

# **Mendham Township Environmental Commission**

## **Annual Report 2023**

### **Shared with the Township Committee, March 11, 2024**

The Environmental Commission (EC) provides a valuable voluntary resource to our community, on environmental matters that impact our community, focused on what makes best sense for residents, and for our community as a whole. EC provides guidance and supportive information to the Mendham Township Committee (TC).

EC was highly active in 2023, covering the range of issues that impact and benefit our community environment. Significant progress was made for the benefit of the Mendham Township community and beyond, increasing collaboration and information-sharing with our neighboring communities and experts on environmental matters. Key achievements are described in this summary report, together with continued plans for 2024.

#### **OPEN SPACE & TRAILS**

EC members regularly walk the Mendham trails, perform ad hoc and organized clean-up themselves, as well as work with environmental organizations, with Eagle Scouts, and with the DPW on key work as needed.

**Trail Stewards.** In 2022, EC introduced the trail steward issue reporting facility, which continued to evolve in 2023, with improved reporting mechanisms and visibility into 2024. In 2023, EC received miscellaneous reports via the MT website and word of mouth. Issues were reported across trails, such as clearing trees and brush in Dismal Harmony, Patriots Path, Mosle Preserve, Buttermilk Falls. Reports were followed through, issues investigated, and resolved, largely by EC representatives clearing blockages, fallen tree issues, amounting to an estimated 15.5 man-hours, or by referring heavier jobs to DPW.

**Eagle Scouts.** EC leads a program of supervised Eagle Scout project work, including significant renovation of information kiosks and trail clearing at several sites. Volunteer support from Eagle Scouts has installed new kiosks and benches, and trail-clearing. Recognition was given to three Eagle Scouts projects completed in 2023 by proclamations delivered at TC on February 26, 2024. In addition, recognition goes to the troop members and volunteers that supported each Eagle Scout.

Projects completed in 2023, recognized by proclamation at TC included:

- David Braun – trail head kiosk and trail clearance at Mosle kiosk
- Mitchell Wood – trail-head kiosk at India brook, and two new benches at the parking area overlooking the soccer fields
- TJ Shaw – built 20 garden beds growing produce for the The Sharing Project

Also, proclamations were issued in February 2023 for two Eagle Scouts completing projects in 2022, Chase Gannon and Brian Janacek (listed in the EC 2022 report).

Eagle Scout projects proposed for 2024 include:

Ryan Smith - Burnett Brook: improve access, repair walkways and improve trail map signage.

Drew Gannon – Brookside Beach picnic benches

Katrino Logano – Girl Scouts - replace the bridge behind Emergency Services building

**Buck Hill Pond – Access & Planting Project.** EC met with MT engineers at the site, and worked with them and the Administrator, to further develop planning for this project, which aims to improve community access to a beautiful natural area, remove invasive brush plants and replace with native plantings, including a significant pollinator and butterfly garden area. This work is being developed with the necessary sensitivity and minimal disruption, to not interfere with existing wildlife and the natural environment of the site. The plan will meet the necessary environmental regulations for such a renovation. This planning work is funded under the external grant awarded in 2022, with a view to putting forward the execution plan for the next stage of grant funding, to submit in 2024, aiming to execute the work in 2025.

**Tree Committee and Open Space Committee.** Building on the EC recommendation to TC in its 2022 Annual Report, EC supported the TC plans to boost the membership and activity of the Tree Committee, to help provide greater focus on tree maintenance and responsible tree management across the Township, such as to manage the Ash Tree ‘Emerald Ash Borer’ disease impact, and to help proactive considerations to manage the growing concern from Beech Leaf Disease. EC also supported the establishment of the Open Space Committee.

**Beech Leaf Disease.** In response to growing concerns from residents, EC engaged with Morris Country and Rutgers University forestry experts, and promoted an educational webinar for residents to better understand the issue and options to manage this problem.

