

**STILLWATER TOWNSHIP
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
September 8, 2025
Regular Meeting**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Branagan, Dr. Lippencott, Mr. Szabo, Mrs. Tracey, Ms. Coriston
MEMBERS ABSENT: Mrs. Emmetts

Chairperson Coriston called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. with the statement that this meeting is in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act. This was a regularly scheduled meeting of the Stillwater Township Environmental Commission. Regular meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m., at the Stillwater Township Municipal Building located in Middletown, New Jersey. This meeting was held in the Office of Emergency Management at the Municipal Building. The flag was saluted and roll call taken.

Minutes

Ms. Coriston made a **motion** to approve the minutes of 8/11/25, as amended seconded by Mrs. Tracey.
Roll Call Vote: Mr. Branagan, yes, Dr. Lippencott, abstain, Mr. Szabo, yes, Mrs. Tracey, yes, Ms. Coriston, yes

Bills

Ms. Coriston made a **motion** to approve the following bill, pending availability of funds, seconded by Mr. Branagan:

Secretary: \$274.00

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Branagan, yes, Dr. Lippencott, yes, Mr. Szabo, yes, Mrs. Tracey, yes, Ms. Coriston, yes

Dr. Mattes arrived at the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

Correspondence:

-NJDEP Application Notice: Swartswood State Park – New Sanitary Facility/Treatment Works Permit Application

-Jeanne Gibson: Letter regarding Swartswood State Park

At this point, this portion of the meeting was opened to the public at 7:12 p.m.

Jeanne Gibson, 1071 Route 619 informed the EC that a trapper has set up traps at Swartswood Lake and no beavers have been caught to date. Trail cams were set up and no beavers were seen. The trapper indicated it is possible the beavers used up all the building material and preferred food in the area and chose to move on. Mr. Szabo added that he saw only one beaver after the last EC meeting discussion and there are five property owners with damage.

Ms. Gibson reported harvesting on the lake was completed and will reduce biomass. She is hoping it will continue in the future. She noted that any assistance residents can obtain from the township to keep the State aware of the issues going on at the park is important.

There being no one else from the public wishing to speak, this portion of the meeting was closed at 7:17 p.m.

Mayor Chammings informed Ms. Gibson of the Treatment Works Approval permit application, noting there has been some progress and movement forward.

A letter submitted to the Township Committee from Ms. Gibson outlining the issues at Swartswood State Park was reviewed by the EC as follows:

Swartswood State Park, New Jersey's first state park, has been attracting visitors for over a century. Located on the state's third largest lake, it offered picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, hiking and camping opportunities to visitors and was often filled with families enjoying the tranquil forest setting. Sunday sailboat races would attract fifty boats and the campground would be full. However, over the past decade those opportunities have been reduced or eliminated and the park is nearly empty most weekdays and the parking lot is rarely even half full on the weekends

The New Jersey Division of Parks bears responsibility for the park and the lake. Whether through neglect or just indifference, they have allowed the following to occur:

1. Outbreaks of hazardous algae blooms close swimming several times a summer.

2. *Overgrowth of lotus and other weeds which reduced the size of the swimming area to about a third of its previous size and contributed to the HAB outbreaks.*
3. *Opportunities to swim reduced to only 5 days a week throughout the season and this year ending the season before Labor Day.*
4. *Closure of the concession stand.*
5. *Closure of the boat rental concession.*
6. *Closure of the campgrounds for three of the last four years.*
7. *Neglect of the aeration system which results in it being nonfunctional for days at a time and also contributes to the HAB outbreaks.*
8. *Abandonment of the ranger house on the corner of Swartswood Road and Rt. 619.*
9. *Abandonment of a \$100,000 weed harvester purchased through a state grant by the Swartswood Lake and Watershed Association (SLWA) and donated to the park to allow them to manage the excessive weed growth. The harvester has been rusting in a shed for years. When these issues have been brought to the attention of park officials, they have responded with excuses. What they have not produced are any concrete plans to address the problems. For example, the swimming area is only open 5 days a week due to a lack of lifeguards, but no one has contacted high school swim coaches in the area to recruit lifeguards. No training program has been offered. How about contacting area guidance counsellors to let students know of the opportunities available at the park? Park officials closed the campground to redo the bathrooms. Is two years a reasonable amount of time for this? No information available on when they will reopen. \$250,000 was spent to redo camp yurts which were then were made unavailable, but the reason given for junking the harvester was that funds weren't available.*

The issue with rampant proliferation of the lotus was brought to the attention of officials a decade ago. This plant which is considered invasive in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New York is considered protected here. There have been roadblocks raised when SWLA has attempted to get permission to control its invasive spread. The SWLA has worked tirelessly to try to stem the deterioration of the lake. They monitor the water quality, volunteer to hand pull the invasive growth of aquatic water chestnut, and have applied for grants to address some of these conditions. Currently there is weed harvesting being done through a grant that the association applied for and received. But the overriding responsibility for the lake lies with the state. They need to cut through bureaucracy and take this responsibility more seriously. They need to provide more solutions and fewer excuses before we lose this important natural resource.

The EC discussed how to best address the issues and who to address them to. The Hazardous Algae Blooms, which are an environmental impact, are currently being addressed. It was agreed that ultimately, the issues are having both an economic and amenities impact and in turn affect tourism. Mayor Chamings suggested contacting Tammie Horsfield of the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce and offered to do so on behalf of the Commission. Mr. Szabo felt that it should be emphasized that the EC is in a unique position because it conducts site survey inspections and planning prior to development at the Planning Board and Zoning Board level. Dr. Lippencott noted park equipment is also an issue as they own electric vehicles with no charging station. Ms. Coriston agreed to draft a letter for the EC to review at the next meeting. Mayor Chamings suggested sending it to the County Commissioners. Dr. Lippencott suggested keeping the letter simple, with bullet points, clear, concise, not lengthy and with strong points. Dr. Mattes suggested a petition regarding the issues at the State Park and requesting the State address them.

