

City of Summit Environmental Commission Minutes, September 15, 2025

Participating: Donna Goggin Patel, Helen Campanha, Francie Cho, Dan Crisafulli, Jeff Hankinson, John Kilby, Mimi Zukoff

Council Liaison: Michelle Kalmanson

Guests: Mandana Arvandi, Rick Bell, Sunil Garg, Jocelyn Modesto, Sid Oberoi, Blaine Rothauser

Donna Goggin Patel called the meeting to order at 8:02 PM. The June minutes were approved.

Educational Outreach: John Kilby

John Kilby, Mimi Zukoff, Francie Cho, and Helen Campanha volunteered at Community Night on July 22 to speak to the community about the work of the EC, RAC and STAC. Thanks go out to all of them.

“Tiny Forest” Reforestation: Donna Goggin Patel

The Tiny Forest has turned the corner in terms of maintenance. This summer, Donna, Mimi and Francie met at the Tiny Forest to weed around 5 times. Several Girl Scouts from Troop #45827 assisted with weeding and have helped out a number of times. Francie watered specific newer plantings at the Tiny Forest once when we had a few weeks without rain. We are starting to think more strategically about where we want certain species, like the staghorn sumacs. William Cho helped us remove several volunteer mulberry trees we realized we did not want and several staghorn sumacs in the center sections of the forest. Dwight Hiscano photographed the Tiny Forest with his drone in late August, so that we can see the most recent growth from above.

There have been a number of tours at the Tiny Forest this summer. The Rahway River Watershed Association hosted an event at the Tiny Forest on Saturday, June 28. Donna and Francie lead tours from 9-10 am and 10:15-11:15 am. Donna brought a group of CivicStory board members to the Tiny Forest on July 12. (This group also received a quick Park Line tour from Jay Cho.) Donna gave tours to the Shade Tree Committees for Hunterdon on July 29, and for Teaneck on August 24. Donna met a freelance reporter at the Tiny Forest on August 27 (the article in the Montclair Local should be appearing this month). Donna met a Rutgers grad student, Josh Kover, at the Tiny Forest on September 2. Josh is researching urban forests.

Mimi led a lesson for the Little Sprouts group at the Summit Free Public Library at the Tiny Forest on September 10. (She had taught a lesson to the group at the Library in August about

native plants, and this was the related field trip.) The Essex County chapter of the Native Plant Society is scheduled to visit the Tiny Forest on Saturday, October 4, in the morning. If you are free to help Donna that morning, please let her know.

Earth Day Clean-Up and Additional Clean-Ups: Donna Goggin Patel

The Summit Conservancy is interested in hosting a clean-up in the Fall (September or later) at Hidden Valley Park. Donna is in touch with them about permissions and potential dates. We discussed potential dates for the 2026 Annual City-Wide Earth Day Clean-Up, and are going to seek permission for the event to be held on Saturday, April 18, 2026, with the rain date of April 19. Helen will draft the permission letter to the city.

Environmental Resource Inventory: Chantal Landman

The Land Conservancy (“TLC”) sent us a final version of the revised Environmental Resource Inventory (“ERI”) last week. The ERI will be presented to the Planning Board at its October 27 meeting.

Sustainable Jersey Certification: Donna Goggin Patel

Summit is renewing its Sustainable Jersey certification this year. We earned 680 points for 54 actions in 15 categories, and we maintain our Silver certification. Donna, Mimi, Francie, Helen, Dan Crisafulli, Lara Mendenhall, Chantal Landman and Melissa Spurr all worked on action narratives with help from many city employees and community volunteers.

Community Energy Plan: Donna Goggin Patel

Donna and Dan continue to gather information and support the city staff in implementing the steps for various Community Energy Plan (“CEP”) action items. In positive news, there are now several Community Solar projects available to JCP&L electricity customers in Summit. The projects are coordinated by Solar Landscape and EverSolar. Residents are receiving flyers about these. One vendor presented to interested residents at the Senior Housing building in July. More information and a searchable database of options is available [here](#).