#### **Benches Sponsorship**

EC has developed a scheme for residents to sponsor a bench in our open spaces, with a plaque for sponsorship, memorial, or other personal messaging. Providers have been identified, sites were mapped for suitable locations, and the scheme is being launched early 2024. Details are available from EC and the MT website.

#### **PLANNING APPLICATIONS & SUPPORT**

**Planning Board and Board of Adjustment representation.** EC supported the review of planning proposals on environmental impact for a number of projects through the year. The EC takes pride in encouraging transparency and objectivity, to raise community issues and seek resolution. Support was given on environmental aspects for all planning submissions. EC has pressed for further attention to Environmental Impact Studies to include in-person site visits, rather than solely theoretical impact assessments (such as the Mosle Lights project, and learnings from the past St Johns/ Hillendale development at Mosle). This is needed, to more robustly evaluate potential impacts on our local water systems, wildlife, native plants, trees, and our residential neighborhoods.

**Mosle Light Project Working Group.** The TC convened a group of 10 people, to use reasonable efforts to develop a lighting plan to enable the Twin Boro Bears to use Mosle Field after sundown between September 15th and November 15th each year. A member of the EC was part of this group. A final proposed solution was presented to TC in December. The solution was a compromise to allow lighting while minimizing disturbance of the environment and neighbors. The solution was contingent upon a full Environmental Impact Study to be completed before further actions.

**Backer Farm Development Proposal.** EC provided an evaluation report to TC on the technical and environmental merits of the Backer Farm proposed development. The report was completed to support TC decisions for their response to the Morris County Agriculture Board, after it had reviewed a revised plan from Backer Farm. EC had listened to views and perspectives from different resident stakeholders, and reviewed available information and documents on the potential environmental impact.

**Pedestrian Easement.** EC recommended in 2022 to restore an overgrown walking easement on route 24, aimed to help provide better pedestrian access between communities, and reduce the need to drive by car between neighborhoods. The restoration work was planned for 2023, but execution was delayed due to workload demands on the DPW. This should go ahead in 2024 now that an existing environmental budget for such projects has been identified.

**Two new areas of work for 2024.** Include liaison with the third-party organization Mendham Alliance for Preservation & Conservation (MAPC):

- 1). vernal pools (land areas that are wetland for part of the year, important for native ecosystems to survive) - understanding and protecting vernal pools from development impact;
- 2). NJ affordable housing rules and leveraging environmental credits – implications and action needed.

## **WATER QUALITY & MANAGEMENT**

**Stream Cleanup.** For the past several years the Mendham Township EC has participated in the Raritan Headwaters Stream Cleanup event which involves many towns in Northern New Jersey using volunteers to clean up sites including streams, parks and waterways. This year the event was held on April 15, 2023. Altogether, 10 large bags of recyclables, and 14 large bags of trash were collected at Burnett Brook, Tempe Wick Preserve and Mosle Preserve.

**Well Water Testing.** Mendham Township jointly with Mendham Borough worked with Raritan Headwaters to provide water testing kits to town residents on October 7th. This event allowed easy purchase of over 20 different well water tests including Coliform bacteria and E.Coli, Nitrates, Lead, Arsenic and Radon. 26 homeowners tested water for various potential contaminations. Only one test showed a failure, for radon. Results for Mendham are in the attached report.

A further initiative for 2024 includes engaging with Whippany River Watershed Action Committee, on common areas of interest and opportunities for education.

## **RECYCLING**

**Styrofoam Recycling.** EC partnered with the Township and Borough DPWs for the January and June styrofoam recycling events. Over 70 yards of styrofoam were recycled, which would have otherwise gone to landfill via regular trash collection.

