

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission

Woodstown Representatives

Jean Jack
Paul Langley
Tim Love (*Alternate*)
Francis Rapa, Chairman
Thomas Turpin
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Pilesgrove Representatives

Robert Breisch
Patricia DuBois
Robert Howell (*Alternate*)
John Ronafalvy
Phyllis Sauler
William Stoms, Jr.

July 12, 2006

TO: Mayor Richard Pfeffer and members of the Woodstown Borough Council;
Mayor Ernie Bickford and members of the Pilesgrove Township Committee;
Chairman Forrest Eichmann and members of the Woodstown Planning Board;
Chairman Jon Ober and members of the Pilesgrove Planning Board:

It is our pleasure to provide you with the 2005 Annual Report of the Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission. Your governing bodies established the WPJEC in 2003 to help protect and enhance the shared natural resources of the two municipalities. The WPJEC encourages Woodstown and Pilesgrove, to the fullest extent possible, to coordinate efforts to protect resources and facilitate orderly, sustainable growth.

Following two upstart years, 2005 brought many hard-earned accomplishments that will benefit the 37-square mile greater Woodstown-Pilesgrove community for many years to come. Most notably, the Environmental Resource Inventory, completed in 2005, establishes a baseline of data on environmental, ecological, and physical conditions to serve as a foundation for informed planning, protection, development and other decision-making with the community.

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,

Trish DuBois
2005 Chair

Francis Rapa
2006 Chair

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Joint Environmental Commission 2005 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 & 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 to advise the elected officials and planning boards on environmental matters. The organization is unique in that, out of more than 375 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. It researches issues, reviews and reports on development plans and develops public education programs. 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.

2005 Activities & Accomplishments

Woodstown-Pilesgrove Environmental Resource Inventory

September 2005 saw the completion of a comprehensive report titled *Environmental Resource Inventory for the Borough of Woodstown and the Township of Pilesgrove*. The 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.

More than two years in the making, the ERI was begun in August 2003 with the WPJEC's creation of the ERI Committee. The ERI Committee began by outlining the scope of the project and defining tasks. Soon after, the WPJEC applied for and received a smart-growth planning grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) and also received matching funds from the Borough of Woodstown as well as in-kind services from Pilesgrove Township. The WPJEC then contracted with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to compile much of the basic text, conduct data analysis and produce GIS-based mapping, among other expertise.

In developing the ERI, the WPJEC combed extensive scientific research to compile detailed annotated inventories of flora and vertebrate fauna found in Woodstown and Pilesgrove. The DVRPC has pointed to this unique effort, including its methodologies, as a model for other communities. In addition, the complete Woodstown-Pilesgrove ERI has been featured as a model ERI on the website of the New Jersey Office of Smart Growth.

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 document has already 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. It has become an effective tool for Woodstown and Pilesgrove as both municipalities review and update their Master Plans.

Woodstown has adopted the ERI as an element of its Master Plan. Pilesgrove has officially recognized the ERI as a resource to support its vision of the community as defined in its Master Plan. The WPJEC relies heavily on the document to identify opportunities for community improvements and resource protection measures.

ANJEC Environmental Achievement Award

At its annual Environmental Congress held in October 2005, the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) presented the WPJEC with a prestigious 2005 Environmental Achievement Award for its recently completed ERI. Beyond the outstanding quality of the document, the WPJEC was selected for the award based on several considerations. Among these were the fact that WPJEC members served as the principal authors of major portions of the ERI and that the WPJEC was able to overcome many challenges to preparing one of the few ERIs covering two municipalities. ANJEC also recognized the WPJEC's work in effectively using the ERI to facilitate detailed reviews of major development proposals. To enhance public access, the WPJEC also has made the ERI available free-of-cost on the Woodstown Borough website as a downloadable PDF document.

Review of Development Applications

In addition to creating an ERI Committee, the WPJEC established a Site Plan Review Committee early on in its existence. The Site Plan Review Committee 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. This process also led to the creation of a detailed Environmental Impact Statement Checklist which is discussed in greater detail below.

Pilesgrove Township has been experiencing the most development pressure with a flurry of development applications over the past several years. During 2005, the WPJEC reviewed ten major development proposals and submitted comments to the Pilesgrove Township Planning Board on two of these.

Woodstown Fall Festival Exhibit:

In cooperation with the Woodstown Open Space Advisory Committee, the WPJEC co-sponsored an exhibit at the Woodstown Fall Festival in September 2005. There were several objectives to this special outreach effort. First, the WPJEC sought to educate Woodstown and Pilesgrove residents about the recently completed Environmental Resource Inventory. Large themed maps and aerial photographs were displayed and fact sheets were produced and distributed to interested citizens. WPJEC members were on hand to answer questions and listen to residents' concerns.

Second, the participants informed residents about the ongoing effort to compile an Open Space and Recreation Plan for Woodstown as well as educate voters about the upcoming referendum to authorize creation of an Open Space Fund for Woodstown. A community survey was conducted and questionnaires were distributed to residents requesting their opinions about the Borough's open space and recreational needs. Sixty people responded to the survey, providing valuable input to the research and analytical phase of the project.

In November 2005, Woodstown voters approved the creation of the Open Space Fund by a vote of 644 votes to 473 votes, a sizable margin of 15 percent. The referendum authorized an open space tax of up to two cents per \$100 of assessed property values.

