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Environmental Commission sets high 'green' bar in Raritan

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RARITAN — Community shredding day, a shared bicycle program and putting mulching blades on lawnmowers top a list of ambitious goals for the borough's Environmental Commission in 2012.

Chairman Jim Foohy said that the commission decided at its first meeting of the year, on Jan. 4, to begin meeting on the third Wednesday of the month — historically it met on the first Wednesday — and will meet again on Jan. 18.

There's a lot to do, Foohy said.

The commission wants to hold a number of Earth Day events during the week of April 18, including the group's annual river/canal cleanup. Foohy would like to use the county's high volume shredder one weekend that month for a community shredding day — then recycle the shredded paper. It's an event that the county has held a number of times, he said.

"Every time they've had it they've had a good turnout."

Paper is among the heaviest items in a typical trash can. Removing that weight from the waste stream can save the borough money as well as reduce the impact on the environment. Foohy wants to see a pair of trash bins — one exclusively for recycling — set at the end of Nevius Street bridge, where the borough plans to place benches for people to enjoy the river.

A confirmed environmentalist, Foohy called the county's every-other-week pick up of curbside recycling "sufficient."

"I have two buckets and I rarely need the second one," he said.

The recycling bin and shredding day are part of a larger effort devoted to boosting recycling education during 2012, Foohy said. The bridge bins would sport a sign urging people to "keep our bridge clean; please recycle," he said.

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Foohy would like to see a dedicated bicycle route through town, and hopes to initiate a program that would make available unclaimed bicycles held by the police for residents to borrow for short stretches — like a lending library, he said. They would be maintained by volunteers and painted lime green to make them easily identifiable.

Getting out of their cars and onto bikes would reduce pollution and even help people stay healthy, he said.

"I tool around the neighborhood in good weather," Foohy said, and owns three bikes.

Another idea is to encourage residents to mulch their lawns when they mow using special mulching blades on mowers that chop up the clippings into small bits that fall between the blades of grass and feed the lawn, rather than requiring residents to bag up the clippings and deliver them to the Public Works yard.

These efforts could help the borough attain certification in the state's Sustainable Jersey program, which would make it easier for Raritan to obtain additional grants for other "green" initiatives.

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