

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission

Woodstown Representatives

Shane Godshal (Alternate)
Jean Jack
Paul Langley, Chair
Erv Parker
Mayor Richard Pfeffer
Francis Rapa

Pilesgrove Representatives

Andrew Grosik
Robert Howell (Alternate)
John Ronafalvy
Phyllis Sauler, Vice Chair
William Stoms, Jr.
Robbie Waddington

February 12, 2010

TO: Mayor Richard Pfeffer and members of the Woodstown Borough Council;
Mayor Edward Kille and members of the Pilesgrove Township Committee;
Chairman Forrest Eichmann and members of the Woodstown Planning Board;
Chairman Scott Donnini and members of the Pilesgrove Planning Board:

It is our pleasure to provide you with the 2009 Annual Report of the Woodstown - Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission (WPJEC). Your governing bodies established the WPJEC in 2003 to help protect and enhance the shared natural resources of the two municipalities. This report summarizes activities of the WPJEC over the past 24 months in an effort to keep you fully informed of our recent activities.

We fully appreciate the unique circumstances of our joint commission. Our establishment as a joint entity provides us an advantage over other environmental commissions as we employ the synergy of our combined resources and ideas to meet our charter and the needs of both Pilesgrove Township and the Borough of Woodstown. The WPJEC encourages Woodstown and Pilesgrove, to the fullest extent possible, to continue to coordinate efforts that protect resources and facilitate orderly, sustainable growth.

The WPJEC would like to take this opportunity to thank our elected and appointed municipal leaders for your past support and we look forward to working with you toward continued successes.

Sincerely,

Paul Langley
2010 Chair

Phyllis Sauler
2010 Vice-Chair

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission

2009 Annual Report

Mission Statement of the Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission (Adopted November 13, 2003)

The Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission will act cooperatively to advise and assist the two municipalities in the protection, conservation, and wise use of our environmental resources. The Commission will produce and maintain a living document called the Natural Resources Inventory [Environmental Resource Inventory] to provide accurate and comprehensive information, based on sound scientific principles, so that the municipal governing bodies and land use planning and regulatory authorities can make informed decisions regarding the future of our two communities shared heritage. Our actions will be based on the following fundamental objectives.

The Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission will:

- Ensure that environmentally sensitive areas are identified and, for their protection, endorse reliable and thorough investigations before development in or around those areas is considered;*
- Provide thoughtful input to the planning boards regarding impacts to natural resources and the environment from proposed development;*
- Educate and sponsor awareness of local and shared environmental issues by encouraging public involvement and by partnering with organizations within our boundaries as well as those of our neighboring communities;*
- Advance the agricultural heritage of our combined communities by promoting the Borough of Woodstown as the town center and maintaining the rural characteristics of the surrounding Township of Pilesgrove;*
- Advocate and support affordable access to safe and unpolluted natural areas, open space, and historical treasures;*
- Promote the preservation of open space for recreational and conservation purposes.*

Background and Overview

The Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission (WPJEC) was formed in May 2003 by resolutions of the Borough of Woodstown and the Township of Pilesgrove, as enabled by state legislation N.J.S.A. 40:56A. The organization is unique in that, out of 383 established local environmental commissions throughout New Jersey, the WPJEC is only the second joint environmental commission comprised of two municipalities. This resulted from the recognition of the need to cooperatively protect the two towns' shared natural, cultural and community resources.

The WPJEC is an advocate for sound environmental measures and natural resource protection and uses a wide range of information and approaches to inform local government (elected officials and planning boards) and area residents on environmental issues, laws and programs. It researches issues, reviews and reports on development plans, and develops public education programs. The WPJEC maintains an Environmental/Natural Resource Inventory for the Woodstown and Pilesgrove communities, communicates with local citizens through publications, meetings and outreach programs, and works with neighboring commissions and other organizations to address regional and state-wide environmental issues.

The WPJEC consists of 10 regular members and two alternates, equally representative of the two municipalities. Members are appointed to three -year terms. Meetings are held the second Thursday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. (even months in Woodstown; odd months in Pilesgrove). Its members have varied backgrounds, skills, and a high level of enthusiasm, representing the diversity of Woodstown and Pilesgrove.

