

CAPE MAY POINT ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MINUTES

May 14, 2025

Start Time: 10:00 AM

End Time: 11:15 AM

The Environmental Commission of the Borough of Cape May Point was called to order by Chair PM at 10:00 AM and the Open Public Meetings Statement was read. This meeting was held electronically via ZOOM under local operation guidance from the NJDCA pursuant to P.L. 2020, c. 11. Rich Johnson, Mary Lynn Mackenzie, Paula Massanari, Emelia Oleson, and Tom Reilly were present. Sandy Allison and Sean Burcher were not in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On motion of MLM, seconded by TR, the minutes of the April 16, 2025 EC meeting were approved by all present.

ON-GOING BUSINESS

Commissioner Liaison Report:

- Public Works (PW) is working towards getting the beaches ready to open. There are oystercatchers nesting on the beach between Whilldin Avenue and Coral Avenue. Beach mats are down, and PW works has ordered more.
- One well at the circle is failing, which PW has tried to have repaired, but it will need to be replaced in the future as a capital expense.
- We are also working on the tree removal ordinance, which some people find difficult to navigate. As a reminder, the tree ordinance is required by the state as part of our stormwater management plan.
- The PW building renovation is coming along, but it has been impeded by much-needed rain.

Update on Lake Lily:

SY read the following report on Lake Lily: "Lake Lily is a valued resource to our town – providing stormwater management and supporting wildlife. The lake is a complex aquatic ecosystem impacted by climate changes such as low rainfall, pesticide/fertilizer/pet waste run-off, aquatic weeds, wildlife excrement, oxygenation, etc. NJ owns and regulates the lake water (as well as our groundwater). The borough of Cape May Point has the responsibility to manage and preserve the lake.

The borough has a longstanding agreement with Clean Flo to aerate the lake using 11 diffusers (bubblers) and non-toxic enzyme products to improve water quality, liquefy organic matter and reduce muck buildup. Note that there are no diffusers at the south end of the lake due water levels being too low. The severe drought NJ has experienced in the last year has impacted the lake resulting in lower water levels (particularly at the south end) and increased aquatic weed growth

We are not alone in struggling to maintain our lake – lakes everywhere across the country are working on the same issues. As reported last month, Clean Flo informed the borough that their company does not address aquatic weeds and recommended we contact Tigris Water Management. Ryan Flannery (Field Operations Manager with Tigris) came to Lake Lily on Tuesday, April 22 to conduct a visual assessment and make recommendations. Bill Gibson was present for his visit. Mr. Flannery followed up with recommendations and a quote. His recommendations are as follows:

The goal is to diminish the green algae and slowly eradicate the invasive species in the shallow (south end) area of the lake – some of which are duckweed, parrotfeather and overgrown water lilies. Tigris will keep the health of the lake as their highest priority. They will use EPA registered products in accordance with NJ DEP guidelines, targeting a different species with each treatment. Tigris staff are certified applicators. They recommend seven treatments, to the south end of the lake only, between May and September. After each treatment, Mr. Flannery will provide a report on the water quality (specifically pH and dissolved oxygen). At the end of this seven-series treatment cycle,

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Tigris can do a more comprehensive water quality test for phosphorus and nitrogen. There is no utility in doing that evaluation now while the invasive vegetation is being treated and dying off.

It is important to note that while the EPA and NJDEP products are an algaecide and herbicide, there will be no impact on the fish, turtles, birds, etc. in the lake. There will also be no impact on the groundwater surrounding the lake. When asked about the green algae as normal growth in a warming lake, Mr. Flannery said that because the south end of the lake is shallow and has no mechanical aeration and is subject to increasing summer heat, it is a ripe environment for a Harmful Algae Bloom (HAB), which would be a serious safety concern for our community. Mr. Flannery expects this treatment series to be an on-going need each year with the main objective to keep the lake vegetation at a manageable level with as minimal interference as possible. It is worthwhile to note that Tigris manages treatment of many, many lakes & ponds in South Jersey. Mr. Flannery gave me five references that I will follow up on."

