

Avalon Environmental Commission
January 19, 2021

The meeting was called to order at 4:01 pm by Chairwoman Rothman.

Pledge of allegiance.

Chairwoman Rothman read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement.

Roll call: **Present:** Kevin Coyle, Joe Dvorak, Steve Malyszka, Donna Rothman
 Absent: Claire Driscoll, Brian Reynolds, Beth Tipping

A motion to approve the minutes from the December 15, 2020 meeting was made by Kevin Coyle and seconded by Joe Dvorak. Approved by all.

Threatened and Endangered Birds – Fish and Wildlife update: Donna Rothman reported no piping plovers were seen or found nesting in the Borough of Avalon during the 2020 calendar year, with only oystercatchers, which are a species of concern, being found on the beaches in 2020. It is suspected that the intrusion of humanity, predators, and possibly water intrusion on Avalon’s beaches may have affected nesting.

Donna Rothman announced ANJEC is hosting a webinar on January 27, 2021 on the 2021 Goals and Actions for Environmental Commissions, and encouraged all to attend, if possible.

Surfside Park Lecture Series – Presentation by Wetlands Institute – Brooke Knapick and Erin Rawls:

Donna Rothman announced an upcoming outdoor Lecture Series presented by The Wetlands Institute to be held at Surfside Park throughout the summer months. The focus will be the Environmental Characteristics of Avalon as a barrier island and the creatures who share the island with us. She introduced Brooke Knapick and Erin Rawls, who will be giving an overview of the program.

Erin Rawls announced the theme of the lecture series would be to focus on the uniqueness and necessity of barrier islands while educating attendees on the ecosystems, species, and other characteristics of these islands. Each month will introduce a new topic. In the month of May, the series will be introduced by explaining what a barrier beach is, including the ecosystem of a barrier beach. Considering May is the peak season for horseshoe crabs, a portion of May’s series will focus on horseshoe crabs, their migration patterns, and their reproductive methods. In June, the focus will turn to diamondback terrapins, as June is during the peak of their egg-laying season. In July, birds will be a primary topic, with education touching on the nesting patterns and stressing the importance of protecting piping plovers and oystercatchers. In August, attendees will be educated on the “unsung heroes” of the barrier beach ecosystem, such as mollusks, crabs, and sharks. For the final month of the series in September, butterflies will be a primary topic, as it is the peak migration season during that month. A monarch butterfly demonstration is expected, and the migration patterns of turtles and birds will also be discussed. When planning the lecture series, it was decided to focus on what is actually taking place on east coast barrier beaches during the times the lectures are given, to create a better bond between attendees and the topics being discussed.

Brooke Knapick added The Wetlands Institute offers walk-throughs and tours of their facilities, including an indoor lecture series during the winter, usually held over lunch or dinner. In the summer months, The Wetlands Institute also hosts walks through Avalon areas to promote education of the ecosystem. Due to COVID, it is expected to host the winter lecture series via a virtual platform; however, the details have not yet been finalized.

Donna Rothman commended Erin and Brooke for their well-planned lecture series, and noted the bay is very important, which often gets overlooked.

Joe Dvorak inquired if The Wetlands Institute has noticed migration pattern changes due to climate change during their observation of wildlife on the island.

Erin Rawls noted The Wetlands Institute is more focused on nesting than on migratory patterns; however, she reported it has been noticed that the timing has shifted slightly for some migratory species.

Kevin Coyle questioned if the lecture series will discuss the impact of backpassing and beach fill projects on mollusk habitats.

Brooke Knapick responded yes; all facts will be presented.

Donna Rothman expressed her happiness that the series seems to be appropriate for all ages.

Brooke Knapick indicated the intent was to stress the importance conservation and making changes to a broad group of potential attendees.

Donna Rothman suggested exploring options for possible incentives that can be offered to the public for attending all five sessions, such as door prizes. She reported the cost of this series would be \$1,250.00.

Further discussion took place regarding the series at Surfside Park, including amplification, projection screens, audience placement, and crowd management. Also discussed were opportunities for further education that could be offered to the public in the future, such as group tours of The Wetlands Institute, the bird sanctuary, and the salt marsh safari.

Planning/Zoning Board: Donna Rothman reported her virtual attendance at the recent Planning/Zoning Board Meeting held January 12, 2021. An application discussed at the meeting was filed by Tim Kerr concerning the building on the boardwalk at 30th Street, and the plans for renovations to be made to the existing commercial structure. She announced the application was denied by the Planning/Zoning Board.

Joe Dvorak noted his attendance as well, and explained the existing commercial structure is nonconforming, with many issues surrounding the application, with parking being one of those issues. He indicated the applicant could revise the plans and re-apply to the Planning/Zoning Board in the future.

Tree Committee: Joe Dvorak announced plans have begun for an extension to the Community Forestry Management Plan, which is typically a five-year document. The committee is working to set goals and designate members and organizations to implement the goals.

Donna Rothman added the revisions of the plan were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension would be for the time period covering 2021 through 2023.

Butterfly Garden: Steve Malyszka reported overgrowth has been cleaned up, and the area looks great, which is an indicator of a good spring season for 2021.

Artificial Turf: Steve Malyszka requested an update on the Planning/Zoning Board's review of the Environmental Commission's recommendation to no longer allow artificial turf in the Borough of Avalon. He expressed the opinion that artificial turf should not be permitted.

Joe Dvorak expressed his understanding that the Planning/Zoning Board is considering allowing artificial turf, but not allowing such a surface to be counted in a property's green space calculation.

Bamboo: Steve Malyszka mentioned his knowledge of a bamboo planting in town, and asked if any Environmental Commission member is aware of the status of that issue.

Donna Rothman detailed a recent conversation with Borough of Avalon Code Enforcement Officer Paul Short, who has indicated that the violation notice in connection with the bamboo planting is being contested.

Armacost Park: Steve Malyszka reported two meetings have been held with Joe Lomax to review how Armacost Park has evolved over the years. Aerial photographs were found dating back to the 1930s of the area. The photographs from the 1930s primarily showed sand dunes in the area. The 1960s photographs showed some streets, as well as some forestation of the area. Photographs dating around 1967-1968 showed the formation of a pond, thicker forestation, and the dunes. Photographs dating around 1974-1975 showed the formation of ditches, which seemed to feed the body of water in the area. Since the photographs in the 1970s, the photographs show the progression of the ditches and the pond being filled in by phragmites. He surmised that floodwaters could have contributed to some of that growth. He requested that the findings be taken to the Borough of Avalon Administrator to request more studies of the area to determine where water in that area goes.

Donna Rothman agreed with taking the findings to the Administrator, and noted one of the powers of an Environmental Commission granted by New Jersey State Statute is the ability to conduct research.

Bay Park Marina: Kevin Coyle announces the County Open Space Program will soon be announcing the finalized funding granted to the Borough of Avalon for this project. Once that funding is finalized, the Borough would be able to go out to bid for the project and begin construction shortly thereafter.

Donna Rothman inquired if turtles are nesting in the sandy areas of Bay Park Marina, with Kevin Coyle responding yes.

2021 Project Updates, Presentation to Council and ALHOA, Arbor Day: Donna Rothman announced her recent presentation to Borough Council of the 2021 Work Plan and 2020 report. Since then, ALHOA has asked for a presentation by the Environmental Commission at an upcoming meeting. She requested that any ideas of topics to be discussed at that meeting be forwarded to her, while noting a copy of the presentation will be given to the Environmental Commission. She also expressed the wish to develop pamphlets and brochures to educate the public.

Adjournment at 5:17.