

Forming of the New Environmental Commission

The Jersey City Environmental Commission was reorganized by ordinance in January 2011 after being dormant for five years. The ordinance revised the structure and purpose of the former commission. Any references to specific dates were removed and replaced with broader language ensuring that the ordinance would not have to be revised every six years, or whenever the updated version of the Natural Resource Inventory was due. Additionally, the mandate to advise the Planning and Zoning Board of Adjustment of the environmental impacts on development projects was removed. This was done to reduce the amount of bureaucracy for the development application process, since Jersey City has on average over 200 applications a year to our Planning and Zoning Boards. Moreover, this was to refocus the Environmental Commission on its advisory role to the Planning Board and Municipal Council concerning open space preservation, water resources management, air pollution control, solid waste management, noise control, environmental appearance, marine resources, protection of flora and fauna through amendments to the City's Master Plan and public educational programs lead by the Environmental Commission. Finally, the commission in its last iteration was not successful in completing the mandated actions of the Environmental Commission: the Natural Resource Inventory and the Annual Report, because the majority of their meetings and time were spent on reviewing applications for development. The City of Jersey City has an in-house Engineering Department with an Environmental Engineer whose primary role is the review applications for development for their environmental impact. The Jersey City Environmental Commission became a member of ANJEC, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, in August.

Board Actions at Meeting – Formation of Subcommittees

The first meeting of the newly formed Commission was May 23, 2011, and they meet on a monthly basis. Since then their actions have been aggressive in setting a foundation for the Commission. At the very first meeting three subcommittees were formed; one to oversee the Natural Resources Inventory, one to focus on Public Policy at the national, state and county level, and one to address the proposal by Spectra to build a natural gas pipeline that would run through all of Jersey City. At the June 14th meeting the Public Outreach Subcommittee was formed. At the July 27th meeting, the Shade Tree Committee was formed.

Natural Resources Inventory Subcommittee

In attempts to fulfill the legislative mandatory item of completing a Natural Resource Inventory, a subcommittee was formed to oversee the grant writing, hiring of a consultant, and eventually the exercise to complete the inventory. The subcommittee has reached out to the group that oversees the Jersey City Green Map in hopes to use that site as vehicle on updating the City's inventory on Open Space using resident input. Additionally, in July the Commission submitted a grant to Sustainable Jersey Small Grants program in order to hire a consultant to begin the inventory, with plans to secure further funding in the future. However, the Commission was informed that Jersey City was not going to receive the grant funding. The committee has already reached out to ANJEC to look for alternative funding to complete this legislative requirement for all Environmental Commissions.

Public Policy Subcommittee

This subcommittee focuses on proposed new and amended public policies at the National, State, County and Municipal level. The Public Policy Committee made its first actions before the Environmental Commission's first meeting. Their first act was to prepare, submit and present comments on behalf of the Commission and the Mayor in regards to NJDEP's proposed amendments to the Coastal Zone Management Program and how this would impact development along the Hackensack River Waterfront. Comments were then also prepared and submitted in August to the EPA for Mercury Air Toxic Rule on EPA Proposed Cooling Tower Rule in regards to the PSE&G Hudson Generating Station in Jersey City along the Hackensack River.

Spectra Subcommittee

This subcommittee was formed to work in collaboration with the Mayor's Office and its opposition to a natural gas pipeline being installed throughout all of Jersey City along much of Jersey City's major transit areas. Additionally, this subcommittee is in the processing of reviewing and preparing comments for the recently released Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the pipeline. The subcommittee, consisting of Environmental Attorneys and Engineers, is also supposed to aide in providing knowledge to the public about the impacts of the pipeline along with the City's stance and actions on the proposal.

Public Outreach Subcommittee

The outreach subcommittee has been working with the Mayor's Office, 365 Days of Green a Year Program, and Jersey City Redevelopment Agency's LEAF program. The LEAF program will provide revolving loans to small businesses and residents that would like to invest in green products and technology. The 365 Days of Green a Year is a program that was adopted by the Mayor in April 2011 – the City will host "green" events on a regular basis where the residents will be informed of new City green initiatives for them to take advantage of or alternative green programs they can also benefit from. The subcommittee is already working with the JCRA to host a "Green on Grove" event with the main goal of educating the public about the LEAF and 365 days of Green a Year program, as well as the "greening" a weekly community music and art event, "Grove on Grove" to "Green on Grove."

Shade Tree Subcommittee

At the July EC meeting, two residents requested that the Environmental Commission start a Shade Tree Subcommittee to address the shortage and maintenance of street trees. The commission voted to begin the subcommittee, but only two commissioners are on the committee and the rest of the committee is made up of resident volunteers. They are in the process of writing bylaws with the intentions to include the Directors of Public Works on the subcommittee in an effort to enforce existing legislation meant to add to and protect the street tree inventory.