**Residential Recycling Collection.** EC engaged in discussion, with Morris County MUA on opportunities for increasing the recycling grant reimbursement by improving reporting of volumes recycled. This aims to boost the grant paybacks. In addition, EC representatives together with Township Committee member Amalia Duarte, dug deep with MUA into the possibility to resume single-stream recycling collection. This helped secure the zero extra cost outcome that was put in place by TC in 2023. A popular outcome for residents. In addition, a further outcome was that EC was invited and funded by MUA to participate with two reps at the Association of NJ Recyclers (ANJR) Annual Conference, for additional education on NJ developments on recycling, a helpful new engagement.

## **FLORA & FAUNA**

EC made progress under its registration with the National Wildlife Federation, with the goal to secure wildlife-friendly accreditation for the Township, and extended partnership with the Borough, an attractive status to achieve, and which would attract homebuyers to our Mendham community. EC secured 95 points towards the target 175 pointed needed, towards becoming a Certified Community Wildlife Habitat, and will further build progress in 2024.

EC participated in the 3rd Annual Great Swamp Watershed Association native plants sale, selling to over 40 people. EC hosted a successful tour at local certified home with Toadshade Wildflower Farm, selling native plants, with over 40 attendees.

EC introduced a Native Plant Ordinance which will require Mendham Township to plant only native plants on Township municipal properties, and it encourages residents to plant more native plants (this was voted through by TC, February 2024).

The student members of the EC have developed promotional and education materials, using social media platforms and websites to promote environmental awareness, also supporting high school project work.

## **SUSTAINABLE ENERGY**

Sustainable energy is a growing area of responsibility for Townships across NJ. EC pursued a project to promote clean energy and solar power, investigating with third party experts. Scope for possible different sites to install solar energy were reviewed, including the new Township building, and possible support from MT schools to leverage scale for greater value in generating solar power. This work continues in 2024.

With increasing trends for a sustainable local environment, for 2024 EC leverages experience from a new member, Michael Rohal, who will lead a project striving to secure Sustainable Jersey certification.

## **MEMBERS**

Our talented, motivated EC Team members led on respective areas of activity listed below, plus work together across all areas of support, and miscellaneous issues impacting our environment.

Kylie Bailin – Native Plant Education

Mary Calabro – Raritan Headwaters Liaison, Well-water Testing, Clean-up Events

Janet Demeo – Planning Board representative

Bernadette Koenig – Event Support (Native Plants, Well-water testing, Styrofoam, Clean-ups)

John Mallon – Eagle Scout Project Supervision, Trails Signage & Blazing

Richard Smith – Trails Mapping, Sustainable Energy

Martin Slayne - Chair

Heather Tokarz– Recycling & Styrofoam Collection

Matt Van Kirk – Trail Stewardship

## **Student Representatives**

We also thank our student representatives for miscellaneous support on our initiatives, events and communications: 2022/3 Emily Borinsteyn, Sophia James; 2023/4 Benny Marcello, Loki Reynolds, Ryan Smith.

**TC Representatives**

We thank for their sponsorship support:

Amalia Duarte

Tracey Moreen

**Changes for 2024**

Two EC members retired at the end of their terms in 2023, Janet DeMeo and John Mallon. Thanks for their significant efforts, Janet, as liaison to the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and beyond (a considerable – Kylie Bailin takes on this work for the interim), and John, as expert on our local trails and open space, representative from the Wildlife Committee, and a key role as liaison with numerous Eagle Scouts projects that achieved great success restoring and renewing trail head kiosks, trail clearing and blazing, walkway repair and more. John continues to help-out on Eagle Scout project support.

For 2024, we welcomed five new EC members elected by TC, Shoko Culberson, Marcelo Figuiera, Bruce Flitcroft, Jesse Luis and Michael Rohal. We welcomed a new TC representative, Sarah Neibart. And continuing TC representative, Amalia Duarte. EC thanks Amalia for her ongoing valued engagement and support, helping promote EC successes with TC and in community messaging.

**OVERALL**

A highly active and successful year. The EC plans for 2024 progress work in all areas. The EC continues to build and further embed a community culture that respects and protects our natural environment. EC will further support the breadth of environmental matters that impact our community.

