



New Jersey Community Forestry Council
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting
May 11, 2023; 10:00 AM

The May bi-monthly meeting of the New Jersey Community Forestry Council (“Council”) was called to order by State Forester Todd Wyckoff at 10:00 a.m. and the Open Public Meetings Act notice was read by Vice Chair Pam Zipse. The notice was also available in the meeting packet. The roll call was taken by Ms. Dudas.

Members Present: Kristin Ace, Lisa Simms, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Pam Zipse, Lori Jenssen, Joseph Greipp, Barry Emens, Mark Beamish, Vinh Lang & Neil Blitz.

Excused: Bill Brash, Steve Chisholm, Carl Bowles, Matt Simons and Dr. Melanie McDermott.

NJ Forest Service Staff Present: State Forester Todd Wyckoff, Policy, Technical & Operational Advisor Terri Slack, Program Specialist Trainee Rachael Vannatta, Grants Administrator Patricia Shapella, Grants Assistant Gail Harrije and Forestry Assistant Sherry Dudas. Quorum was met upon completion of roll call.

Approval of Meeting Minutes for 3/9/2023 Meeting

Ms. Zipse called attention to the March meeting minutes. A short discussion took place regarding a requested edit. Mr. Blitz moved to approve; it was seconded by Barry Emens. Ms. Zipse called for a vote on the minutes. Vinh Lang abstained; otherwise, the vote was unanimous to approve the minutes as amended.

State Forester’s Report

State Forester Todd Wyckoff thanked the NJ Tree Foundation for allowing NJ Forest Service staff to participate in their Arbor Day event. Also, the RGGI program, the New Jersey Forest Service and Sustainable Jersey partnered on a grant announcement released on Arbor Day. Using RGGI funding, the Forest Service and Sustainable Jersey are offering a grant opportunity for school districts to plant trees with a focus on schools located in environmental justice areas.

The Urban and Community Forestry program welcomes Rachael Vannatta to the program as a Program Specialist. Mr. Wyckoff enthused how tremendously happy and lucky we are to have her join our program and help with our capacity. She really hit the ground running and helped the program out a lot with the programmatic accreditation administrative work and other projects.

The RGGI stakeholder process is still open for comments by the DEP; this is an opportunity for members, both as individuals and as Council members representing various groups, to let the DEP know their thoughts and continue to champion trees. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (“BIL”) funding was announced April 12th in Newark, with Senator Booker and other federal officials announcing the release of \$1.5 billion in funding as well as the allocation of \$250 million for the various states across the nation. At the March Council meeting, UCF’s application for these funds was discussed. Identify EJ communities out of the list of 55 in New Jersey that were 100% comprised of environmental justice census blocks. We had applied for just about \$17 million and during the Newark announcement, they announced the funding to states and UCF received \$11.25 million of our requested \$17 million. Staff is still working with the US Forest Service to figure out how our

application now needs to be amended due to the reduced funding commitment, and it is hoped that clarity on how to proceed is given soon. A discussion regarding building capacity with neighboring states ensued.

As Council members and individuals and representatives of various groups across the state, it's important to know that there's a billion dollars that the US Forest Service is making available for urban and community forestry work for municipalities, universities, NGOs and for profits. These applications are due June 1st and as the State Forester, Mr. Wyckoff has no role in that portion of the funding opportunity; the various organizations will have to apply directly for funding and the State Forester will not be reviewing those applications.

The US Climate Alliance is a group of states and Guam looking to address climate smart strategies and, to that end, every couple of years the Alliance hosts the national working lands group and this year's meeting was in Washington, DC. Lauren Sinclair and Mr. Wyckoff represented the New Jersey Forest Service on a DEP team that attended the meeting and included other staff from the blue carbon areas as well as RGGI and the climate resiliency office. There were forestry reps, agricultural soil reps and others from across the country all working on carbon and climate and resiliency strategies. Mr. Wyckoff thought it was really powerful for DEP staff to hear the benefits and the power of trees and forestry, whether that's urban forestry or traditional forestry, and see the role trees play in other states to their benefit to meet their climate goals.

Mr. Bigelow completed the draft of the revised guidelines which was subsequently reviewed and revised by the Guidelines Subcommittee and UCF staff. That second draft will be reviewed by the Subcommittee and is expected to be presented to the CFC at its July meeting.

The RFP for the upcoming UCF grant program, which will primarily be for tree inventories, is being released June 23rd with a due date of August 25th. A maximum of \$15,000 per grant will be allowed and the total available for this grant period is \$750,000. Also, later in May NJ Forest Service management will be participating in a programmatic review of New Jersey Forest Service programs by the US Forest Service, which encompass all the programs that receive US Forest Service federal funding: stewardship, urban and community forestry, forest health and fire.

