

The Board of County Commissioners of the County of Monmouth

DIVISION OF PLANNING



TERI O'CONNOR
County Administrator

Email:
teri.oconnor@co.monmouth.nj.us

JOSEPH BARRIS, PP, AICP, CFM
Director of Planning

Email:
joe.barris@co.monmouth.nj.us

Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the
MONMOUTH COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL
Thursday, May 8, 2025, 5:00 PM

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:02pm.

2. ROLL CALL – ATTENDANCE

Members present: David Kostka, Ellen Smith, Scott Thompson
Members absent: Daniel Beckelman, Paul Johnson, Peter Volpe
Staff present: Melissa Bezahler, Harriet Honigfeld, Caroline McFarland – Watershed Ambassador

- 3. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES:** Mr. Thompson asked for a correction to the minutes, which Ms. Bezahler noted. Ms. Smith made a motion to approve the minutes for the February 7, 2025 meeting. Mr. Thompson seconded the motion. With a voice vote, the meeting minutes were approved with Mr. Kostka abstaining.
- 4. PRESENTATION:** AmeriCorp Watershed Ambassador Caroline McFarland presented her outreach efforts as a Watershed Ambassador, noting that she had completed 42 presentations in schools this year and her service projects included beach cleanups. Ms. McFarland shared her passion in promoting watershed stewardship and water quality awareness and hoped that this program can continue remain a priority for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The MCEC members thanked Ms. McFarland for a well-done presentation.
- 5. REGULAR REPORTS**
- A. Chairperson** – Mr. Thompson noted that this a challenging time for environmental stewards at the county, state and national levels and emphasized the need to be aware of how cuts to agencies will impact air and water quality.
- A. Staff** – Ms. Bezahler stated it is expected the spring edition of Environmental newsletter will be ready in late May/early June and encouraged newsletter submissions by MCEC members of any interesting Earth Day events.

6. OLD BUSINESS

Hall of Records Annex 2nd Floor-1 East Main Street-Freehold, New Jersey 07728
Telephone 732-431-7460

7. NEW BUSINESS

- A. **Farm Summit Recap** – Ms. Smith attended the Farm Summit and commented how she found the event to be very interesting but missed seeing Ms. Honigfeld’s presentation. Ms. Honigfeld noted her presentation is posted on the Planning Board website. Mr. Thompson thanked Ms. Smith for attending on behalf of the MCEC. Ms. Honigfeld noted that it is expected the Farm Summit will become an annual event. Ms. Bezahler noted that the event drew over 100 attendees, including farmers and agricultural resource providers. Ms. Bezahler shared statistics regarding Monmouth County Farms.
- B. **Update on the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan** – Ms. Bezahler provided an overview of Monmouth County’s role leading the Cross Acceptance process for the NJ State Plan, which aims to align planning efforts across all governmental levels. Ms. Bezahler noted that the County had developed an online tool to support public and municipal input, held an informational meeting and hosted a public form on March 31 on behalf of the NJ State Planning Commission. Ms. Bezahler highlighted the next steps that the County is taking in the Cross Acceptance Process -reviewing comments from the municipality and public and preparing a draft response for the Planning Board’s review.
- C. **Building MCEC Engagement** – Ms. Bezahler shared that at the April Planning Board meeting, administration had introduced a proposal to create a new Planning Advisory Collaborative which would merge the Environmental and Transportation Councils along with having broader public representation. There was a discussion on this idea. Mr. Thompson noted that at the joint council meeting the discussions were dynamic and that consolidation into a new group with those who want to stay engaged and give their time and effort as a volunteer would be a great idea. Ms. Honigfeld clarified it would be consolidation, but also expansion to broaden the group and to make the groups more advisory in nature. Mr. Kostka concurred with Mr. Thompson that this might be a good approach moving forward and he is interested in the specifics of what the role would entail.

8. MEMBER REPORTS

- Ms. Smith reported on her experience assisting with the Barnegat Bay Blitz. Ms. Smith also reported that Wall Twp townwide clean-up is to be held on Saturday, May 10, 2025. Ms. Smith also spoke with Commissioner Dominick “Nick: DiRooco to address removing inactive members from the MCEC, but noted this might not be necessary if the Planning Advisory Collaborative group takes formation.
- Mr. Kostka, no report. Mr. Kostka is eager to reengage in the community now that he is back in Monmouth County.
- Mr. Thompson attended beach sweeps for Clean Ocean Action (COA). His site had over 110 participants at his location and noted that several thousand participated throughout the event. Mr. Thompson shared that COA tabulates data and analyzes it. The data influences quality of life issues, such as banning plastic bags. Mr. Thompson also noted that he found a seahorse which he had not seen one in the ocean or bays in over 30 years. Mr. Thompson asked for confirmation on NJDEP app that allows users to report sightings of wildlife. Ms. Bezahler affirmed it is the (NJ) Wildlife Tracker application.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT – None.

10. **ADJOURNMENT** There being no further business, Mr. Thompson asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Kostka made a motion to move and Ms. Smith seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 5:59pm.