Multi-Town Environmental Commission Meetings: Donna Goggin Patel

Donna and Dan attended a virtual meeting on September 9 about stormwater management current practices and efforts. Participants from Berkeley Heights, Cranford, Rahway, Scotch Plains and Westfield joined the call. Towns reported on their stormwater ordinances, potential zoning changes to limit residential runoff, the potential for stormwater utilities and educational efforts in the towns. We are currently sharing educational materials related to green

infrastructure, such as rain barrels, rain gardens and Adopt a Drain programs. We are looking into hosting a presentation about the weather patterns in New Jersey now and what is expected in the next decades. There is a grant which requires multi-town collaboration that we could explore if a project presents itself. Rick Bell also suggested that the EC's response to variance requests related to steep slopes may be a way to more forcefully assert its position that maintaining the trees is a crucial step to preventing more flooding.

Shade Tree Advisory Committee: John Kilby

STAC is working on providing increased information on the city's website and is working on a "Welcome Wagon" digital email for new residents. The STAC plans to do more outreach and education about the Landmark Trees in Summit. The next "Fall in Love with Trees" presentation will be in 2026 due to the "Path for All" construction at Reeves-Reed Arboretum.

Recycling Advisory Committee: Mimi Zukoff

Green Bucket continues to collect the food waste from the Transfer Station. In June, they collected 3,600 lbs. In July (with 5 weeks), they collected 4,240 lbs. In August, they collected 3,095 lbs. The usage has been relatively steady and stable; the program has kept approximately 92,000 lbs. of food waste out of the incinerator since its inception. RAC is considering placing educational signage about the program in downtown locations to increase resident awareness.

On June 24, George Drossinos and Mimi toured the facility in Keasbey that currently processes Summit's residential curbside recycling. They were both impressed with Bayshore's process and machinery. They separate out metal, plastics and paper and put them in bales for resale. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a market for recycled glass, and it is crushed for incineration or landfill. The plastics are baled in three separate categories - #1, #2, #3-7, with 1's and 2's being the most profitable. They indicated there are buyers for the 3-7 category. Their machinery sorts the plastic into categories using a laser to identify the type of plastic.

Some takeaways from the tour (note that some of these are unique to Bayshore and can't be generalized to other recycling processors):

- There is no market for recycled glass, and it contaminates the paper in single stream recycling.
- The city could be paid for the paper if we were using dual stream (separating paper from other recycling), which we did prior to the newest contract.
- Recycled items need to be reasonably, but not perfectly clean. They should not contain significant amounts of food/residue.

- Wet paper is acceptable, since paper bales are being sold domestically/locally. The issue with wet paper is when it is baled and shipped long distances, especially in the heat. Then the wet paper gets moldy.
- Spiral notebooks and staples are okay, but loose shredded paper is not. Shredding may be recycled in clear plastic bags.
- Egg cartons have already been recycled, and cannot be recycled again. This applies to egg carton-like packing material as well.
- All cartons containing liquids are recyclable, including shelf stable, juice boxes, refrigerated cartons and tetra paks.

Mimi pointed out that they learned a lot on the trip, and that it's a complex industry. It has raised new considerations for the next contract renewal. We also want to learn more about how Giordano processes the recycling it picks up at the Transfer Station. Mimi and George shared the information with DPW, the EC and Michelle Kalmanson. They will be meeting with Nancy Adams soon to find out more about how and why Maplewood moved back to dual stream recycling.

Over the summer, the city publicized the four “quick tip” recycling videos with RAC members filmed by the city Communications office. These each promote Recycle Coach at the end. (There also is now a more prominent button on the city’s website for Recycle Coach.) If you have not had a chance to watch these great videos, they are available on the city website [here](#). And they are featured in the TAP Into Summit [here](#). RAC is accepting suggestions for additional topics.

BookSmiles last collected 2,680 lbs. of excess books on August 29. Since the inception of our partnership, BookSmiles has saved 38,000 lbs. of books from the garbage stream. In addition to the benefits of getting books into the hands of children and adults who appreciate them, this has saved Summit approximately \$1650 in tipping fees. Mimi is trying to have two of the current Helpsy bins swapped out with ones with a larger opening for donations. All four current bins have a small opening which makes it difficult to drop off large quantities of used textiles.

A RAC member recommended reading “Garbage Land” by Elizabeth Royte and asked that RAC consider a campaign to encourage people to read e-books instead of buying books. RAC will ask the City to re-run “[Think Before You Buy](#)” for the holiday season. RAC is researching an inquiry that came to the EC about options to recycle water filters (like those in refrigerators and under sinks).

