



New Jersey Community Forestry Council
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
May 12, 2022; 10:00 AM

The May bi-monthly meeting of the New Jersey Community Forestry Council (Council) was called to order by Chairperson Brash at 10:00 a.m. and the Open Public Meetings Act notice was read. The notice was also available in the meeting packet. The roll call was taken by Ms. Slack.

Members Present: Bill Brash, Kristin Ace, Lori Jessen, Vinh Lang, Robert Lee, Lisa Simms, Matthew Simons, Barry Emens, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Dr. Melanie McDermott, Pam Zipse, Mark Beamish and Neil Blitz

Excused: Wayne Dubin, Carl Bowles, Steve Chisholm, Donna Drewes

NJ Forest Service Staff Present: State Forester John Sacco, Assistant Director State Forestry Service Carrie Sargeant, Technical & Operational Advisor Terri Slack, Assistant Regional Forester Michael Martini, Grants Administrator Patricia Shapella, Forestry Technician Emily Farschon and Forestry Assistant Sherry Dudas.

Quorum was met upon completion of roll call.

Minutes:

The meeting minutes from March were reviewed and Barry Emons motioned to approve. Matt Simons seconded. Chairman Brash called for a vote on the minutes as sent. The vote was unanimous to approve the minutes.

State Forester's Report:

State Forester John Sacco gave the report and reported that Forestry and other programs of the DEP continue to be reorganized. In the Parks & Forestry space, the Historic Preservation Office and the Office of Natural Resources Restoration and Green Acres have moved out of the area formerly known as "Natural and Historic Resources" and have formed Forests, State Parks and Historic Sites. Within Forestry, the public lands or the state lands unit that was formerly under the State Foresters now moved to the Forest Fire Service. The rest of the aspects of Forestry are still intact. The reasoning was that Forest Fire Service has quite a bit of responsibility over a large area and more personnel, so some synergies may be realized there to bolster some of the

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activities of the State Lands group with those of the State Forest Fire Service. Mr. Sacco will be doing aspects of UCF with Mr. Martini, Ms. Slack, Ms. Farschon and new hire Sherry Dudas (hourly forestry assistant). Ms. Sargeant will continue with program development, procuring funding and the future direction of the program. She will be back in November in her usual role, but this is a chance for her to concentrate on some projects including revising program guidelines, which are hoped to be completed in May. Ms. Sargeant also needs to complete some data processing and website improvements. Mr. Sacco also asked Ms. Sargeant to develop future projects, as she is being released from the day-to-day managing of grants and accreditations.

Council discussed that UCF funding is intact and that the program has one vacant FTE position needing to be filled. The lack of clarity with respect to the reorganization was also discussed and that the Council ought to be able to answer questions if they are called upon to support the UCF programs to their best ability.

Mr. Sacco will be devoting more time to UCF, to the Jackson facility and Private Lands. He assured Council they have nothing to fear in terms of UCF losing authority of voice. In fact, he thinks it'll be a little easier since he's going to be more involved with the day-to-day operations with Mr. Martini and Ms. Slack. Staff wants to be in the best posture to support the Council. The State Lands and Forest Health programs will be managed by Greg McLaughlin, Chief Fire Warden for Forest Fire; other elements of the NJ Forest Service will remain under Mr. Sacco, i.e., private lands, Forest Resource Education Center/tree nursery, and UCF. The question was asked if Ms. Sargeant was ok, in light of the reorganization and since she wasn't in attendance at the meeting (note: she was at the meeting for portions of it, and specifically during this discussion). Mr. Sacco indicated that she is fine. Council stated that they are there to support her as well and wanted that message conveyed. Ms. Zipse voiced that there is a Guidelines committee that wants to assist with Guideline revisions.

Mr. Sacco will bring the concerns of Council to the attention of Assistant Commissioner Cecil. The unit now known as State Parks, Forests and Historic Sites is the unit that the Forest Service and the Fire Service are both under. Staff still have the same roles to fulfill, same amount of support, it's the chains of command that have shifted somewhat. Council members voiced their support of staff and their willingness to continue to be "hands-on" and to guide UCF through these changes.

The DEP's revised organizational chart was shared and Mr. Sacco stated the reorganization chart for UCF is being drafted.

A discussion ensued regarding the Forestry Task Force (FTF). Mr. Sacco reported that Assemblyman Smith requested the DEP's participation in the FTF and as a result Assistant Commissioner (AC) John Cecil is one of the co-chairs/coordinators. It is Mr. Sacco's understanding that there will be some breakout groups of the FTF, at which point some UCF staff will be a presence. There are two workgroups, Carbon and Ecology/Environment, and it is

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assumed AC Cecil will attend one of the two workgroups and another DEP staffer will attend the other.

