

CAPE MAY POINT ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MINUTES

January 7, 2026

Start Time: 10:00 AM

End Time: 11:45 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. Sandy Alison, Sean Burcher, Rich Johnson, Mary Lynn Mackenzie, Paula Massanari, and Tom Reilly were present. Emelia Olsen was absent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On motion of TR, seconded by SA, the minutes of the November 12, 2025 EC meeting were approved by all present.

ON-GOING BUSINESS

Commissioner Liaison Report: SY reported that Winter Warrior was applied to the lake in the second week of December. Bill Gibson approached NJ Forest Service for a permit regarding the burn on the island in the lake. The Service agreed to do the burn, with the expected timeframe near the beginning of March with a possible opening at the end of January. PW has purchased the lake mats and have received half, with the rest due next week. The mats will be put down sometime this winter. For the first time there is a separate line budget item to include everything needed for the lake such as bubblers, product, bubbler maintenance, repeat water testing, sonar scan, water testing, etc.

Regarding Veterans' Memorial Park, SY has arranged a resolution to open a trust for the park, and donations have been coming in. SY also shared that she is working with a committee for a local recreation grant from the state to complete phase 2 and 3. Engineers are currently working on cost estimates for the grant package.

PM recognized the efforts addressing the concerns about Lake Lily have been paying off and all the work SY has done. SA shared her support of the Borough getting a handle on the lake and completing the ongoing documentation, as well as how much work SY did with the Veterans' Memorial Committee.

Areas of feedback for the Tree Ordinance: SY reported that in 2025 CMPT lost 63 trees, and that they expect many more of the black pine species to be dead or dying this year. SY is currently considering what proactive work can be done knowing there is an impending loss of canopy.

PM followed up on the two trees that had been improperly cut down. The Tree Committee noticed not only the trees, but bushes, saplings, and other low vegetation had been damaged as well.

Questions/Feedback for SY:

- PM opened the meeting for questions or comments. There were no questions or comments at the time.

Triangle Park: Following up on the Audubon contract presented at the previous meeting. The proposed contract for their time and expertise is quoted at \$250 with the volunteer event scheduled for May 26, 2026. SA asked if Audubon would be able to flag trees/plants that need to be removed. PM will ask about including this service since it is beyond the initial outline. She will also ask the Taxpayers Association to help recruit volunteers and send out an email to the community. PM called for a vote to approve the cost. On motion of MLM, seconded by SB, the contract cost was approved by all present.

Planning Board: MLM reported that they have not met yet since November so there is nothing new to share. The Dark Skies sub-committee has been discussing the main piece that falls within the Planning Board. The [original ordinance proposal from 2024](#) can be found on the EC website for reference.

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Mayors' Monarch Pledge: PM found a potential grant for seedling trees. PM attended the Zoom call related to the grant, but ultimately determined it wasn't a good fit.

Native tree List: SY looked for feedback on the following four points listed below, with the understanding that the fourth item has already passed.

- 1. NJ does not require replacement of a hazard tree. Our current ordinance does. Based on the applications to date, the vast majority of tree removals are hazard trees that have not been replaced anyway because of the allowed exemption of a requisite number of healthy, native trees already present on the property. The proposed revision would not require replacement for a hazard tree on private property.*
- 2. While native trees thrive best in our coastal micro-climate, at present our ordinance does not recognize healthy, thriving non-native trees for the re-planting exemption. For example, a 5000 sq ft lot might have 3 healthy trees but one is a Catalpa tree which is not on our approved list so therefore that property would not qualify for the exemption. The proposed revision would recognize all healthy trees on a property, not just native trees on our approved tree list. OR we could consider eliminating the exemption altogether. Note that the Borough's Landscaping and Vegetative Plan (coupled with a zoning permit) would still require a minimum number of trees based on lot size.*
- 3. In the current ordinance, the application fee is \$75/tree. If a homeowner has several hazard trees (e.g. a group of Japanese black pines) the cost is burdensome. The proposed revision changes the fee to \$75 per application no matter how many trees are requested for removal.*
- 4. The Approved list of Replacement Tree Species is currently an Appendix to the Tree Ordinance. The proposed revision is to manage that list by resolution so that it can be easily reviewed and modified without re-opening the ordinance each time. Note that the resolution on the agenda today adds two new trees – the Eastern Redbud and the Southern Magnolia. Both trees were vetted and approved by the Borough's Tree Committee. We have also noted on the list the number of bird species, where known, are supported by that tree. We hope that information provides an impetus for choosing a particular tree. We recognize that purchasing and planting trees is expensive so choosing a tree that is native and known to thrive in our environment is wise.*

Concerns on the first: SB asked about who will determine if there is a hazard tree. SY clarifies that Bill can provide hazard tree assessments or otherwise it would require an arborist to determine if the tree is hazardous. Other members had similar concerns, but the EC overall agreed that Bill would be an appropriate party to make these determinations.

Concerns on the second: Currently only on private property a hazard tree needs to be replaced, but that is not the case for public property. If a tree is taken for safety reasons, TR doesn't believe it should be required to be replaced and instead should be at the homeowner's discretion. TR was in favor of removing the replacement requirement for hazardous trees.