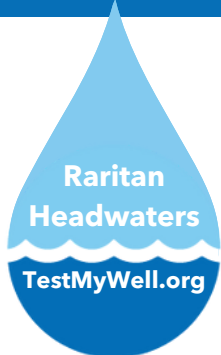
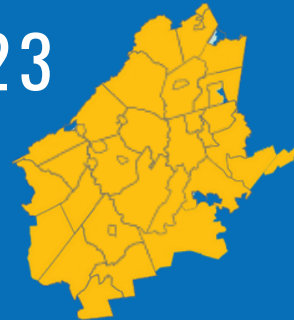
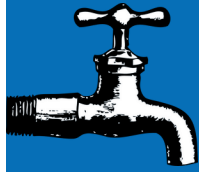
Martin Slayne, PhD

Chair, Mendham Township Environmental Commission

On behalf of all the hard-working volunteer members of our Environmental Commission, and the numerous community supporters that have actively contributed to our EC initiatives over 2023 and into 2024.

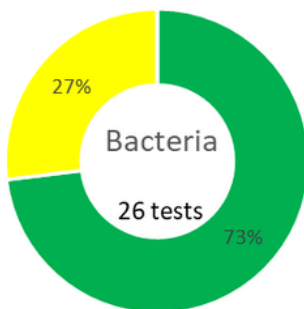
# WELL TESTING REPORT 2023

## MENDHAM TOWNSHIP & BOROUGH

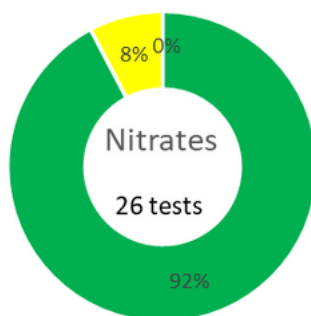


### 26 Taps Tested in Mendham Twp & Borough

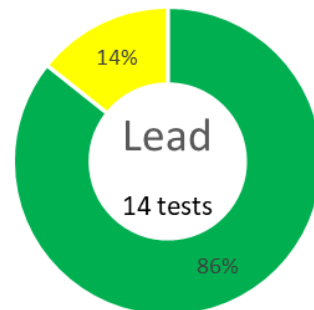
- Coliform Bacteria and E.coli
- Nitrates
- Arsenic
- Lead & Copper
- Volatile Organic Compounds
- Iron & Manganese
- Radionuclides (Gross Alpha and Radon)
- PFAS



- Coliform bacteria absent
- Coliform bacteria present, E.coli absent
- E.coli present



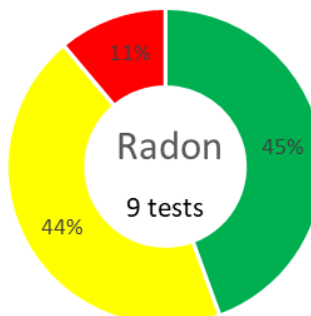
- Nitrates below 4 mg/L
- Nitrates 4-10 mg/L
- Nitrates failure - over 10 mg/L



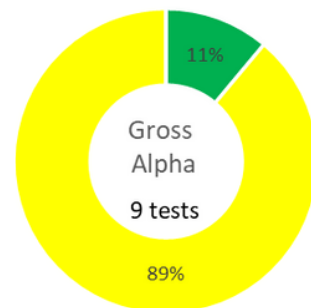
- Lead undetected
- Lead detected under MCL of 15 ppb
- Lead failure - over 15 ppb



- Arsenic undetected
- Arsenic detected under 5 ppb
- Arsenic failure - over 5 ppb



- Radon under 800 pCi/L
- Radon detected 800-4000 pCi/L
- Radon over 4000 pCi/L



- Gross Alpha undetected
- Gross Alpha detected under 5 pCi/L
- Gross Alpha 5-15 pCi/L
- Gross Alpha over MCL of 15 pCi/L

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