Mimi continues to work with the Summit Free Public Library to see about screening the film, “Plastic People,” about how much plastic is getting into our bodies. There is no date on the schedule yet.

Summit Free Market: Mimi Zukoff

For 2025, residents should expect Summit Free Market events on the second Saturday of each month from 8AM-3PM and the fourth Friday of each month from 12-2PM. The September dates are Saturday, September 13, and Friday, September 26. As the Summit Free Market is often short of volunteers in the summer, please feel free to volunteer if you are available. You can simply show up, and you will be told what you can do to help.

There are spots on the Summit Free Market Committee for both an EC rep and a RAC rep. Right now, Mimi is filling both slots. Please let Mimi know if you would like to join the Free Market Committee and volunteer there.

Green Schools: Donna Goggin Patel

The Green Schools parents will meet next on Friday, October 24, at 8:45 am. If you would like to join the green parent group, please email greensummitnj@gmail.com.

There is currently a drive across the District to collect reusable bags for GRACE. All the primary centers and elementary schools are collecting bags through September. LCJSMS will collect bags the first two weeks in October. SHS will collect bags the second two weeks in October. The SHS Environmental Club and the Thrift and Sustainability Club are planning to hold a sweatshirt swap in October.

Other Green Schools initiatives for the year include a stuffed animal drive (likely winter), the Earth in the Classroom lessons (April), and a Walk/Bike/Carpool initiative (May). Please note that Washington School has several recycling opportunities available to the community. There are bins for sneakers (in any condition) and reusable bags outside the entrance to the school under the awning.

Repair Café: Courtney Cordaro

Repair Café returns on Saturday, September 27, from 11 am - 3 pm at Christ Church (561 Springfield Ave.; Summit). Bring up to two items per person for free repairs, including bicycles, lamps, computers, electronics, wooden furniture, and clothing/textiles, plus knife sharpening. For more info, go to www.repaircafegs.org.

GreenFaith: Mimi Zukoff

The GreenFaith global organization is teaming up with 350.org and Third Act and encouraging a nationwide Day of Action on September 21, 2025, in advance of the United Nations Climate Conference. They are calling the mobilization *SUN Day* and encouraging individual

GreenFaith chapters to hold events the weekend of September 20-21, 2025. This is intended to be more of a mobilization event than one large rally held in New York City. To learn more, visit this [site](#). Some local congregations are holding events.

New Business: Everyone

Mandana Arvandi mentioned that it is Climate Week in NYC next week. More details can be found [here](#).

Jocelyn Modesto spoke about the proposed Tatlock lighting project and voiced concerns about the effect of the lights on animal species in Martin's Brook Park. She also asked whether the Environmental Commission had ever commented or taken a position on the lighting proposal. Donna explained that the EC comments on variance applications going before the Planning and Zoning Boards. The EC has not yet received plans for the Tatlock lighting as it originated from Common Council. In addition, the EC's current membership does not include anyone with expertise in the effects of development on wildlife that would distinguish its comments from those being made by neighbors or other residents with concerns about wildlife. Blaine Rothauser, an environmental consultant, spoke about the data he gathered from spending time in Martin's Brook Park and the special nature of the park. He found Martin's Brook to be a unique remaining pristine ecosystem within Summit. He described it as a fragile green space with various species of bats and nesting birds such as the wood thrush and veery, both of which are species of special concern and protected in New Jersey during breeding season. Although about 50% of Martin's Brook Park's vegetation is invasive species, it is a habitat for several species that could face negative effects from the proposed lighting project. He advocated for the EC to publicly speak out about the Tatlock lighting proposal.

Following these comments, Donna asked the EC members to let her know if they were in favor of a statement or action by the Commission. And she also reminded the members that they are welcome to voice their opinions as individual citizens at any time.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Donna Goggin Patel.

Dates for the 2025 Environmental Commission Meetings

All meetings will be held in the Whitman Room in City Hall unless noted. These are typically the 3rd Monday of the month. Any changes to that schedule or location are noted:

October 20 (Large Conference Room)

November 17 (Large Conference Room)

December 15 (Large Conference Room)