SY further stated:

"I have reached out to SOLitude and Allied Biological for a competitive assessment and quote. We are planning to meet with Solitude next week. In addition, I have reached out to EMSL Analytics, an independent water analysis company who can provide testing of Lake Lily water for us. They are sending me specifics on how and where to pull the samples as well as cost.

Matt Pelegrino (longtime naturalist at Lighthouse State Park), with Public Works employees, waded out to Lake Lily island on Tuesday May 13th to evaluate the invasive plants. They began to tag the invasive plants but quickly realized that 95% of the vegetation on the island is invasives and smothered in poison ivy. Only three native saplings exist on the island and are not worth the enormous time and effort it would take to penetrate the thick invasive vegetation to save them. He recommends we wait until winter and do a controlled burn of the existing island vegetation and replant it with all native plants. Based on his knowledge from successful replanting in the State Park, he can recommend native plants that should do well and support our bird population. Matt volunteered his time for this, and we so appreciate his help.

In an effort to collaborate with the CMBO, I reached out to Brett Ewald to assess the impact of any lake treatments on the bird population. Mr. Ewald explained that an incremental approach to work at the lake is preferable vs a wholesale change at once. He explained that a healthy lake and environment is a better habitat for birds and wildlife. For example, we might view the overgrown thicket of plants on the lake island as a good cover for the birds but a BETTER cover for the birds would be removing the invasive plants and replacing them with native plants that provide not only cover but a food source as well.

He shared an overview of NJ Audubon's Position Statements on a number of topics including herbicide use which is applicable to our possible work on the lake. It states, "Although the use of herbicides is not preferred, NJAS recognizes that in ecological restoration and habitat maintenance, use of herbicides may be essential to success and that the long-term consequences of losing biological diversity are far more severe than the short-term impacts of herbicides. NJAS supports the use of herbicides in activities where ecological restoration or wildlife habitat management is the objective and when no other effective alternative is available."

Further, the policy states, "Used as part of an integrated management plan, herbicides can be very effective in restoration projects or in controlling invasive and exotic species of vegetation that threaten native plant and animal communities... and should only be used when natural or mechanical methods are not possible or effective." In the case of the prolific aquatic weeds in the south end of Lake Lily, manual removal is not feasible and mechanical removal risks massive spread of parrotfeather due to their fragile root system.

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SY finished by saying that because Dr. Sousa doesn't want to directly consult with the Borough, perhaps he could recommend someone to work as a consultant who doesn't have a financial motivation to provide an opinion on what actions should be taken with the lake would be advantageous. She asked TR if he would be willing to ask that question. PM said that she agrees, and if TR doesn't have time, she is willing to do it.

Commissioner Liaison Report (continued):

PM asked SY about the light pollution recommendations from the EC that was first raised to the Commissioners last year. SY said that the topic is in the PB queue. SY said that the PB would be looking at the Zoning side of things in terms of construction, and separately how this would affect the Master Plan. SY said that the EC could do something to better educate residents or make recommendations to the community, that would be an option. PM said that the formal recommendation from the EC was that an ordinance be put in place. MLM confirmed that there is a PB queue of over ten items, but she will follow up with PB Chair Matt Brown to get a better idea of when it will be addressed.

Invasive Patrol: PM and SY joined the invasive removal work Monday morning at Lake Lily. Several people stopped by to provide positive feedback on their work. PM will draft an article on the work being done and how it doesn't just open up the view of the lake, it also helps native vegetation. SY said that Elise Geiger said that they leave a five foot border of wooded area at the north end of the lake to help protect nesting birds. The female swan was killed again by coyotes. At one time swans could nest on the island when there was a little more room for them.

Triangle Park: PM looked at the forested area of Triangle Park with Patty Schuhl. The trellis designates where the wooded area begins. There is also a solar bird bath there that isn't able to get sun. There are two dead trees. They are not a hazard, but they could be removed and replaced with new trees this fall.

