity for the Commission to provide a review, feedback, and support opportunities for a sustainable development
- The Environmental Resource Inventory may be bid out and if so, the ERI would be adopted as part of the Township's Master Plan.
- The township's tree ordinance may be considered for revision as we look for ways to promote the planting of more trees. Additional existing ordinances may be considered for review and update.
- BEC will continue to explore the possibility of town wide composting.
- The Commission will also continue to push ahead on the milkweed pollinator path and promote a Mayoral Monarch Pledge.
- Finalize a Bronze level recertification with Sustainable Jersey