

PENNINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

Monday, January 26, 2026, 7:30 PM

Zoom virtual meeting

EC Agenda - Jan 2026

1. Call to Order / Roll Call

Chair Kieran called the meeting to order.

Members present: Kieran (Chair), Jim, Nell, Nancy, Joann, Brian.

Also present: Monica Carlson (new member), Bob Kecskes (guest)

Members not present (mentioned in meeting): Dan R, Andrew Seeder, Andy J.

2. Approval of Minutes from December 15, 2025

Minutes approved (Joann; second Nell)

3. Announcements

- *Scrap metal recycling event (Green Team / Joann)*

Joann shared details for a scrap metal drop-off with the Hopewell Valley Green Team at the Hopewell Township Public Works Building, 12:00–3:00 PM. Items must be at least 60% metal. Items with wood are not accepted due to fire risk. Wires and Christmas lights are accepted but must be kept separate to avoid tangling. Nancy requested a flyer for social media; Joann offered to resend the flyer and noted it had already been shared through Borough channels.

Volunteer support: Joann noted she could use additional volunteers, especially if cold weather requires shorter shifts. Jim volunteered to help.

- *Watershed Institute: Winter salt week*

Kieran shared a note Dan had sent him and forwarded the details by email.

4. Public Comment (if any)

No public comment was received.

5. Welcome to EC & Introductions: Monica Carlson

Kieran welcomed Monica Carlson as the newest Environmental Commission member, filling the seat vacated by Emily. Kieran shared Monica's background, including environmental training and her work at NJDEP. Monica introduced herself: she has lived in the area since 2021 and in Pennington Borough since 2024 with her family. She works as a scientist at NJDEP and has two children (one at Toll Gate and one at Sapling Woods Nature School). Monica shared particular interest in connecting Toll Gate students to the Pennington Arboretum

as an educational resource, and supporting the National Wildlife Federation community habitat certification work.

STRATEGIC PROJECTS

6. Stream Health, Water Tables, and Water Withdrawals (Guest: Bob Kecskes)

Kieran introduced Bob Kecskes (local resident, former NJDEP) and framed the discussion as educational and exploratory, with no decisions expected.

Bob provided an overview of groundwater withdrawals, streamflow impacts, and how water use is evaluated from an ecological and planning perspective. Key points included:

- Withdrawals from wells can reduce streamflow and wetland water levels, with impacts often felt locally near the well. Seasonal streamflow naturally drops in summer due to evapotranspiration, and human withdrawals can deepen that summer “dip.” In the Stony Brook watershed, long-term data indicate notable summer low-flow stress, with larger contributing withdrawals in the broader region (including downstream areas).
- Bob described the “low flow margin” method used by NJDEP to evaluate whether streamflows meet ecological thresholds, and noted that many watersheds do not meet the target margins. Bob shared observations about drought conditions revealing ecological impacts, including warm, low flows and eutrophication risk in certain reaches.
- Bob emphasized the role of conservation, particularly irrigation demand, and encouraged proactive planning and preservation to reduce future stress on water resources.

Next steps:

The Commission expressed interest in inviting Bob back for a longer, more focused discussion and developing a short educational piece for the community based on the themes raised.

7. Community Conversation: Water Runoff, Stormwater, and Protecting Our Waterways (Jim, Nell, Nancy)

Kieran noted this is the first Community Conversation of 2026 and is scheduled for February 5.

A. Logistics and program preparation (Jim)

- A prep/dry-run call is scheduled for Wednesday at 10:30 AM.

- Jim has received slide decks from Brian and Olivia (Watershed). Additional slides from Steve (Watershed) were expected but not yet received at the time of the meeting.
- Jim requested Monica send a headshot for a slide that introduces EC members.
- Recording: Members emphasized the event should be recorded and handed off to John for posting.

B. Outreach and communications

- Members reiterated the importance of sharing the event poster broadly through personal networks. Announced/used channels included MercerMe, Hopewell Express, Donnelly publication, Central Jersey online calendars, Hopewell Valley News, and EC social media. Watershed will also promote the event (Olivia to post).
- Additional outreach ideas included sending to Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (Dan), school-related groups, a Green Team mailing list (about 150 people), and Margo at the Pennington School (Kieran).
- Monica offered to share through an eco-school group and asked for a brief description of the Community Conversations format; Kieran agreed to send her a short overview.

8. Environmental Commission Site Planning Checklist: Update (Andrew Seeder, Joann, Andy J, Brian, Kieran)

Kieran deferred detailed discussion of this agenda item due to time and absences. Kieran provided a brief status: Andrew has been mapping ANJEC checklist categories to Borough Code/ordinances and Chapter 163 (site plan review). Next step is an alignment discussion with the Planning and Zoning Board before moving deeper into checklist development.

9. Community Energy Plan (CEP): Update and Overview (Brian, Joann, Andy, Kieran)

Brian provided a high-level overview of the CEP and the work completed to date as follows:

A. CEP Background and purpose:

- The Carbon Neutral Working Group began with the Borough goal to achieve carbon neutrality for Borough operations by 2035, using Sustainable Jersey's Excel-based emissions model.

- A baseline year of 2018 was selected (pre-COVID). Progress was tracked through 2022–2024; reductions were achieved, with a slight increase noted in 2024.
- The CEP expands the work beyond municipal operations to the broader community, consistent with the original resolution’s intent.

B. CEP framework

- The plan aligns with the State Energy Master Plan and is organized around seven strategy areas: transportation, renewable energy, energy efficiency, buildings, community planning, environmental justice, and clean energy innovation.

C. Grant and technical support

- The Borough received a \$10,000 BPU CEP grant, with technical support from Sustainable Jersey.
- Data quality challenges were noted, largely due to limitations in getting data precisely scoped to Pennington Borough boundaries.
- Joann provided an update that the grant agreement process is still moving through BPU; she will follow up again.

D. Work completed and next steps

- Consultants are being interviewed to support technical work; the intent is to use grant funds for consultant support. The team has reviewed and begun prioritizing template actions by impact and difficulty, and has coordinated with Hopewell Township to avoid working in a silo.
- Community outreach: a community survey draft is near-ready (Nancy and Kieran leading), to be circulated to guide priorities.
- Timeline: draft plan development through winter/spring; community presentation and feedback at Pennington Day and a public meeting; finalization and Council adoption targeted over the summer.

Kieran thanked Brian for the overview and emphasized the CEP will remain a major focus through 2026.

10. Pennington Arboretum: Update

Kieran noted new signage has been installed at the Arboretum and encouraged members to visit. Additional Arboretum projects are planned for 2026, including work related to exclosures/enclosures, with multiple community partners involved. Further detail was referenced as being in the pre-read.

11. **Looking Ahead: EC Priorities for 2026**

Kieran shared that he has been meeting individually with EC members to gather input on 2026 priorities. He expects to share a draft set of themes/priorities with the Commission in the coming weeks.

STANDING UPDATES

12. Updates from Committees & Boards

Borough Council update (Dan)

Dan was not present; no update provided.

Green Team update (Joann)

Covered under announcements: scrap metal event logistics and volunteer needs.

Planning and Zoning Board update (Andy)

Andy was not present; no update provided.

Open Space update (Nancy)

Nancy shared that a tract under consideration has likely stalled because a developer has moved in. She noted the Open Space Commission maintains an extensive ranked list of potential properties, though many opportunities fall through. Most opportunities are outside the Borough, with very few within Borough limits. The Commission discussed the importance of a surrounding "belt" of open space.

13. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting is Monday, February 23, 2026 at 7:30 PM.

14. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn: Nell. Second: Jim.

Meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.