Council members who want to be more involved from a forestry management perspective were encouraged to do so by Mr. Sacco. A discussion regarding outreach to interested foresters ensued.

Ms. Zipse voiced a concern that the voting on the FTF may be structured so there is a smaller number of forestry management-based organizations to get a vote and Ms. Ace requested an explanation of NJ Audubon's role in NJ forestry, which was given.

Mr. Sacco reported that the RFP for the 2022 grants was released. The Commissioner signed the spending plan for \$2.24 million, and Tuesday, May 10th was the release date.

Chairperson's Report:

Chairperson Brash reported that Spotted Lanternfly nymphs are beginning to emerge, so he's forwarded that information out to municipalities. Arbor Day was being celebrated with events around NJ this year, and towns are excited about planting trees and doing their inventories. The price to plant trees has gone up in some areas of the state, but not all.

The importance of earmarking incoming grant monies was discussed. UCF staff currently doesn't know what community foresters are still available to do community tree plans and the new Guidelines will need to try to address that. It is important for engagement with the consulting community that's going to be producing plans.

Mr. Martini represented that Ms. Sargeant can talk more about the proposed process communities will need to follow with respect to plans and inventories when she presents the draft revised Guidelines. The Guidelines Subcommittee will be part of developing the process. Twilight meetings with Dr. Grabosky and Chairman Brash's contacts will be held and a stakeholder rollout is envisioned. The Shade Tree Federation Conference organizers are holding a spot for the new Guidelines on its October conference agenda. Planning needs to happen with the goal of coordinating the grant timelines with the Green Communities and Sustainable Jersey grant cycles as well.

Mr. Martini advised that for communities wishing to get to work soon on UCF grant applications, staff is advising them to work within the current guidelines and then they will learn in the next five years how to apply under the new guidelines. This gives them five years to learn the new process. With respect to the new Guidelines, at one point Ms. Sargeant was waiting for the Camden tree inventory to be finished. Trenton and Gloucester City inventories are complete; the report for Trenton still needs to be received but staffs' understanding is that the Camden inventory process hasn't started yet. Council discussed the need to get the draft guidelines completed and to not tie receipt of these three communities' inventories to the draft guideline process.

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The topic of the State Arbor Day celebration was discussed more fully. Arbor Day events are an opportunity to recognize towns and highlight municipal programs. The Commissioner did a tree planting in Highland Park and that was the event where the Stewardship Grant Award was announced. This was a press event and did not include the Urban and Community Forestry Council.

A motion was made by Ms. Simms and seconded by Mr. Emons that a letter regarding the Council's disappointment that it wasn't a participant in the DEP's Arbor Day event for this year and expressing the hope that it is for Arbor Day in 2023 in partnership with the DEP. The motion was passed.

New Business:

Fiscal Report

The fiscal report was provided in the packet and reflected uncommitted funds as \$812,120 in the account. As of May 4th, the \$2.24 million was approved and that as well as the net loss funds will be expended on grant awards for the funding cycle opened on Tuesday. The SAGE system should be ready to accept applications for 60 days.

Program Report

UCF has 252 management plans, 46 first, 64 second, 68 third, 72 fourth and 2 fifth. The \$2.24 million are for the grants; approximately \$5,000,000 something encumbered. The Program is still assigning funds to grants that are currently being finalized, so that part of that money is encumbered. The 800 plus will be rolled into 2023 grants. That is typically how UCF manages the license plate funds; It rolls into the next year for expenditures. There is \$812,000 of uncommitted funds.

Green Communities Grants

UCF has two in the queue for processing: 35 open stewardship grants and 18 in process. Twenty five are executed and seven are in financial review, which represents 32 out of 38 completed. There are still 3 from 2017 open, 6 from 2018, 6 from 2019 and then the 2020s are still building up. This is just for the license plate fund. Information went out through our Gov delivery that itree funding was potentially in the balance and there was an overwhelming response of over 600 people to go to itree events. itree is funded and Beatrice is looking at some additional funding sources to keep that program viable.

Accreditation and CORE training

Ms. Farschon reported that the program had 150 accredited communities at the end of 2021; staff put the final matrix into the SAGE system, so if individual communities are eligible to apply, they should be able to apply. Staff has the ability to accept late documentation, so if the

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28 communities with missing AARs submitted their AARs there would be 28 more communities accredited for the year.

In 2020-2021, there was a change in definition for missing AARs which accounts for the decrease in communities missing AARs. The 2021 CEUs report was reviewed and the 36% in webinar attendance was discussed. There were 125 successful participants in 2021. A discussion ensued regarding struggling communities and the plan to reach out to them, both by staff and Council members.