2008/2009 Activities & Accomplishments

Review of Development Applications

Development applications are reviewed by a WPJEC Site Plan Review Committee that is charged with reviewing and reporting on development proposals and developers' environmental impact statements to ensure that development plans are consistent with planning goals and resource protection standards. The Site Plan Review Committee meets on an as-needed basis and shares its findings, progress, and concerns with the entire WPJEC for input. In the event that a proposal raises questions or concerns, the full WPJEC then submits written comments and recommendations to the appropriate planning board.

Both the Pilesgrove Township and Woodstown Borough land development codes call for an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to be submitted by applicants as part of major site plan information requirements. In 2005 both municipalities adopted an EIS checklist that specifies what data, analysis and investigations are to be included as part of the EIS. The EIS worksheet is part of the major subdivision development application requirements to ensure that proper environmental reviews of potential development sites are conducted prior to local planning board review. In 2008, WPJEC initiated action to update and revise the EIS checklist. The significant change during this revision was the inclusion of the assessment for the presence of Field Tiles, which are discussed later in this report.

Pilesgrove Township continues to experience the most development pressure due to the proportionally large amount of open space in the municipality. The WPJEC continues to monitor all proposed development applications in both Pilesgrove and Woodstown, and reviews and comments on plans, as necessary, in accordance with the Commission's charter.

Despite the downturn in the economy, the WPJEC reviewed five major applications during 2008 and 2009. During that period, the Commission reported on four major residential subdivision applications and one major site plan for redevelopment of commercial property in downtown Woodstown. In addition, the WPJEC began an extensive review of a General Development Plan proposal to construct a 450-acre industrial park in Pilesgrove.

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Environmental Resource Inventory

The WPJEC continues to maintain the *Environmental Resource Inventory for the Borough of Woodstown and the Township of Pilesgrove*. The comprehensive 160-page Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) takes stock of the natural resources and environmental and physical conditions within the 37-square-mile greater Woodstown-Pilesgrove community. The report examines geology, soils, climate, surface and ground water, vegetation, animals, and habitat. The document also looks at the built environment, including housing, industry, agriculture, traffic, infrastructure and cultural resources and how they have impacted the natural environment. The ERI features 23 detailed color maps.

The ERI provides a broad snapshot of the rich and vital resources of Pilesgrove and Woodstown, and adds perspective to how vulnerable these resources are. The WPJEC relies heavily on the document to identify opportunities for community improvements and resource protection measures. The document has proven an invaluable tool for the two municipalities as they decide how to plan for their futures as a unified, sustainable community. The ERI will continue to be updated as circumstances warrant, to ensure the most accurate and current information is available.

Because the ERI is now five years old and there is a wealth of new environmental data available, the WPJEC is considering a major revision of the document in the next two years. Examples of major changes since publication include new Landscape Project wildlife habitat data, new soil surveys, designation of new Category One waterway protections in Pilesgrove, hundreds of acres on newly preserved land as well as many changes in demographic, census and land-cover data.

Smart Growth / Habitat Survey

A new and exciting project was initiated in 2009 that will build upon the WPJEC's past successes in protecting critical wildlife habitat. The Commission was chosen to receive a \$6,000 ANJEC Smart Growth Planning Grant to implement a WPJEC Critical Habitat Survey Project. The grant will be used to hire an environmental consultant with expertise in wildlife habitat investigations. In addition to the ANJEC grant, the WPJEC will be teaming with the South Jersey Land and Water Trust to administer a \$3,000 Conserve Wildlife Grant toward elements of the project, including stream assessments and vernal pool surveys.

The WPJEC Critical Habitat Survey Project is a multi-pronged approach to identifying and documenting rare plant and animal species and their associated habitats, as well as other habitats that feature high biological diversity and unique environmental characteristics, throughout the greater Woodstown -Pilesgrove community. This project will encourage greater protection of rare species and important habitat, help prevent landscape fragmentation and the creation of unsustainable biological islands and will advance smart growth principles by encouraging the integration of natural resource protection and sound land-use planning.

The multifaceted project will begin with an extensive data review, interviews of government and private biologists and ecologists, and extensive field surveys and analysis to identify the rare species communities and areas of high biological diversity within Woodstown -Pilesgrove. Emphasis will be placed on aquatic environments, vernal habitat, grasslands, forests and wetlands. This information will then be used to develop informational guidelines, natural histories, habitat evaluations, checklists and protocols for identifying and reporting up to seven target species selected through the investigation and survey phase.

