



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

BOROUGH OF KUTZTOWN ENVIROMENTAL ADVISORY COMMISSION

2024 Membership

The Kutztown Environmental Advisory Commission (EAC) members at the beginning of 2023 were Cheyenne Friscia, Kathy Kelly, Constantine (CJ) Penzone, Randall Wert, and Todd Underwood. Lisa Ladd-Kidder served as the Borough Council Liaison for 2024. At the January EAC meeting, officers were elected as follows Todd Underwood – Chair, Randall Wert – Vice Chair, and Kathy Kelly – Secretary. Two seats on the commission were vacant at the start of 2024. One new member joined the EAC in 2024 – Lisa Foreback in September. Thus, one seat on the commission was vacant at the end of 2024.

Report on Progress Toward Goals

In 2024, 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.

In January, the EAC Chair gave a presentation on The Natural History and Restoration of the Sacony Trail at a Mengel Natural History Society meeting in Reading, PA. This presentation documented the work of the EAC over the past ten years to restore the habitat along the trail.

In November, the EAC Chair gave a presentation to a Lehigh Valley Bird Town meeting on the Natural History and Habitat Restoration along the Sacony Creek at both North Park and along the Sacony Trail. The meeting was held at Kutztown University and was followed by a tour of North Park and the EAC's restoration work there.

An EAC member produced a webpage on the Butterflies of North Park and the Sacony Trail (<https://www.kutztownboro.org/commissions/eac/butterflies/>) that was completed in February 2024. This was the culmination of a six-year survey for butterflies in this area. The webpage documents the 46 species of butterflies found with original local photographs for each species and information about their abundance and flight season. Additional information covers daytime flying moths, butterfly biology, how to identify and find butterflies, and butterfly conservation. We thank Sheila Sacks for her work in putting the information together into a functional webpage.

An EAC member produced three additional information papers about Forever Chemicals or PFAS substances. The first was on the impact of PFAS on children, the second on PFAS in clothing, and the third was on the history and future of PFAS. The first two were posted to the EAC's webpage and to our Facebook page in April 2024 and the third was posted in August 2024. These papers help raise awareness of the health problems associated with PFAS substances and where they may be exposed to them. In addition, the EAC investigated the potential risks of PFAS chemicals in firefighting gear and clothing. These chemicals are used to fireproof clothing, so it is recommended that firefighters wear base layers of clothing without PFAS fireproofing to prevent contact of these chemicals with the skin. Lisa Ladd-Kidder spoke with the Kutztown Fire Chief and confirmed that our firefighters are following this protocol.

We continue to use our webpage on the borough's website and our social media account (Facebook) to inform residents about environmental issues and the EAC's work. In April, the webpage received a major update by removing items that were out of date and moving more recent activities to the forefront. Throughout 2024, we produced Native Plant of the Month information posting to our Facebook page to encourage our followers to learn more about native plants for their gardens.

An EAC member led two nature walks along the Sacony Trail for first grade students at Kutztown Elementary School in May.

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

The EAC continued to monitor PCE (Perchloroethylene, a known carcinogen) test results with a focus on the New Enterprise Stone and Lime Company's (NESL) monitoring well 6a and their discharge pipe into the Sacony Creek. In June, the EAC drafted a letter to DEP from the borough further clarifying the inconsistencies in the testing by NESL and the elevated PCE levels in Monitoring Well 6a. In October, the EAC provided further input into a letter to DEP from the borough regarding the NESL Quarry Permit Renewal. We will continue to review PCE monitoring data and advise the borough on how this may influence the quality of our drinking water supply.

The EAC also continued to monitor and advise the borough on the state of our water supply in relation to our aquifer and its recharge capability. We support the borough's efforts to reassess the viability of our aquifer through an independent consulting company's review (Spots, Stevens, and McCoy). We look forward to examining the results of this review in 2025.

In May, The EAC reviewed the response of East Penn Manufacturing (EPM) in regard to the EAC's comments on their Kutztown Wire and Cable (KWC) Manufacturing Facility State Only Operating Permit #06-03063 renewal application. Kutztown Borough responded to the original request in July 2023. The EAC determined the responses addressed our concerns. The EAC drafted a letter to DEP from the borough stating that East Penn's comments have been reviewed and accepted.

In June, the EAC received a “State only Air Permit Renewal Application” from the foundry. We reviewed the application and had no questions or comments. A letter was drafted to PA DEP from the borough stating that we appreciate the chance to review and that we accept the renewal permit application.

Finally, the EAC has continued to keep track of the many plans for warehouse and townhouse 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, stormwater control, and the impacts on our aquifer from the removal of additional water to supply these developments.

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

The EAC continued to monitor the schedule of recycling pick up and has no suggestions for improvement because of the current lack of manpower and weak market for recyclable materials.