Correspondence cont'd.:

-State Planning Commission Notice of Public Hearings (6) for the draft Final New Jersey's State Development and Redevelopment Plan and Infrastructure Needs Assessment -Ms. Coriston will attend virtual hearings in October and suggested other EC members do the same if they can.

Old Business

Wild and Scenic River Project Update: Tara Mezzanotte, Foodshed Alliance, will provide an update at the October 20th EC Meeting.

Citizen Leadership Form to Serve on the EC: Applicant Leona Kral will appear before the EC at their meeting on October 20th.

ANJEC Environmental Achievement Awards:

Mayor Chamings stated the Township Committee unanimously nominated the EC for a 2025 ANJEC Achievement Award for their 40-Year Surface Water Quality Report (1984-2024) by Dr. Lippencott. Clerk Ingles will complete the nomination application to ANJEC and may need assistance from Mrs. Wunder and Ms. Coriston.

ANJEC Environmental Congress: October 10, 2025, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. @ New Brunswick Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey

Ms. Coriston will attend the Environmental Congress. Any other EC members interested in attending should contact Mrs. Wunder.

40-Year Surface Water Quality Report (1984-2024): Dr. Lippencott

The EC agreed to add this item to the October 20th EC meeting agenda for discussion to include the following items: Water testing 2025 line item and budgeting for next year; purchasing equipment, determination on what testing, if any, will need to be done in the future, review of report recommendations and testing parameters that may need to be adjusted or removed.

Stream Water Testing – Summer 2025:

Dr. Lippencott stated the testing will not be done at this time as the opportune time to do so would have been in July.

TREX Program Update: Ms. Coriston

Ms. Coriston stated that bags are needed for the TREX collection receptacles. Mrs. Wunder will contact the CFO and have the bags ordered funded through the EC Supplies line item.

Fishing Line Collection:

All line is to be cleaned of litter/leaves, hooks and lead sinkers. Lead sinkers are to be provided at the meeting for recycling.

New Business

Site Surveys:

-Zoning Board – Block 2302, Lot 1, application to construct a 36' x 36' barn to store agricultural equipment

Dr. Lippencott reported there were no issues with the application. An NJDEP General Permit 8 was issued for the property. He noted that if Stillwater had the WSR designation, the process would have been very difficult, requiring an individual permit that would be both costly and a lengthy process for approval. Dr. Lippencott made a **motion** to accept the site survey as listed, seconded by Ms. Coriston.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Branagan, yes, Dr. Lippencott, yes, Dr. Mattes, yes, Mr. Szabo, yes, Mrs. Tracey, yes, Ms. Coriston, yes

Environmental Commission Volunteer Recognition:

-Ms. Coriston for the TREX program.

-EC members for checking the fishing receptacles.

Endangered/Threatened Species Sightings: None

Other sightings: Mayor Chamings reported a beaver at Veteran's Memorial Park, in addition to the 300-400 Gizzard Shad that have died at the VMP bridge. There were quite a few Bald Eagles feeding on the Shad. The number of fish skeletons is unbelievable and Fish and Game were notified.

Dr. Lippencott reported that while hiking at the Blair Preserve with his grandson, they found signs of a beaver in that area as well. He questioned what effect the presence of the Shad would have had on the E. coli results if the summer stream water testing had been conducted.

Mayor Chamblings reported she received a phone call from a Hackettstown man about a sighting of a mountain lion in the area of Wall Street.

At this point, this portion of the meeting was opened to the public at 8 p.m.

There being no members of the public wishing to speak, this portion of the meeting was closed at 8 p.m.

Planning Board (PB) Liaison Report: Dr. Lippencott

- A lot line adjustment application for property on Dove Island Road was approved for completeness.
- Approval of bills.
- The Planning Board continued their discussion on Air BNBs and short-term rentals, reviewing the existing B&B ordinance.

Township Liaison Report: Mayor Chamblings

- Residents attended the Township Committee meeting held on September 2nd, expressing concerns about the Plymouth Lake Association dam loan. A meeting will be held on October 21st between the Plymouth Lake Association and the Township Committee.
 - Approval was granted for four 100% disabled veterans in Stillwater, with reimbursement of taxes.
 - An amendment was made to the Employee Handbook with respect to employees who are also a member of the Fire Department and the procedure moving forward for leaving on a call.
 - The bridge on Route 521 has been reopened and the light removed. This is a temporary repair and the permanent one is approximately five to 10 years away.
 - The following County bridges will be under construction in the near future: Swartswood Road bridge near Mengo's; Route 521 bridge near Boomer's; and the Stillwater Road bridge.
- Mr. Szabo commented on the politics involved with such construction and the effect the closures will have on the local businesses.

Dr. Lippencott questioned if there were any grant funding opportunities for the stream water testing. Mayor Chamblings stated there is potential for stormwater grant funding and tying the water sampling with stormwater management. She suggested reviewing the MS4 Primer and also contacting Planning Board Engineer Joe Vuich to discuss the options further. She also recommended bringing Bob Pierce into that conversation as he is the Deputy Stormwater Director for the County. Mr. Vuich was named Stormwater Coordinator and is currently fighting for a \$50,000 grant. Mayor Chamblings will speak with him prior to the October Planning Board meeting.

With no further business to come before the Commission, Ms. Coriston made a **motion** to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 p.m., seconded by Mr. Branagan. In a voice vote, all were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Wunder, Secretary