An education and training component will enable the WPJEC and citizen scientists to conduct additional species and habitat searches. Training will be provided to WPJEC members and other interested persons, including four days of field survey training, a power point presentation on the project's findings, instruction on survey techniques, instructions on how to file Rare Species Report Forms, training on the species regulatory applicability and a presentation of zoning and regulatory case studies.

The WPJEC will encourage the use of the Critical Habitat Survey Project products for:

- Aiding in future sight plan compliance reviews;
- Filing of rare species sighting reports for inclusion in NJDEP Landscape Project and Natural Heritage Program databases;
- Working toward certification of all vernal habitats within Woodstown and Pilesgrove;
- Aiding in the designation of Conservation Zoning Districts that exhibit rare species and important or sensitive habitat; and
- Revising and updating the Woodstown -Pilesgrove Environmental Resource Inventory.

As a final outcome, the WPJEC will prepare a report to the governing bodies and planning boards of both municipalities that will summarize the work and findings of the Critical Habitat Survey project. The report will present recommendations on how the findings can support planning and zoning efforts (i.e. establishment of Critical Environmental Sites or Conservation Zoning Districts and design measures)

The survey phases of the report will begin in early 2010 and completion is expected by year-end.

ANJEC Activities

WPJEC maintains a membership and working relationship with the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC). ANJEC is a non-profit organization established to aid New Jersey environmental commissions, individuals, local and state agencies in activities that preserve natural resources and promote sustainable communities. ANJEC maintains a comprehensive environmental resource center and provides a variety of workshops for environmental commissioners, government officials and state residents.

In addition to regular research interactions and attendance at ANJEC sponsored events, in March 2009 WPJEC hosted and participated in an ANJEC Environmental Commissioners Course at Pilesgrove Township Municipal Building and an ANJEC sponsored environmental commissioners networking session at a Woodstown business location. These events attracted Environmental Commissioners from various South Jersey communities and afforded WPJEC members opportunities to network and develop working relationships with neighboring communities' environmental experts.

Electronic Recycling

In 2009, given the substantial growth in the use of electronics and the hidden environmental hazards associated with the disposal of many electronic components, the WPJEC initiated an Electronics Recycling campaign. Working together with Township and Borough officials, the WPJEC facilitated an Electronics Recycling Day that received excellent community support. The objectives of raising community awareness and providing a location for residents to properly dispose of their old electronics were met, as indicated by the large turnout and high volume of electronics that were properly disposed. Greater than ten pallets of electronics equipment was processed and properly disposed in a single day.

Field Tiles

Over the past two years, WPJEC has continued efforts to raise awareness and educate the community regarding "field tiles". These agricultural drainage systems have been used to manage subsurface water and drain wetlands to support agricultural land use and many have been in place for decades. The WPJEC strives to meet the balance necessary to maintain our local agricultural industry and support community development needs; however the absence of documentation regarding the design and flow of the large comprehensive underground drainage systems can be problematic when the community is assessing development plans versus environmental impacts.

To address this environmental issue, the WPJEC has focused on educating the community, identifying methods to properly assess land use for the presence of field tiles, and exploring processes to survey residents and collect data to develop a

comprehensive understanding of local subsurface drainage systems. Additionally, the EIS Checklist was revised in 2008 to include assessing for the presence of Field Tiles.

Light Pollution Ordinance

The WPJEC has prepared and recommended a draft light pollution ordinance with the purpose of minimizing problems associated with improperly designed and installed outdoor lighting, particularly problems of glare, light trespass, compromised safety and security, inefficient energy consumption, and adverse ecological and aesthetic impacts.

The recommended code is consistent with the recommendations of the New Jersey Light Pollution Study Commission, issued in 1996. It incorporates elements of two models: the Model Outdoor Lighting Ordinance for Cities and Towns, prepared by New England Light Pollution Advisory Group and the Framework for Outdoor Lighting Improvement Ordinances, prepared by the Indiana Council on Outdoor Lighting Education. The WPJEC also reviewed light pollution ordinances from several New Jersey municipalities. In addition, the WPJEC tailored the draft ordinance to meet the specific needs of the greater Woodstown -Pilesgrove community. For example, although critical agricultural interests are safeguarded by right-to-farm protections, the WPJEC wrote provisions that expressly exempt farming activities from the requirements of the ordinance.

During 2009, the Pilesgrove Township Planning Board conducted a detailed review of the ordinance and drafted amendments to its land use code based on the WPJEC recommendations. In addition, the WPJEC was honored when the Upper Deerfield Township, Cumberland County used the WPJEC ordinance as the basis for similar revision in their town. The WPJEC light pollution ordinance is also being reviewed by several other municipalities in the region. The Woodstown Borough Council adopted the ordinance as a part of its borough code in May, 2006.