RJ asked for clarification where if a hazard tree comes down, if the homeowners already have enough trees, can they ask for an exemption to replacing the tree. SY confirmed that they can, but because the ordinance is still confusing and coupled with expenses, it's not straightforward for what the community members can and cannot do. RJ, MLM, and SB were in favor of keeping the replacement requirement with the exemption still in place.

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PM referenced the net loss of canopy, concerned that if they are allowing people to take down hazardous trees, replacement trees should still be required to maintain the overall canopy cover. If the EC is not requiring a replacement, how are they supporting no net loss. RJ emphasizes that if there is a hazard tree, yet the homeowner already meets their canopy requirements, to ask the homeowner to replant would be to ask them to go beyond their individual requirements. PM clarified that if there is an exemption, there will still ultimately be a net loss. PM supported the idea that if a hazard tree is taken out, it should be required to be replaced.

SB included that replacing trees at a 1:1 ratio is not the same as a net loss in canopy, because once a tree is removed, other trees take up and expand into that canopy space. SB emphasized the volume of canopy should be assessed versus number of trees.

SA chose to abstain from commenting at the time.

There was no one in favor of removing the exemption entirely. Currently, if a homeowner wants to meet the exemption, they have to have a certain number of native, listed trees. No one was in favor that non-native trees should count towards the minimum to meet the exemption.

Concerns on the third: Everyone was in favor of the adjustment to the fee.

PM will circle back to the net loss discussion for a future meeting.

RJ asked SY if anything discussed would prevent the Borough from taking down a tree if there was a safety concern. SY assured it would not, so if there is a hazardous area such as a blind corner due to vegetation that it should be brought up and can be addressed appropriately.

PM asked SY about the answer to where the downed/hacked trees would fall into loss of canopy, and SY will follow up.

NEW BUSINESS

Information sharing from Rutgers Lake Management Course: RJ and TR met with SY and Bill after the course and decided to wait until the next water test to further discuss concrete plans moving forward with the lake. SY has found a lab to test the stormwater. The lab will allow the Borough to pull our own sample. SY will send the lab the number of drains and what we want to test for, and they will send us a quote. SY recognized RJ and TR for their time and commitment to taking the course and assisting with the progress on the lake.

Review of 2025 Budget Expenditures: PM shared the budget expenditures. There were no questions or comments at the time.

Formal vote on 2026 meeting dates: PM sent out the meeting dates for 2026 with the Nov. date adjustment. PM called for a vote to approve the 2026 meeting dates. On motion of TR, seconded by MLM, the dates were approved by all present.

Review of Draft Changes to EC website: There were no comments or questions on the website draft changes. PM asked CL to make the proposed updates to the website.

2026 Potential Goals/Projects: The following additional goals will be undertaken in 2026: 1. TR and RJ will work together to develop a stormwater goal. MLM and PM will work together to augment the number of action items completed in 2026 for the Mayors' Monarch Pledge.

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CORRESPONDENCE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PUBLIC PORTION/ADJOURNMENT

On motion of RJ, seconded by SA, the meeting was opened to the public. Jean and Garret were both present from the public. Garret commented that when discussing the tree canopy that the shape of the tree wasn't discussed; e.g., an oak would cover a lot more canopy than a pine tree. He asked that the EC keep in mind the kind of tree used to be replaced can have a much different canopy impact depending on the species.

Jean offered comments on the discussion about tree replacement and hazardous trees. On the point of net loss, Jean asked when the Borough will determine the equation for determining that loss. Since it seems like there are a lot of trees taken down and not a lot of replacements, Jean wondered what is currently used to determine the target or benchmark for our net loss. Jean also wondered if it's possible for the Borough to use some kind of tape/markings to represent when a tree has been approved to take down thus providing transparency for any concerned community members. In terms of dead trees, Jean shared that when she spoke to someone with the Borough, she was told she could submit a photo of the dead tree and it did not need to be assessed by Bill or an arborist. She asked if that is a possibility still and if a dead tree needs to be formally assessed. As a property owner, looking to renovate, the sooner there are reliable guidelines it would be very helpful. Jean supported—as a member of the community—replacing any trees that are taken down.

SY was not aware of any provision allowing a photograph to substitute for a formal assessment, and her current understanding is that it has to be done by Bill or an arborist. If someone doesn't want to replace a tree and doesn't meet the exemption, they can donate to the tree trust for trees to be planted elsewhere. SY emphasized that with Jean's concerns, one can see how difficult it is for homeowners to navigate the ordinance. SY will go back to the NJ Forest Service for more information on the benchmark for canopy cover.

Jean asked when these ideas will be coming out of the EC for Commissioners to vote on. SY's intent is to offer the revised ordinance at the next Commissioner's meeting but cautioned it would take time to go through all the readings. SY would expect to see whatever the adopted ordinance is within a couple of months. Garret asked if there is a mechanism for collecting data on trees that are being planted by community members. PM shared there is currently not a reporting method for people planting trees—especially when trying to calculate for canopy. SY added that if a tree has been replaced, the Borough is supposed to check on it the following year for good health.

On motion of RJ, seconded by MLM, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 am.

Respectfully submitted, Courtney R. Lacombe, EC Secretary