



**New Jersey Community Forestry Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Virtual Meeting**  
**December 9, 2021; 10:00 AM**

The December monthly meeting of the New Jersey Community Forestry Council (Council) was called to order by Chairperson Brash at 10:00 a.m. and the Open Public Meetings Act notice was read. The notice was also available in the meeting packet. The roll call was taken by Ms. Slack.

Members Present: Bill Brash, Wayne Dubin, Mark Beamish, Donna Drewes, Barry Emens, Dr. Jason Grabosky, Vinh Lang, Robert Lee, Dr. Melanie McDermott, Lisa Simms, Matthew Simons

Excused: Carl Bowles, Kevin Thompson, Pamela Zipse

Absent: Steve Chisholm, Lori Jenssen

Resigned: Yvonne Favaro, Donna Massa

NJ Forest Service Staff Present: State Forester John Sacco, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator Carrie Sargeant, Technical & Operational Advisor Terri Slack, Forester Michael Martini, Grants Administrator Patricia Shapella, and Forestry Technician Emily Farschon

US Forest Service State & Private Forestry Eastern Region Staff Present: Mid-Atlantic Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator Julie Mawhorter

Quorum was not met at the beginning of the meeting but was later met at 10:05 when Dr. Jason Grabosky was able to sign back on.

**Minutes:**

The meeting minutes from September were reviewed and Mr. Simons motioned to approve. Mr. Emens seconded. The vote was unanimous.

**State Forester's Report:**

State Forester John Sacco gave the report. Mr. Sacco began the report by noting that the Council has 2 new appointments -- Kristin Ace and Neil Blitz – and that the Council meeting packet has information on the credentials of each new member. Mr. Sacco also reported that both Donna Massa and Yvonne Favaro have resigned from the Council and that there are many members of the Council who are coming up on their term expirations. He encouraged Council members to take note of their term expiration and to consider continuing their membership on the Council. Those not in attendance at this meeting will be encouraged to review and renew their membership as well.

Mr. Sacco then noted the passage of the federal infrastructure bill which includes a substantial amount of funding for forestry. It contains approximately \$40,000,000 for urban & community forestry. While how to access that funding has not been announced, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is developing procedures for disbursement of the money to states via grants. Mr. Sacco reminded Council members that the NJ State Forest Action Plan (SFAP) was approved last year, and that for federal forestry grant awards, there must be a tie in to the SFAP. Mr. Sacco asked Ms. Mawhorter if she would provide further details on disbursement of these grant funds. Ms. Mawhorter confirmed that the 40 million for the urban program is what the USFS received last year, and that urban forestry is a continuing priority. New funding will come through the Build Back Better (BBB) legislation, which initially has 2.5 billion to be spent over the next 10 years for urban and community forestry. The USFS is ready to get this funding out to worthy projects.

Dr. Grabosky asked if the USFS has a bulleted list of priorities to help those seeking funds respond proactively when the money becomes available. Ms. Mawhorter stated that the big priorities are climate resilience, social/environmental justice, and equity. She noted Federal EO 40 which calls for 40% of the money to be directed to disadvantaged communities through certain federal programs. Urban & community forestry is one of these targeted programs. No specifics are available yet on how the funding will be disbursed.

Dr. Grabosky noted that NJ is fortunate to have good data/analytic staff who can help translate urban forestry outputs so that the public understands what they get from these investments. Ms. Mawhorter said there may be support for the NJ Forest Service and/or land grant colleges for a federally funded data project.

Ms. McDermott stated that we should all be thinking about how to assist Overburdened Communities (OBCs) successfully use this money to rebuild their urban canopy and capacity to maintain it; capacity is huge. However, if staff cannot be hired and trained to maintain the continuity, then it's all for naught. Cities need to have on site dedicated trained staff – these projects will not work without them. Can this funding, therefore, go to pay salary, rather than just fund projects?

Ms. Mawhorter responded that on the federal level, building capacity is key and there is support for same. Federal funding will be distributed via grants with two-year cycles – for community engagement, staffing, etc. -- but at some point, a long-term funding mechanism is needed. While the infrastructure bill has no specific funding for urban, there are other federal agencies that will receive funding, such as DOT, that can be used to support green infrastructure, tree planting, etc.