Inter-Municipal Networking

Another 2005 accomplishment of the WPJEC was the formation of a network of neighboring Environmental Commissions in Salem and Gloucester Counties. The WPJEC recognized that while there are lines drawn between counties and municipalities, these boundaries do not always recognize natural resources. Periodic meetings, called "environmental summits" were held in 2005 for the exchange of information and ideas. The groups discuss projects that can be mutually beneficial, share experiences and serve as a sounding board for ideas and strategies.

Nitrate Dilution Model:

In 2005, The WPJEC researched and recommended, to the Pilesgrove Planning Board, establishing, per ordinance, a nitrate dilution model as part of the Environmental Impact Statement requirements. Looking at local soils, land use and climate, the model simulates the impact of septic system effluent on groundwater and surface water quality. This information could then be used to determine the appropriate acreage for building lots that would adequately protect water quality, and ecological and public health.

Bluebird Nest Boxes

In early spring 2005, the WPJEC was approached by Woodstown-Pilesgrove Cub Scout Pack 238, which requested assistance planning a conservation project to meet advancement requirements. The WPJEC devised and coordinated a project to construct and install bluebird nesting boxes within a State-owned grassland habitat in Pilesgrove.

On behalf of the Cub Scouts, the WPJEC obtained a State Division of Fish and Wildlife Special Use Permit to erect the bluebird boxes within the Salem River Wildlife Management Area off East Lake Road. The WPJEC then arranged for Fred Akers, one of South Jersey's leading bluebird experts to speak to the scouts about proper placement, installation and maintenance of the nest boxes. Mr. Akers is administrator of the Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association, member of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and North American Bluebird Society. He is a cooperator with the New Jersey Endangered Species Program and manages about 80 bluebird boxes in Buena Vista Township.

Black Bear Policy

In September 2005, the WPJEC submitted extensive comments to the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife regarding a proposed Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. The proposal had many direct implications to Salem County's growing black bear population and proposed to divide both Woodstown and Pilesgrove between Bear Management and Bear Exclusion Zones. The WPJEC supported measures to safeguard local bears while protecting agricultural interests. The WPJEC also opposed the Bear Exclusion Zone provision and encouraged better reliance on research of black bears in agricultural/coastal plain regions such as eastern North Carolina. In its final response and policy document, the Division of Fish and Wildlife responded directly to several of the WPJEC comments and recommendations. While the Bear Exclusion policy was not entirely abandoned, it was clarified and tempered in response, at least in part, to the concerns of the WPJEC.

Open Space Plan

In support of Woodstown's efforts to establish a vision for meeting the future open space and recreational needs of the community, the WPJEC, in 2005, took the lead in launching the production of a Woodstown Open Space and Recreation Plan. On behalf of the Borough, the WPJEC applied for and received a matching grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions to complete the Plan. An Open Space Committee was formed that includes members of the WPJEC, the Borough Planning Board and the Town Council. Based in large part on its work with the ERI, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission was contracted as the consultants to support this effort. At years end, the Open Space Committee was wrapping up much of its research and starting production of the plan document. The plan will guide the Borough's efforts to meet its recreational needs, protect natural and historic resources and improve eligibility for State land acquisition and park development funding.

Light Pollution Ordinance

In 2005, the WPJEC prepared a draft light pollution ordinance and submitted it to both planning boards to consider for recommendation to the governing bodies for adoption. The purpose of this measure is to minimize 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. Although Pilesgrove has not acted on the proposal at the time of this report, the Woodstown Borough Council adopted the ordinance as part of its borough code in May, 2006.

The draft 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 (<http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/cfa/ps/nelpag.html>); and the Framework for Outdoor Lighting Improvement Ordinances, prepared by the Indiana Council on Outdoor Lighting Education (<http://icole.home.att.net/>). 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.

Environmental Impact Statement Worksheet

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 light of a number of Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) submitted by applicants which contained incomplete or ambiguous information, the WPJEC, in 2004, developed a comprehensive EIS Checklist which specifies what data, analysis and investigations are to be included as part of an EIS. Applicants must submit all of the information requested on the checklist, or explain why it is not needed, before a project can be deemed complete by the planning board. Both municipalities adopted the EIS worksheet as part of their major subdivision development application requirements to ensure that proper environmental reviews of potential development sites are conducted prior to local planning board review. Pilesgrove adopted the measure in late 2004 and Woodstown in September 2005.

WPJEC Website

Working with the Borough of Woodstown website administrator, the WPJEC launched a webpage in 2005. The site provides visitors with basic information about the WPJEC, including background, member roster, mission statement and meeting schedule. The complete Woodstown-Pilesgrove ERI document is also available online for download. In addition to the WPJEC webpage, the Borough of Woodstown posts all WPJEC meeting minutes on its website.

Woodstown Conservation Zoning Project

In April 2005, the Woodstown Planning Board established a committee to evaluate environmental resources and conditions along the Salem River in southern Woodstown. The area serves as critical foraging habitat for a nesting pair of federally protected bald eagles. The WPJEC supported the work of the committee. Specifically, the Planning Board appointed a representative of the WPJEC to serve on the Committee. Another member was both a planning board and WPJEC member. In addition, the ERI, completed later in the year, provided important data to assist the Committee in its assessment and formulation of recommendations to protect important resources in the area.