Chairman's Report

Ms. Zipse provided the report in Chair Brash's absence and began by welcoming Ms. Vannatta to the UCF program. She also congratulated UCF staff on the procurement of the federal funding and spoke on behalf of the Council in conveying excitement in seeing how the funding rolls out and expands urban and community forestry programming across New Jersey through that funding. She also was pleased to see the NJ Forest Service marking Arbor Day again and, as the Executive Director of NJ Tree Foundation, was happy to see many personnel from NJ Forest Service at the Tree Foundation's Arbor Day event.

The rollout of the new Guidelines, when they are finalized, was discussed with Dr. Graboski affirming that Rutgers can assist in that regard. He did feel that another meeting with consultant stakeholders should take place. Mr. Wyckoff advised that all the steps necessary to ensure the Guidelines are a product all parties can be proud of take place first before the rollout happens. Ms. Zipse advised that the NJ Shade Tree Federation has a session devoted to the Guidelines scheduled at its October conference. Mr. Wyckoff offered that a possible course of action may be to finalize the draft, then present to NJDEP administration in June, schedule a meeting in July, have some other engagement sessions in August, and by October, discussion of them at the Shade Tree Federation Conference may be a realistic timeline.

A discussion regarding the five vacancies on the Council ensued, with Mr. Wyckoff sharing that he has reached out to the DEP's Environmental Justice office for assistance in filling the vacancies, with Ms. Zipse

encouraging members who are aware of potential members to reach out to Mr. Wyckoff and Mr. McDonald for them to consider. There is also information on UCF's website for individuals who would like to be considered for membership on the Council.

The sample tree ordinance for the NJDEP's Stormwater Management Program is still able to be commented on; Ms. Zipse encouraged members to review it and submit comments as Council members. Mr. Wyckoff requested that he be copied on the comments. Ms. Zipse also wished staff well with the federal programmatic review and acknowledged that state lands will also be hosting the planners meeting the week after and acknowledged that staff has a lot going on.

New Business:

Fiscal Report

Pat Shapella reported on the fiscal state of the program, which was provided in the packet. It was noted that there will be monies available for grants once the Guidelines are finalized and rolled out.

Program Report

Ms. Vannatta provided the Program report. The program has received and processed 253 approved management plans and especially because of the continued extension and the changing guidelines, no more are expected in the immediate future. In terms of compliance, of those 253 approved management plans, the program had 147 of those communities accredited for 2022. So that's just over half, but still slightly less than 2021. Thirty communities have missing AARs, so that was the component they were missing to meet accreditation, but they had fulfilled all the other requirements. Ms. Vannatta reached out to all these communities and heard back from between 6 and 10 of them. By the next Council meeting, she is expecting the accreditation status for 2022 to be over 150. As for grants, the program has 4 Green Communities grants and 62 Stewardship grants open for a total of just over \$2.23 million between the two grant opportunities. She is also working on a project to try to bring the communities lagging with their education requirements back into compliance.

Legislative Issues

Ms. Slack provided a report in the packet. Discussion ensued regarding the Forest Stewardship Task Force recommendations being a basis for new legislation addressing some of its provisions. It was noted that the comment period is still open for the recommendations. The introduced Vegetation Management Response Act was discussed; it may be reintroduced and move rapidly toward promulgation.

Subcommittee Reports

The Guidelines Subcommittee will be meeting soon.

Unfinished Business

None.

New Business

A discussion on how the Council can connect with NJDOT & NJ Transit regarding how they manage their areas – side of the road, sides of the train line, etc. took place. Ms. Ace expressed frustration with how transit and utility line rights-of-way are vegetatively maintained and was looking for direction on how to be pro-active in communication with companies to enhance these properties. Mr. Blitz said, and Dr. Grabosky concurred, that the utility companies have a legal right to manage their rights-of-way in the manner they want. He knows of communities that will sometimes get advance notice when the utilities will be spraying or pruning in an area. Dr. Grabosky thought that there is a disconnect between the utility companies, their communities and their

contract clearance company. Sometimes the clearance company might not be privy to agreements made between the utility company and its communities, so better communication is needed. Dr. Grabosky further added that Rutgers is working with utility companies on their forest resilience and forest health issues and acknowledged that there was a lot of work that needs to be done, and suggested that conversations be curated with affected parties. Ms. Ace said she is aware of serious problems with spraying of rights-of-way and deleterious effects on wildlife. Mr. Wyckoff thinks an effective strategy might be to create public-private partnerships, where the regulatory aspects of the right-of-way management by right-of-way holders is discussed with community partners, where there is some give-and-take. Mr. Emens suggested that that can be accomplished with meetings with stakeholders. Mr. Beamish, who is a utility forester, said that his company encourages community engagement but get very little response to requests to engage. Mr. Wyckoff felt that the UCF program could play a role in getting Shade Tree Commissions the information they need to engage with their utility right-of-way managers.

Public Comment: None.

Ms. Zipse announced that the Shade Tree Federation has resumed its Tree Talk series and one is scheduled for May 17th. and that its Conference will be October 26 & 27, 2023 in Cherry Hill, NJ.

Ms. Zipse adjourned the meeting at 11:49am, after Kristin Ace made a motion for same and Neil Blitz seconded.