Mr. Sacco asked Ms. Mawhorter if she thought the forestry funding in the BBB bill would survive. Ms. Mawhorter said there are signs it will stay in and move quickly but she cannot say with certainty.

Mr. Sacco noted that both Shannon Hart and Anna Korn are no longer working in the NJUCF program and that replacements are being sought.

Mr. Sacco then gave a brief update on the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) funding. The NJFS is waiting for guidance from the administration as to whether/how much money forestry may receive. There have been several auctions and forestry is included in the Strategic Funding Plan. Mr. Sacco also confirmed that the letter from Chairperson Brash on behalf of the Council regarding distribution of RGGI funding was received by DEP Commissioner LaTourette. Given the priorities of this administration, Mr.

Sacco remains hopeful for good news soon regarding RGGI funding for urban and community forestry initiatives.

#### **Chairperson's Report:**

Chairman Brash reported he has not received a response from the Commissioner regarding the RGGI letter. He also informed the Council that both Yvonne Favaro and Kevin Thompson have resigned.

Ms. McDermott asked about the "makeup" of the Council and term expirations; Ms. Sargeant directed her to the information on term expirations and suggested distribution of membership.

Chairman Brash said he will send a note to Mr. Thompson expressing his condolences on behalf of the Council and that he has sent a letter to Ms. Favaro thanking her for her service and asking if she had a recommendation as to a replacement for her – could she recommend someone with experience at the local level? Ms. Sargeant noted that Ms. Favaro was our SMA liaison on the Council. Mr. Martini stated that the arborist from Princeton is a member of SMA and may be interested in joining the council. Ms. Sargeant then informed Council that the procedure for joining the Council is to send a letter of interest/resume to the NJFS and that currently we have no additional prospective new members to evaluate.

Ms. McDermott asked if the NJ Shade Tree Federation (STF) will be putting someone forward. Ms. Sargeant responded that those discussions have not yet taken place and that Ms. Massa is a great loss to the Council. There are 3 standing seats on the Council – Rutgers Urban Forestry, the NJ Tree Foundation, and the NJ Shade Tree Federation (STF). Dr. Grabosky noted that the STF is currently working to replace Ms. Massa as the Director; therefore, it may take some time before the STF can put forth a candidate for Council. Dr. Grabosky noted that both he and Mr. Dubin are past presidents of the STF so there is still a STF connection on the Council.

#### **New Business:**

Mr. Martini provided updates on Community Forestry Management Plans and Stewardship Grants.

##### Community Forestry Management Plans (CFMPs)

- One new plan submitted
- 251 currently approved plans – 46 first plans, 63 second plans, 68 third plans, 72 fourth plans, and 2 fifth year plans
- The most recent plan reviewed was for Union County which will be discussed later in the meeting

##### Urban & Community Forestry Stewardship Grants

- NJUCF received 39 grant applications; 38 will receive funding
- Staff is meeting/working with municipalities to finalize the grant agreements
- 18 open stewardship grants and 38 in process -- 1 open for 2016, 4 for 2017, 7 for 2018, 6 for 2019, and 38 for 2021
- Just over \$1.4 million in grant funds obligated across these stewardship grants.
- For 2021: 30 inventory grants, 8 planting grants

- Reminder for consultants working with towns that have grants to watch for SAGE emails. These “Agate” emails are often ignored but are important. They’re from our online grant system and it’s how grantees will be contacted, for example, about how to submit the required resolutions.
- Support from Council to get these grant agreements finalized is appreciated. Reach out to Mike Martini or Pat Shapella with grant related questions.

Ms. Farschon provided updates on NJUCF Accreditation, Annual Accreditation Reports. Ms. Farschon and Ms. Sargeant updated Council on Database Issues.

#### NJUCF Accreditation Update

- Outreach via email and social media conducted in November to assist municipalities
- 110 met CEU requirements at that time, 140 still needed additional CEUs
- New Accreditation report will be up by December 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Total municipalities accredited for 2021 won’t be determined until Annual Accomplishment Reports (AAR) are received (by February 15, 2022)

#### New AAR Form

- NJUCF worked with a consultant and staff graphics designer to make the AAR a fillable PDF; information entered in the fields on the form will be automatically read by a computer program and recorded so that NJUCF staff doesn’t need to retype each piece of information.
- NJUCF is requesting municipalities submit a “live copy” of the pdf – i.e., upload an electronic copy.