The spring 2022 CORE training had 120 resident registrants and 100 people passed (an 83% success rate), which is absolutely remarkable, especially compared to the last couple of years, where the success rate was about 60% for the last couple of online courses. Staff emailed over half of the course certificates and once Ms. Zipse's fees are paid by the others the rest of the certificates will be emailed. Staff is going to attempt to offer a were hybrid at the Shade Tree Federation Conference for CORE.

Legislative Issues

Ms. Slack reported that there was a legislative update in the Council packets and there no issues to discuss.

Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI)/Strategic Funding Plan.

RGGI represents a significant amount of funds. Under this program, auctions are held for pollution rights to be conveyed to commercial facilities and those auctions earn revenue that is then between NJ's Economic Development Authority (EDA), the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) and NJ UCF. So far, those auctions have brought in 300 and approximately 364. \$1,000,000 to the state with two auctions still to go this year. The EDA receives 60% of the funding and BPU gets 20% of that funding, some of which can be used to address the urban heat island effect. The DEP has two pots of money (two 10% pots). One is for local government initiatives and the other is split between Forestry and Tidal Marsh for carbon sequestration projects. When DEP joined RGGI three years ago, the Department promulgated rules that said the three agencies would develop a funding plan called the Reggie Strategic Funding Plan, and that funding plan outlines the initiatives. That three-year funding plan is coming to a close at the end of this year, so the DEP, EDA and BPU have just embarked on the new RGGI Strategic Funding Plan. Forestry needs to be in the plan.

DEP is initiating a new stakeholder process and the first stakeholder meeting is tentatively set for Thursday, June 9th at 6:00pm. Timeline is in the Council packet. Staff will provide the call-in information for that meeting via email and social media when it is announced. The DEP is trying a new way to get people engaged, by having the three agencies put together 140 character-or-less statements on different ways each agency might spend the RGGI money and those statements will compete against each other in a series of mini-competitions. UCF is currently

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finalizing those statements. Forestry is contributing to the plan and providing a list of important stakeholders.

In the statute, it is guaranteed that 10% of the funding will be split between Forestry and Tidal Marsh. The percentages of the split is not in the statute. For example, the funds could all go to Tidal Marsh and Forestry could get zero. A webpage specific for the RGGI Strategic Funding plan where the stakeholder will be able to contribute to the voting process. Through the stakeholder process votes on the different statements will occur via the DEP's dedicated RGGI website. This process is to help the DEP develop its draft plan and once that plan is developed it will go out for a public comment, so stakeholders will have additional opportunities to comment.

Whether UCF has a statement of needs was discussed and Mr. Sacco suggested that if Council members and their respective groups have information that they feel should be shared in the stakeholder process they should participate in the process. Mr. Martini suggested that an open forum within the urban and community forestry community may be a way to garner feedback from this community and it was expressed that a forum such as that would help communication for mutual support.

Mr. Martini will discuss this suggestion with Mr. Sacco and Ms. Farschon.

No Net Loss Program Report.

One plan was submitted by Sue Seibolt of the DEP's Natural Resource Restoration and Council received it in an email. Mr. Martini reported that plans are not being received very robustly.

Council Subcommittee Reports

Community Forestry Management Plan Review Subcommittee

Nothing to report.

Community Forestry Management Plan Guidelines Subcommittee

We need to meet with consultants as soon as the draft revised guidelines outline is received. This subcommittee will meet as soon as its members receive the outline.

No Net Loss Subcommittee

Reported under NNL Program Report earlier in meeting.

Council Business - Proposed bylaw changes

The subcommittee is proposing to amend article 3B5 and amend article 5C (staff support and duties). The forester term will begin January 1st. Dr. Graboski moved to approve changes to bylaws with a typo addressed; seconded by Mr. Blitz. Motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business

Needs

Outside Employment Questionnaires & Cannabis Training – Council members who still need to complete these tasks were reminded to do so.

Foresters Toolbox/educational outreach - Ms. Zipse gave an update on educational outreach. The Shade Tree Federation plans to roll out open forum zoom chats with their membership, with the first one being in early June. This is an opportunity to have conversations between Shade Tree commissions, municipal employees, etc.

Public Comment:

Chairperson Brash then opened the floor to comments from the Council. Ms. Zipse reported that the dates and location for this year's live NJ Shade Tree Federation Conference will be October 13th and 14th, at the Crown Plaza in Cherry Hill. There is no featured speaker yet.

Ms. Zipse also reported that the Haddonfield Shade Tree Commission is exploring a public/private planting partnership where the Borough will provide trees for private property owners to plant on their properties. Council members can email Ms. Zipse with any suggestions they may have.

Chairperson Brash then opened the floor to members of the public. No comments from the public were received. Chairperson Brash then closed the meeting.