

Montclair Environmental Commission Meeting- Draft Minutes

January 7, 2026

Present: Keith Brodock, Mac Carbonnell, Bill Martens, Ruchi Misra, Imke Oster, Gray Russell, Alison Tribus. **Absent:** Suzanne Aptman

Alternate Commissioners: Gray Russell

Department of Sustainability Liaison: Lisa Johnson

Town Councillors: Susan Shin Andersen and Eileen Birmingham

Approval of December 2025 Notes: Postponed

Key Reports/Updates

Meeting Operations

As of 2026, as per a vote at the December 2025 meeting, Bill Martens will serve as Chair of the MEC with Alison Tribus as Vice Chair. Chair Martens outlined plans to establish clear annual goals and priorities for 2026, aligned with the Climate Action Plan, Resilience Action Plan, and relevant sections of the Montclair Master Plan. The Commission also discussed operational improvements, including earlier distribution of materials, clearer action items, greater use of committees and to pilot a new meeting recording tool on a trial basis to improve documentation efficiency.

Climate, Energy and Resilience Planning

The Planning Board approved a sustainability and resilience amendment to the master plan developed by Colliers environmental engineering firm working with Lisa and NJDEP. The next step involves developing a draft Resilience Action Plan. The Commission will review both the climate action plan and resilience plan before the next meeting to identify coordination opportunities and priority focus areas.

2026 Meeting Schedule Planning

The Commission set its 2026 meeting schedule for the first Wednesday of each month, with no meeting in August. Adjustments were made to the April and September meeting dates due to holidays and school breaks; meetings will be held on the 2nd Wednesday of those months.

Municipal Community Solar Project

The township lawyer amended privacy agreements and proposed changes to Gable. The contract has been sent to Gable for review and signature. Once executed, Gable can obtain data from PSE&G to analyze and cross-reference with town records and start developing the RFP. The RFP will include realistic numbers of low-moderate income households and require council approval by resolution, with Gable running the process in collaboration with the Township.

Tree Shade Commission vs Advisory Board Discussion

Discussion centered on creating either a shade tree commission or advisory board. Councillor Birmingham explained that commissions are subject to strict state statutes with specific requirements, including 30-day meeting mandates and mayoral appointments, while advisory boards offer similar functionality with less rigid requirements. The tree committee will evaluate the best approach and

return with recommendations. Current tree ordinance work continues with Councillor Birmingham and Mac reviewing drafts with Lisa for consistency with private property regulations.

Tree Ordinance Development Challenges

A new draft of the Tree Ordinance is being developed. However, the tree ordinance faces enforcement challenges with existing ordinance poorly enforced, making more stringent versions potentially problematic. Previous drafts collapsed due to enforcement concerns. The approach involves using state model ordinances as rationale and potentially automating permit processes online, but IT department turnover creates limitations. The new manager, Stephen Marks, supports moving forward. Debates continue regarding restriction levels, punishment vs education approaches, and balancing effectiveness with enforceability.

Waste Reduction and Recycling Initiatives

Textile recycling discussions continue with the library as the preferred drop-off location. The Commission will survey existing collection boxes around town. Clean community funds are available for litter abatement, murals, and environmental cleanup projects. The new waste reduction committee will address recycling contract reviews, composting programs, and comprehensive waste stream management.

Community Energy Plan Review

Lisa reported the community energy plan is 90% complete, developed in-house by Marrakesh and Lisa after using the \$10,000 grant for solar feasibility study—the study identified DCS with its new roof as the best solar location after the library, offering a six-year payback period. Next steps include Commission review, community meeting, and Council adoption. The plan overlaps significantly with the climate action plan and incorporates Sustainable Jersey data.

Wildlife Management

A thermal drone survey is underway to assess Montclair's deer population. The results will inform future recommendations on deer management and wildlife protection ordinances, recognizing community and policy considerations.

Commissioner Term Renewals and Appointments

Multiple commissioners have expired terms according to the Township website. The Commission structure should include seven members plus two alternates, but current status needs Township Clerk verification. Keith's dual role as planning board member creates replacement challenges since environmental commission requires planning board representation. The Council must approve all reappointments with proper term staggering to avoid mass expirations.

Committee Structure and Membership Review

The Commission reviewed standing committees: communications, energy, site plan review, and tree committees. A special Waste Reduction and Recycling Committee (Alison, Gray, Judy) was created, encompassing recycling, composting, and textile initiatives, with members assigned, which the commission will vote to add to ByLaws at the next meeting. A special Wildlife and Ecosystem Management committee (Bill, Mac, Ruchi) was established to address wildlife management and biodiversity, with members assigned, which the commission will vote to add to ByLaws at the next meeting. The communications committee will be disbanded, with communications handled by

committees, which the commission vote to remove from the ByLaws at the next meeting. Social media management was assigned to the Secretary. The Energy Conservation & Transportation Committee (Bill, Gray, Ruchi), Tree Committee (Imke, Suzanne, Mac), Site Plan (Keith, Bill, Mac) committee members were all confirmed. There will be a formal vote to make changes to the Bylaws in the February meeting.

Municipal Liaison Designations

The commission lacks officially designated Council liaisons despite Councillor Shin Anderson's and Councillor Birmingham's regular attendance. Council needs to formally appoint liaisons to all commissions rather than current informal arrangements. The Commission appreciates having Council representation after past periods without any Council members attending meetings. Formal designation would ensure consistent communication and prevent Commissioners from feeling forgotten.