#### NJUCF Database(s)

- Accreditation database moved to DEP SQL server.
- Working to extend our contract to have the the No Net Loss (NNL) and grants databases also moved to this server. This will create efficiencies and enable NJUCF to analyze what’s happening across our 3 program areas. Also, having UCF data in the DEP server makes the program more relevant across DEP.

#### 2022 Community Forestry Council Meeting Schedule

Council was provided the following prospective meeting dates for 2022: 1/13, 3/10, 5/12, 7/14, 9/8, & 12/8. Meetings will remain virtual unless otherwise noticed. Hybrid meetings may be considered. Dr. Grabosky motioned that the meeting dates be approved. Mr. Dubin seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

#### Term expirations

Council members were asked to review the chart of term expirations and note their expiration date. If a Council member’s term has expired or is coming up, let Mr. Sacco know whether you wish to renew, with a copy to Ms. Sargeant.

### Subcommittees

Council was provided with a list of Subcommittees and members. Council should review the list for accuracy and let NJUCF staff know prior to the January 2022 meeting which committees they wish to remain on or be added to. An updated list will be provided to Council at the January meeting for further discussion.

### Ethics Training

NJUCF informed Council that the full ethic training video will be shown at the end of the January meeting so that all members can be up to date on their ethics training. The Council ethics chart will also be updated.

### Legislative Issues

Ms. Slack provided Council with current legislative updates in the packet and briefly discussed. She also noted that a new legislative session begins next year, so all bills not signed into law this session will need to be re-introduced in the 2022-2023 legislative session.

### No Net Loss Program Report

Ms. Sargeant reported that Anna Korn has left DEP; therefore, there is no NNL report.

### Subcommittee Reports

- CFMP  
Mr. Simons reported the Committee received one plan for review – Union County. The Committee voted to approve same.
- Community Forestry Management Plan Guidelines  
There was no Committee update. Ms. Sargeant noted that she and a representative from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission provided a brief status update on the LSR project, of which the guideline update is a part, at the NJ Shade Tree Federation Conference.
- No Net Loss  
Mr. Simons reported that there was nothing in the portal. Ms. Sargeant confirmed that nothing new had been added.

### License Plate Financial Report

Ms. Sargeant noted that NJUCF is now able to again provide a summary of the available funds for the Shade Tree License Plate account. In addition, separate from this fiscal report, Ms. Sargeant noted that there is a program spending plan on hold at DEP fiscal for 2 million for next year's grants. This 2 million is not reflected on the financial report in Council's packet, as there are old unclosed NNL grants, funding for which is being repurposed for next year's stewardship grants. Council asked that should there be an indication that funding is in jeopardy to reach out so that Council can act.

### Council Business

- Council Letter of Support for Additional NJUCF Staff  
Chairperson Brash entertained a motion to draft a letter in support of hiring staff to replace lost NJUCF staff to ensure that legislative mandates are met and that trees are not at risk because

NJUCF does not have the capacity to fulfill these mandates. Mr. Simons made the motion; Ms. Simms seconded. The vote was unanimous.

- Federal grant funding used for state program staff  
Ms. Mawhorter stated that the USFS mechanism for federal money to go to the states is through a grant, and that these funds can be used to support staff. Many states are using federal funding to support their UCF staff. Ms. Sargeant noted that NJUCF is not able to hire state employees with federal grant dollars. Federal grant money has been used, however, to hire staff as “consultants” for NJUCF. Ms. Sargeant can provide information on NJUCF funding data for Council as needed.
- A2070 Neonic Legislation  
Mr. Dubin alerted the Council that the neonic bill was up in Committee and that the language of the bill has been significantly amended; he provided a brief update on the changes to the bill. Mr. Dubin agreed to provide a copy of the revised bill which Ms. Slack will share with Council.
- Attendance of New Council Members at meetings.  
Ms. Sargeant stated that the two new Council members will join Council at the January meeting.

Miscellaneous matters:

- Mr. Martini announced that he is being promoted to Assistant Regional Forester.
- Mr. Emens noted a small date correction to the fiscal license plate report, which will be corrected.

**Unfinished Business:**

There was no unfinished business to discuss.

**Public Comment:**

No public comment was received.

Chairperson Brash then adjourned the meeting.