PM wrote to the Tree Committee to inquire if they could support the EC, and they said they do not have the capacity to help with Triangle Park. She then reached out to the Audubon Society, and will report back once she hears from them.

Planning Board: MLM stated that there are no additional updates from the PB at this time.

Mayors' Monarch Pledge: MLM and PM met to discuss potential action items. MLM said that the requirement is that we do at least three activities to meet the pledge requirements. The Borough is already doing several of them, including the invasive patrol around the lake and the educational articles already being sent to the community. There are several new items we are looking to do, including action item 14 which is planting milkweed or pollinator friendly plants along roadsides and public right-of-way locations. We are interested in planting black eyed Susan's at two different beach entrances where there is space. We need to see if the plants will take. We are looking to plant them at the beach entrances at Coral and Brainard this year as a pilot. PM and MLM plan to each adopt an entrance to care for. If they are successful, we can look to do more entrances next year. We are also interested in action item 19 which is to add or maintain native milkweed or pollinator friendly plants in community gardens, so we may be looking to partner with the Borough and plant at the south end of the lake if there is space. PM asked if SY had asked Ray in PW about adding lantana; SY said she would follow up. Another item that they looked at includes number 9, a community art project, where we ask the community to send us pictures of monarchs and then we publish in early fall. Lastly, item 18 is to support community science efforts to promote monarch migration and health. There are already monarch tagging efforts happening at the State Park, NJ Audubon, and now the Science Center. We will partner with SB to see if the community can partner with the efforts already underway at the Science Center.

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Salem Oak Sign: SY said that Elaine spoke with each of the commissioners and there are no barriers to the EC moving forward with creating a sign for the Salem Oak. PM will request that Lynne Smith bring his etching to Borough Hall to be scanned for the sign. SY will investigate where the Borough typically has signs made.

Educational Plant Walk: TR reported that Courtney Leo is not interested in doing the walk this year, but perhaps would consider volunteering to do one next year. She requested a copy of the layout of the gardens and a list of what flowers are there so that she can begin educating herself.

Lawn Treatment Article: TR said that by the next meeting he will have a sign that will remind people of the harmful effects of fertilizer.

NEW BUSINESS

Possible Signage at South Lily Lake Garden: This topic was tabled until the next meeting when SA will be able to attend and discuss.

Native Tree List: PM said that resident Cathy Stambaugh requested that the list of native trees be reviewed because she is looking to plant a redbud tree on her property, and while some native tree lists for NJ coastal areas have this particular tree on their list, the Cape May Point Tree Ordinance list of approved trees does not include it. SY has reviewed the native tree lists from multiple municipalities including Cape May and West Cape May. All of the lists are varied in what they have included. SY spoke with local arborist Matt Notch to get his feedback, and he suggested that we look to the lists of DE, MD and VA because as our climate gets warmer they may have trees that would do well here. She also spoke with Susan Hoffman of the West Cape May Shade Tree Commission, who suggested that to make the approved tree list a living document it is easier to have the list be approved by resolution versus included in an ordinance. Finally, the members of the Cape May Point Tree Committee has stated that they would like to evaluate and comment on any potential changes to the list, and the list can also be reviewed by Licensed Tree Expert Mickey Riggin for his feedback.

Draft Willow Oak Article: PM recently drafted an article on the new willow oak trees planted in Pavilion Circle. RJ emailed photos that he took of the trees for the communication. PM would like to revise the article to add that the money for trees came from the Civic Club.

CORRESPONDENCE

PM had sent an email to the EC Members regarding administrative support for the EC. PM and SY created a list of duties, and SY has met with someone who would be a viable candidate for the role. The EC budget is \$5,000 for 2025, and \$500 has already been spent on ANJEC dues. We believe the lake management course may be able to be paid from the Environmental Trust fund, which is for education.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PM said that if there is no additional new business, we may consider cancelling the July meeting. It will be discussed at the next EC meeting in June.

PUBLIC PORTION/ADJOURNMENT

As there were no members of the public in attendance, on motion of MLM seconded by TR, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 am.

Respectfully submitted, Kelly L. Redington, EC Secretary