



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

BOROUGH OF KUTZTOWN ENVIROMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION

2023 Membership

The Kutztown Environmental Advisory Commission (EAC) members at the beginning of 2023 were Cheyenne Friscia, Kathy Kelly, Keith Leinbach, and Todd Underwood. Lisa Ladd-Kidder served as the Borough Council Liaison for 2023. At the January EAC meeting, officers were elected as follows Todd Underwood – Chair, Keith Leinbach – Vice Chair, and Kathy Kelly – Secretary. Three seats on the commission were vacant at the start of 2023. Two new members joined the EAC in 2023 - Randall Wert in February and Constantine (CJ) Penzone in August. Sadly, Keith Leinbach passed away in July. Thus, two seats on the commission were vacant at the end of 2023.

Report on Progress Toward Goals

In 2023, EAC members decided to focus on broad goals related to progress in four main committees: 1. Community Education, 2. Air & Water Quality, 3. Refuse & Recycling, and 4. Parks & Trail. Below is a summary of the progress of each committee toward accomplishing their goals.

Progress Toward Annual Goals

1. Community Education Committee. Goal - Communicate and/or educate borough residents and local media (when needed) on pertinent environmental issues.

An EAC member produced an information paper about Forever Chemicals or PFAS substances that was posted to the EAC's webpage and to our Facebook page in April 2023. This paper helps raise awareness of the health problems associated with PFAS substances and where they may be exposed to them.

In April, the EAC, with help from the Kutztown University (KU) Community Outreach Center, presented information on the borough's recycling program at the KU Earth Day Event.

An EAC member led two nature walks along the Sacony Trail for first grade students at Kutztown Elementary School in May. We also purchased native wildflowers that the first graders planted in two plots by the elementary school.

We continue to use our social media account (Facebook) to inform residents about environmental issues and the EAC's work. In August, we started a Native Plant of the Month information posting to our Facebook page to encourage our followers to learn more about native plants for their gardens.

In October, two EAC members participated in a Sustainability in Business Panel Discussion at Kutztown University organized by in Dr. Muratcan Erkul, a Professor in the Business Department. EAC members spoke about the EAC's activities in Kutztown in support of sustainability. Other participants in the panel discussion included representatives from Waste Management, Penske, B. Braun Medical, East Penn Mfg., Maxatawny Planning Commission and Berks Gas Truth. The event was very informative and well attended.

2. Air & Water Quality Committee. Goal - Examine and review air quality & water quality issues as they arise in the borough.

The EAC was unable to produce an updated greenhouse gas inventory because the borough's energy use is no longer clearly tracked and tabulated. Keith Leinbach was planning to work on this in his retirement in 2023. Unfortunately, our loss of Keith has put the greenhouse gas inventory on hold.

Early in 2023, the EAC recommended that the borough do some proactive testing for PFAS chemicals in the borough's drinking water wells even though this won't be required until 2024. The borough agreed and went ahead with some basic testing of our well water. In August, the testing results showed that the levels of two major PFAS chemical categories were well below the Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) or limits for these substances in drinking water. This is great news and provides a solid baseline for monitoring of these substances in our drinking water.

In July, EAC members reviewed a DEP air permit renewal request for the East Penn Manufacturing facility on Willow Street. We drafted a letter to DEP with our questions and comments about the renewal request to Borough Council who approved the letter. The comment letter was sent to the DEP in late July. We have not received any response to our comments, so sent a follow-up letter to the DEP in December. A January 2024 email from the DEP indicated that a review of the application should be completed within a month, and we should receive a response soon.

The EAC continued to monitor PCE (Perchloroethylene, a known carcinogen) test results with focus on the New Enterprise Stone and Lime Company's (NESL) monitoring well 6a and their discharge pipe into the Sacony Creek. A summary of these test results has found that Monitoring Well 6a has equaled or exceeded the Maximum Contamination Level (MCL) 12 times from 11/01/2018 through 12/30/2022 and the Discharge Point data has exceeded the Water Supply Agreement (WSA) limit 27 times during the same monitoring period. In addition, based on data provided to the Borough of Kutztown, the Quarry failed to meet the quarterly monitoring requirement in CY2017, CY2018, and CY2019. More recent data on Quarter 3 in 2023 showed PCE levels in monitoring well 6a trending downward from at 5.8 µg/l in January to 4.3, 5.2 and 3.6 µg/l for July, August, and September respectively. The discharge pipe values had no excursions over the maximum value of 2.5 µg/l for Quarter 3. In 2024, the EAC plans to review the 2023 Quarter 4 PCE testing results and to send a letter to DEP with a request for information on their plans to assess whether PCE contamination is moving toward our drinking water wells.

