

Environmental Commission Annual Report for 2023

Throughout 2023, the City of Summit Environmental Commission (EC) worked to promote sustainability efforts in Summit through community projects, outreach, events, and coordinating activities with other organizations. As dictated by state law, the EC has seven appointed commissioners and two alternates. Donna Goggin Patel is the appointed chairperson. For 2023, Rick Bell was the Planning Board representative to the, EC member Mimi Zukoff was chairperson of the Recycling Advisory Committee (and the EC representative to the Summit Free Market Steering Committee), and EC member John Kilby was chairperson of Summit's Shade Tree Advisory Committee. Chris Sprague resigned from his position in September, and he was replaced by Francie Cho.

All EC meetings are open to the public and several non-members attend meetings on a regular basis. In addition, Council liaison Jaime Levine attended several of the EC meetings in 2023.

Many EC members are members of other groups interested in sustainability. Jeff Hankinson is on the Park Line board. Donna Goggin Patel is a trustee of Reeves-Reed Arboretum, and she is involved with the Green Schools parent green team. Mimi Zukoff is active in the Summit Area GreenFaith Circle.

2023 Projects

Annual Earth Day Clean-Up: EC members, particularly Kelly Moughalian and Donna Goggin Patel, organized and managed the annual Earth Day Clean-Up which took place on April 22 at ten different spots in Summit. We had 269 participants who collected 1,820 lbs. of trash and 80 lbs. of recycling. Volunteers also added wood chips at Martin's Brook Park, Hidden Valley Park, and Wilson Park. Kelly, Dan Crisafulli, Lara Mendenhall, Chris Sprague, Mimi Zukoff, and our Council liaison Jaime Levine all ran sites for the clean-up.

Community Energy Plan Grant: The NJ Board of Public Utilities and Sustainable Jersey awarded Summit a \$10,000 planning grant to create a Community Energy Plan (Plan). EC members Donna Goggin Patel and Dan Crisafulli led this effort. Throughout 2023, they met with Aaron Schrager and Jin Blades from the city staff, Council Members Marjorie Fox and Jaime Levine, and interested residents about the Plan. We also held several meetings with stakeholders. The Plan sets out a roadmap of potential actions Summit may take in the next 3-5 years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Donna presented the proposed Plan to Common Council on November 13, and Common Council unanimously approved a resolution adopting the Plan on December 5.

Tiny Forest Reforestation: The Tiny Forest now contains over 650 plantings of over 45 native species of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. The Tiny Forest is a multi-layered forest of native plants that is designed to become self-sustaining after 2-3 years and to become a fully-developed forest in 20-30 years. During 2023, dozens of volunteers added plantings, watered and weeded as needed (as part of the initial maintenance), and performed other tasks, such as adding wood chips to the path and around the plantings. EC Members Donna Goggin Patel, Lara Mendenhall and Mimi Zukoff have taken the lead on this project with assistance from Francie Cho, Dan Crisafulli, Jeff Hankinson, John Kilby, and Chris Sprague. Over the summer, the middle school rec campers helped every Thursday morning as a volunteer opportunity. Donna led several tours of the Tiny Forest for neighboring Environmental Commissions, including representatives from Fanwood, Millburn, Rahway and Roselle Park. On May 13, the city and the Shade Tree Advisory Committee celebrated Arbor Day here. About 25-30 people attended the ceremony with Council President Pro Tem Susan Hairston reading a proclamation and City Forester John Linson speaking about Arbor Day and the Tiny Forest. Donna also spoke and answered questions about the project. The EC learned seed collection techniques and is partnering with the Summit Free Public Library to provide seeds for several Tiny Forest wildflowers to the Library's Native Seed Library.

ANJEC Grant: The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) awarded Summit \$1,500 in May for the completion of the fencing at the Park Line's Butterfly Garden. EC Member Jeff Hankinson, along with Jay Cho, completed the fencing and added signage.

Sustainable Jersey Grant: Sustainable Jersey awarded Summit a \$2,000 grant in May for on-going projects. To date, portions of the grant helped to fund Guy Sternberg's November 2 talk at Reeves-Reed Arboretum on "Trees in a Changing Climate" as part of the Fall in Love with Trees series and a food waste composting banner.

Residential Solar Presentation: With coordination by EC member Mimi Zukoff, the EC, Summit Area GreenFaith Circle, and the Summit Free Public Library cosponsored a virtual talk by Mark Miller of Green House Solar on May 11 entitled "Light Up Your Life: Learn About Solar Power for Your Home."

Membership in Union County Hub and the Northern Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance Group (NJSMA):

The EC is in contact with its counterparts and Green Teams of neighboring towns to share resources and information about successful initiatives. This includes a Union County Hub supported by Sustainable Jersey and the NJSMA, a group of towns in our geographic area. Collectively, we are in touch with members from Berkeley Heights, Chatham Borough, Chatham Township, Cranford, Livingston, Madison, Millburn, Morris Township, Rahway, Roselle Park, Springfield and Westfield. Donna Goggin Patel routinely attends these meetings, and the EC shares these resources with RAC and other city boards. EC member Mimi Zukoff led Summit's coordination with NJSMA for the third year to hold a successful native plant sale in partnership with the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) that will be continued. The EC has shared information from NJSMA about the Drew Forest, a second proposed Keasbey power plant and a development bordering GSWA.

Review of Plans for the Planning and Zoning Boards: Throughout 2023, the EC reviewed more than 40 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. This work was done by Donna Goggin Patel, Lara Mendenhall and Chris Sprague (and then Francie Cho), on behalf of the EC.

Community Outreach

Communications: Many green-related posts have been made to the EC's [Summit NJ Environmental Commission Facebook group](#), and the [Recycling Advisory Committee's Facebook page](#), as well as the [City of Summit Facebook page](#) and local newspapers. Thanks to Amy Cairns for her substantial help in outreach.

Educational Tables at Events: Dan Crisafulli and Donna Goggin Patel manned a table for the EC at Community Night on the Green in July.

Speaking Engagements: Donna Goggin Patel spoke about the Tiny Forest reforestation at the Summit/New Providence Rotary meeting on February 27.

Please join the Summit NJ EC Facebook group 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 typically on the third Monday of the month at 8 PM in the Whitman Room; they generally last about an hour. A list of 2024 meeting dates appears below.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna Goggin Patel, 2023 Chairperson
City of Summit Environmental Commission

2024 EC meeting dates (8 PM in the Whitman Room at City Hall): 1/22 (4th Monday), 2/26 (4th Monday), 3/18, 4/15, 5/20, 6/17, 9/16, 10/21, 11/18, 12/16. There are no meetings in July and August.