Community Outreach and Education

WPJEC actively engages in community outreach activities and promotes education on environmental topics through both sponsorship and commissioner participation, for example:

- Significant Tree Contest – The WPJEC, the Woman’s Club of Woodstown and the Woodstown High School Environmental Club sponsored the first “Significant Tree Search” in the borough and township. At the regular monthly WPJEC meeting on June 11, 2009, awards were presented to residents who nominated trees in the search. Awards were presented for “Widest”, Tallest”, Most Unusual”, and “Most Symmetric” trees.
- “SPLASH & Paddle” – WPJEC has contributed support to this local community non-profit, volunteer organization that is dedicated to teaching our local Salem County youth about water safety while having fun.

- Reusable grocery bags – As a community waste reduction initiative, WPJEC partnered with a local business to obtain reusable grocery bags for distribution at community events.
- Community programs/events – WPJEC have promoted awareness of our local environment through attendance and displays at community events such as Girl Scout Earth Day in April 2009 and the Woodstown Fall Festival in September 2008.
- Training/Seminars – Committee members attend training sessions and informational seminars to continuously broaden and develop the WPJEC members' knowledge and skills and to maintain awareness of trends regarding environmental issues/topics. For example, WPJEC members have attended Sustainable Jersey Workshops, South Jersey Land and Water Trust - Stream Assessment Training, ANJEC Environmental Commissioner Courses and various other educational seminars. WPJEC has scheduled a "Vernal Pool Training" session for the 1st quarter 2010.

Sustainable Jersey

In 2009, WPJEC initiated research and investigation activities in pursuit of a "Sustainable Jersey" certification status for the Borough of Woodstown and Pilesgrove Township. Sustainable Jersey is a certification and incentive program for municipalities in New Jersey that "want to go green, save money, and take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term". Certification includes required and elective "actions" that municipalities can implement to receive the certification. The actions address issues such as global warming, pollution, biodiversity, buying locally, community outreach, green building, and sustainable agriculture. Sustainable Jersey provides the municipalities that enter the program with a comprehensive package of tools, guidance materials, training, and financial incentives, to support and reward progress. Sustainable Jersey will provide direction and resources for municipalities to institute programs that address sustainability and green communities.

Sustainable Jersey is an initiative of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities' Mayors' Committee for a Green Future, the Municipal Land Use Center at the College of New Jersey, The New Jersey Sustainable State Institute at Rutgers University, the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, the Rutgers Center for Green Building, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, and a coalition of NJ non -profits, state agencies, and experts in the field.

Preliminary review by WPJEC personnel indicate that both communities are very close to meeting the requirements of this program, based on actions previously undertaken in each municipality. In the 4th quarter 2009, the WPJEC moved to recommend the governing bodies attain this Sustainable Jersey status and have offered the services of the WPJEC to act as the "Green Team" for both municipalities. The Commission is prepared to support the municipalities in completing the actions necessary to achieve this certification status in early 2010.

Bald Eagle Program

WPJEC members have continued to contribute to the monitoring of the resident Bald Eagle population. Fourteen of New Jersey's 78 active eagle's nests are located in Salem County, including the East Lake and Pilesgrove nesting sites. Both local nests remained active and NJDEP Division of Fish and Game monitoring reports indicate the Pilesgrove nest as being used by a new pair in 2009. During 2009, WPJEC members worked with the State DEP's Bald Eagle Program biologists to report on activities of Pilesgrove's nesting eagles, and are assisting with monitoring the nests for disturbances. In 2008 and 2009, a WPJEC member submitted several reports, with photo documentation, to the State regarding bald eagle foraging activities in both Woodstown and Pilesgrove. In particular, the WPJEC is hoping to raise awareness among State biologists of land-foraging areas that eagles regularly use to hunt rabbits and other land-based prey. State regulations mainly protect eagle water-foraging habitat.

WPJEC Website

In 2008, working with a local website administrator, the WPJEC launched a new webpage [<http://www.w-pjec.org>]. The updated site format provides visitors with basic information about the WPJEC, including background, mission statement, member roster, and meeting schedules. Monthly meeting minutes are posted on the website and the complete Woodstown -Pilesgrove ERI document is also available online for download.

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