The EAC has been keeping track of the many plans for warehouse developments in Maxatawny Township where they impact the borough. Some of our largest concerns include high traffic levels that may lead to increases in air pollution that will impact our air quality, storing of hazardous substances that could pollute our air and water if a fire or other disaster occurs, storing lithium ion batteries that can create fires that are difficult to extinguish, and impacts on our aquifer from the removal of additional water to supply these developments. In December, we reviewed data from a test well at Duke's proposed warehouse development in Maxatawny Township. These data suggest a potential connection between Duke's test well #1 and the Borough's drinking water well #4. The DEP has recommended that Duke conduct a further 5-day test on test well #1. In 2024, the EAC will monitor these results and carefully consider any options we might have if the results showed an impact on our drinking water wells.

3. Refuse & Recycling Committee. Goal - Study borough refuse & recycling programs to suggest changes for improvement in the borough.

The EAC monitored the new schedule of recycling pick up once every two weeks and kept track of problems with finding a company to collect glass recycling.

The EAC facilitated trash cleanups of the Sacony Creek in March, April, and October. Volunteers from the Boy Scouts, EAC, Kutztown University, Kutztown High School, and the community helped with the clean ups.

4. Parks & Trail Committee. Goal – Oversee implementation of the North Park and Sacony Trail management plans, habitat restoration activities, and work of the borough's environmental intern. Also, monitor the health of trees in the Main Street Park and assist with additional tree planting.

In 2023, the EAC facilitated several plantings along the Sacony Trail. In April, the EAC oversaw the planting of 125 native trees and shrubs along the Sacony Trail from the elementary school to the high school. The purchase of these trees and shrubs was funded by the remainder of the Schuylkill Highlands Mini Grant the EAC obtained in 2022. Approximately 50 Kutztown University environmental biology students and faculty members removed invasive shrubs and planted the new trees and shrubs. Richard Laubenstein, Supervisor of Facilities at the Kutztown Area School District, provided a truck to collect the shrubs that were removed and hauled them to a yard waste drop off site. In May, volunteers from the EAC, Kutztown University, and the first-grade classes at Kutztown Elementary school planted about 500 native wildflower plugs along the trail from the elementary school to the high school. These plants filled in some of the gaps between the new tree plantings and flowered later in the summer. The swamp milkweed plants hosted Monarch butterfly caterpillars as well. In October, 27 volunteers, including EAC members, Kutztown University students, and Kutztown High School students planted an additional 100 native trees and shrubs along the trail from the high school to the deck. The trees were also tubed and staked to prevent wildlife and wind damage. The EAC obtained a \$3,000 grant in October from Berks County through their Imagine Berks Plan to pay for these trees.

The EAC produced two Sacony Trail Habitat Restoration Funding signs to acknowledge the funding organizations who have paid for the trees and shrubs we have planted since 2020. This

was a requirement for the matching grant we received in 2022. In September, the public works crew installed these signs along the trail on both sides of Normal Ave. The EAC also added a QR code sticker to the North Park Trail Map sign, so visitors can easily scan and download the map to their phones.

EAC members and other volunteers continued to maintain and weed the native plant garden on North Whiteoak Street. We worked on getting some volunteers to help maintain the garden at North Park now that the bridge is open. However, interest by the Boy Scout group disappeared over the summer. In 2024, we plan to renovate and restore the garden that was inaccessible during the year-long North Park bridge construction.

The EAC facilitated the purchase of two new recycled plastic benches (one paid for with EAC funds and the second paid for by the borough in December 2022). These new benches were installed by the Public Works crew at the Welcome to Kutztown Garden/Park on Greenwich Street in July. With reminders from the EAC, the Public Works crew also installed the new trash can that we purchased in early 2022 at the north end of the Sacony Trail in July 2023.