The EAC facilitated four trash cleanups of the Sacony Creek area in March and April 2024: one at North Park, two along the Sacony Creek in town, and one along the Sacony Trail proper. Volunteers from the Cub Scouts, EAC, Kutztown University, Kutztown High School, Kutztown Middle School, and local residents 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 2024, the EAC completed two major plantings at North Park. In April, the EAC oversaw the planting of 54 native trees and shrubs along the Sacony Creek at North Park. The purchase of these trees and shrubs was funded by a grant of \$1600 from Giant Foods. Approximately 50 Kutztown University environmental biology students and faculty members removed invasive shrubs and planted new trees and shrubs. In November, 15 volunteers, including EAC members, Kutztown University students, and members of the Maiden Creek Watershed Association planted 68 native trees and shrubs on a section of hillside just above the road and bathrooms at North Park. The trees were also tubed and staked to prevent wildlife and wind damage. This was to replace an area of dead Ash trees and invasive Norway Maple trees that were removed by the borough in October. The EAC obtained a \$4,552 grant in November from Berks County through their Imagine Berks Plan to pay for this November planting and an additional planting in April 2025.

In spring 2024, the school district expressed concerns that Sacony Trail visitors were wandering onto school grounds during the school day in part because the trail surface has disappeared and requested the borough come up with a solution or the trail may be closed during the school year. The EAC consulted with Brian Bailey and we came to a consensus that resurfacing the trail south

of Normal Ave was not feasible given the budget, so we would keep the trail grass but clearly mark its location. The EAC developed a plan to clearly delineate the trail with marker posts and a trail map that illustrates where visitors are allowed. We worked with Dr. Richard Courtney, Geography Department at Kutztown University, to produce a Sacony Trail South Section map. The map clearly identifies the location of the trail and marks the school grounds area as off-limits during school hours. In addition, we developed a set of rules for the Sacony Trail, approved by the Public Works Committee. Twenty trail marker posts were installed between Normal Ave and the observation deck in August 2024 and the trail map and a rules sign were installed on the kiosk on the trail near the Kutztown Elementary School in October 2024. A second copy of the rules sign was installed on the observation deck at the south end of the trail in October as well. The school district and borough police chief are satisfied with the new marking of the trail and the police now should be able to enforce any trespassing on school grounds.

The Sacony Trail between Main Street and Normal Ave still needs to be resurfaced. This smaller section of the trail is less prone to flooding and a heavier stone mix should stay in place. Reasonable quotes (less than \$10,000) were obtained in 2022 to resurface and a plan to go ahead with the resurfacing stalled. Despite requests from the EAC in 2023 and 2024, no progress has been made to resurface any section of the trail.

EAC members and other volunteers continued to maintain and weed the native plant garden on North Whiteoak Street. In 2025, we plan to renovate and restore the garden that was inaccessible during the year-long North Park bridge construction.

An EAC member and two KU students sowed three pounds of an Ernst seed wildflower mix with a three-pound oat seed cover crop along the maintenance road (or Larch Loop Trail) at North Park in March where the road edges were scraped in 2023. The seeded areas were covered with straw.

In October 2024, visitors to North Park were tying their horses to trees along the parking lot and throughout the lower part of the park. The horses damaged the trees by stripping the bark and tearing up the roots. EAC members brought this to the borough's attention and council member Lisa Ladd-Kidder obtained a quote to have a hitching post installed. The borough approved of the hitching post and it was installed in a shady section of the parking lot in late November. The EAC contributed \$300 to the ~\$900 installation price. Signs indicating that the hitching post is only for horse and buggy parking and that the park is for pedestrian use only have been ordered. These signs should be installed in early 2025.

In 2024, the EAC continued to maintain bird feeders at North Park during the fall and winter months. We added a new large capacity feeder that only needs to be filled twice a week. Park visitors have expressed their appreciation for the feeders and bird activity they generate.

The EAC helped supervise the work of the borough's environmental management intern, Andrew Martin. Andrew worked on trail maintenance, care of new plantings, weeding invasive plants out of the rain gardens, habitat restoration, and mowing mainly at North Park. During dry periods, Andrew watered the newly planted trees and shrubs. He also sprayed deer repellent on all the trees and shrubs planted over the past few years.

Summary and Future Directions

In 2024, the Kutztown EAC completed its seventeenth year of meetings and activities. The commission worked diligently to make progress on our annual goals. Noteworthy accomplishments were obtaining a \$4,500 grant for habitat restoration efforts, planting >100 trees and shrubs at North Park, delineating the south section of the Sacony Trail and producing a trail map, producing a website on the Butterflies of North Park and the Sacony Trail, 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 2025, we look forward to continuing to monitor the quality of the air and water for Kutztown residents, developing a new meadow on the Sacony Trail, and further restoration of the habitat at North Park.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd J. Underwood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'T' and 'U'.

Todd J. Underwood, EAC Chair
January 6, 2025