

2020-2021 Environmental Commission Summary

Submitted by: Carolina Ramos, Sustainability Program Manager
Secretary to the Environmental Commission

In January 2020, the Jersey City Environmental Commission (JCEC) officially started its tenth year. The Commission had eight (8) meetings in 2020 and seven (7) meetings so far in 2021. All meetings were open to the public and noticed in advance according to the NJ Open Public Meetings Act. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, March – May 2020 meetings were canceled and as of June 2020 meetings have been held remotely. A number of environmental professionals and other invited guests attended and spoke at these meetings. The various projects and accomplishments of the Jersey City Environmental Commission over the course of 2020 and 2021 are outlined below.

Jersey City Green Business Certification Program

Since 2018, Jersey City's Green Business Certification Program recognizes businesses that incorporate sustainable practices. The program allows businesses to earn points for environmentally-friendly practices, such as using energy efficient lighting or composting, as well as measures like having bike racks and donating to local causes. The Environmental Commission reviews and certifies interested applicants. Between 2020 and 2021, the Environmental Commission certified the following 7 businesses: Playscape, Fundraising Well, Rosebud Florist, Chaconia Candles, The Lucky HoneyBee, 11th St Workshop, and JC Fab Lab/Towhee Co.

Pollinator Garden Project

Through the 2020 ANJEC Grants for Open Space Stewardship Award, the Jersey City Environmental Commission and the Bergen Hill Park Association created a pollinator garden to enhance pollinator habitat and education. The Environmental Commission had been awarded \$1500 for the garden project at Bergen Hill Park in Jersey City. Launched in spring of 2021, the pollinator garden features regionally-appropriate plants that attract bees and butterflies. Specific plant varieties have been identified that coincide with the ecoregional planting guide for the Eastern Broadleaf Forest available on pollinator.org, as well as the native New Jersey plants identified on www.jerseyyards.org. The garden also features signage that explains the importance of pollination to the environment and food sources. PS #38's fourth grade class partnered with the Environmental Commission and Office of Sustainability to create pollinator houses to install at the garden.

Plastic Bag Ban during COVID-19

During COVID, there has been an increase in the use of single-use plastics. In 2020 the Environmental Commission co-hosted an event with ANJEC to bring attention to this issue. There was an overview of the current Bag Ban followed by the amendments proposed by Councilman Solomon. ANJEC gave an overview of NJ's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act and also shared the "Story of Plastic" which is about 7 minutes long. Jenna Pantin of Chaconia Candles, a certified green business in Jersey City, explained how she implements sustainable practices into her daily business operations.

Policy Recommendations

In 2020 and 2021 the Environmental Commission made a number of policy recommendations to the City and the State through the following letters:

- 2020 letter to the City Council to urge the state legislature to enact the Liberty State Park Protection Act - SENATE BILL S1449 and ASSEMBLY BILL A2189;
- 2021 letter to the Mayor recommending that the Jersey City Street Tree Program increase the number of trees planted each year and, when possible, plant larger sized and larger-growing shade tree species; and
- 2021 letter to the Mayor recommending that the city should not yet sign the letter opposing the following forest management bills: A-4843/ S-3549, A-4844/ S-3550 and A-4845/ S-3548. The Environmental Commission strives to thoroughly evaluate the bills and seek outside subject-area experts to learn more.

Letters of Support

The Environmental Commission wrote the following letters of support for initiatives that furthered its mission to promote the protection and conservation of Jersey City's natural resources:

- 2020 letter of support to the City Council to express support of Resolution 20-516, Resolution Opposing Construction of the NJ Transit Gas-Fired Power Plant in Kearny;
- 2020 letter of support to Mayor Fulop on behalf of the City's application to the NJ DOT Transportation Alternative grant program for curbing improvements to ten intersections in the City;
- 2021 letter of support to the City Council for the resolution calling for fossil fuel divestment from Jersey City's Pension Plans;
- 2021 letter of support to the Hudson County Commissioners for the Essex-Hudson Greenway, which would offer residents easy access to nature for a range of activities including walking, biking, running, and birding; and
- 2021 letter of opposition to the City Council and Governor Murphy for the proposed Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission (PVSC) gas-fired power plant at their sewage treatment facility in the Ironbound community of Newark. The letter also calls on the state to direct PVSC to redesign the project using a renewable energy-based power source.

Other Activities

In 2021 the Environmental Commission signed on to the US Food Loss & Waste Policy Action Plan Jersey City is part of the Natural Resources Defense Council's (NRDC) Food Matters cohort. NRDC, Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, World Wildlife Fund, and ReFED have created the US Food Loss & waste Policy Action Plan. Their policy plan prioritizes expanding incentives to institutionalize surplus food donation, investing in infrastructure to rescue, recycle and prevent organic waste from entering landfills and incinerators, and educate consumers via food waste behavior change campaigns.

In 2021 the Environmental Commission has been inviting community members to present their projects and initiatives, including public school students, college students, and local environmental stewards.