The EAC helped supervise the work of the borough's environmental management intern, Erin Foley. Erin worked on trail maintenance, care of new plantings, habitat restoration mainly on the Sacony Trail. During the summer of 2023, there was a period of drought, so much of Erin's time was spent watering our newly planted wildflowers, shrubs, and trees. She also added mulch around these new plantings. Without Erin's care, many of these new plants would not have survived this drought over the summer. Richard Laubenstein, Supervisor of Facilities at the Kutztown Area School District, helped facilitate some of this work by providing the mulch and a truck with water tank several times to speed up the watering of >150 trees and shrubs. Erin also worked at North Park where she weeded invasive plants out of the rain gardens.

In October, the EAC began supervising five high school interns in environmental work along the Sacony Creek and Trail. They participated in EAC led trash cleanup and tree planting events and have worked on their own to trim branches along the trail, remove invasive plants, and plant native wildflowers in the meadow area by the borough pool. We look forward to working with these students in 2024 as they develop content for a webpage on the importance of the meadow by the pool and plan for additional wildflower plantings there.

In 2022, EAC members worked with the Superintendent of Public Works to plan for a resurfacing of the Sacony Trail in four sections. Quotes for resurfacing three of the sections of the trail with a modified stone mix were obtained in August 2022. Two sections of the trail were chosen for the resurfacing: section 1 - start of the trail behind Main Street to second footbridge north of pool (\$6,500) and section 2 - Normal Ave to the kiosk by the elementary school (\$1940). The Borough Manager approved of moving ahead with these projects and working with the contractor. We expected this work to begin in late 2022 or early 2023. However, no trail preparation work nor any resurfacing occurred in 2022 or 2023. The latest update we received, December 2023, is that the contractors who submitted the acceptable quotes are no longer in business and the Superintendent of Public Works is looking for new contractors and quotes for resurfacing sections of the trail. We are looking forward to this work proceeding in 2024.

Other Work

In August 2023, the EAC presented our Environmental Stewardship Award to Karen Feridun for her numerous contributions to environmental issues that impact the Borough and beyond. Karen is a dedicated environmental advocate who has helped to protect natural resources and the health of residents in Kutztown. She has served on the Environmental Advisory Commission and the Planning Commission. Noteworthy accomplishments from her work there include: drafting an Alternative Energy Plan for the Borough, serving as principal editor of the Borough's current Comprehensive Plan, and forcing the DEP to hold a public hearing that allowed residents to voice their concerns about the impact of the Kutztown Quarry on our aquifer and the Sacony Creek. More recently, Karen has led a campaign against State Bill 597, the Water Accountability Act, which could lead to privatization of the water supply in small municipalities like Kutztown, resulting in increased water rates and the loss of local oversight of water quality. Karen is also well known for her environmental activism in fighting issues that extend beyond the borough to regional and national scales.

In October 2023, the EAC posted a memorial tribute to Keith Leinbach on the borough's webpage and the EAC Facebook Page. Keith joined the EAC in 2019. He willingly shared his expertise as a chemical engineer on evaluating different environmental permits and regulations dealing with air and water pollution. Keith was relied upon for his knowledge of different areas of the environmental sciences and served as Vice Chair of the commission for two and a half years. Keith was a valued friend, a talented colleague, and an avid environmentalist who will be missed.

Summary and Future Directions

In 2023, the Kutztown EAC completed its sixteenth year of meetings and activities. The commission worked diligently to make progress on our annual goals. Noteworthy accomplishments were obtaining a \$3,000 grant for habitat restoration efforts, planting >200 trees and shrubs along the Sacony Trail, participating in a panel discussion on sustainability at Kutztown University, reviewing the renewal permit application for the East Penn facility on Industrial Ave, on-going monitoring of continuing threats to our water supply from the quarry and planned warehouse developments, and facilitating several trash cleanups. In the future, the commission will continue to address and revise its annual goals based on progress and new business as it arises. For 2024, we look forward to continuing to monitor the quality of the air and water for Kutztown residents, the resurfacing of the Sacony Trail, extension of the Sacony Trail, further restoration of the habitat at North Park, and a website on the Butterflies of North Park and the Sacony Trail.

Respectfully submitted,



Todd J. Underwood, EAC Chair
February 5, 2024