

# SUSTAINABILITY HERO

## November 2022



### Laura Bagwell

Chair, Eatontown Borough Green Team  
and Environmental Commission (Monmouth County)

As chair of the [Eatontown Borough Green Team](#) and [Environmental Commission](#), Laura Bagwell has led Eatontown Borough to achieve Sustainable Jersey [silver-level certification](#). Before moving to Eatontown in 2015, Laura served on the [Red Bank Environmental Commission](#) for eight years helping the Borough of Red Bank to achieve bronze-level certification in 2014.

Equipped with knowledge, skills and the ability to work well with all types of people, Laura focuses on the long-term goal of sustainability, making sure to not lose momentum if she meets a challenge. She explained, “I offer lots of ideas and see which ones gain traction. If meatless Mondays won’t fly, then let’s plant native plants and add solar panels. There is no shortage of Sustainable Jersey actions and work that we can be doing to make an impact.”

Laura has had success forging partnerships. She joined forces with colleagues in Colts Neck Township and the Borough of Rumson to form the Monmouth Invasive Species Strike Team (MISST). In Eatontown Borough, the Environmental Commission and Green Team work on projects with the [Eatontown Shade Tree Commission](#), [Beautify Eatontown](#), [Eatontown Borough Department of Public Works](#) and more.

Laura said, “Sustainability is not a hobby. It’s a duty. My hikes and beach walks always include litter clean ups. My parents taught me stewardship and respect for the Earth. It’s rewarding to be part of a team that is helping to implement policies that will sustain Eatontown Borough for the next generation.”

#### Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified

The Borough of Eatontown created the green team by ordinance on July 13, 2011. Under Laura’s leadership, the Eatontown Borough Green Team moved from bronze-level Sustainable Jersey certification to silver-level in 2022 with 355 points. Completed certification actions include Community Food Pantry/Bank & Soup Kitchen; Community Gardens; Building Healthier Communities; Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Plan; Institute Complete Streets; and Natural Resources Inventory.



The Eatontown Green Team and Environmental Commission planted a pollinator garden, organized trainings, clean ups, community activities and participated in community events such as the annual Eatontown Day and the Clean Up Eatontown Day. Eatontown Borough Mayor Anthony Talerico, Jr. is a champion for the work of the green team, which helps strengthen the impact of the sustainability program. She said, “It takes time to develop trust and partnerships within a municipality. We work closely with the mayor, council, Department of Public Works and other departments to assure that our sustainability work is successful.” To see all the actions completed, review the [2022 Eatontown Borough Certification Report](#).

### **Eatontown Borough Native Plants Ordinance**

The Monmouth Invasive Species Strike Team (MISST) offers training to help communities learn best practices for eradicating invasive plant species and restoring healthy habitats. The first event was held at Bliss Price Arboretum and Wildlife Sanctuary in Eatontown. Michael Van Clef, Ph.D., the [Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space](#) Stewardship Director and Invasive Species Strike Team Program Director, trained the group of nearly 25 residents from Eatontown and other neighboring towns. MISST sponsored additional trainings in the City of Long Branch, Ocean Township and Colts Neck Township.



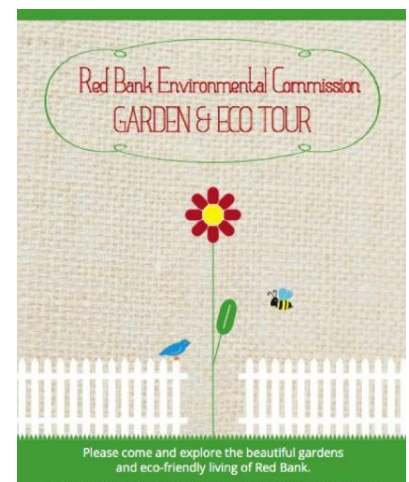
Laura said, “In Eatontown, we’re lucky to have dedicated volunteers and community partners to take on the huge task of managing the many invasive plants in our parks, yards and wild spaces. Regular work parties are held at the Arboretum to manage invasive plants by hand-pulling, snipping, lopping and sawing.” To support the initiative, the Eatontown Environmental Commission and Shade Tree Commission introduced an ordinance that was reviewed by local groups and passed unanimously by the Eatontown Borough Council in March 2022. [Ordinance 05-2022 - Planting and Landscape, Native Plants, Trees](#) amends the Eatontown Borough landscape ordinance to require that plantings for projects reviewed by the Eatontown Planning and Zoning Board be native species. It also bans any trees, shrubs and plants listed on the [New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Teams Do Not Plant List](#).

### **Eatontown Borough Outdoor Lighting Ordinance**

The inappropriate or excessive use of artificial light, known as light pollution, can have serious environmental consequences for humans, wildlife and the climate. The [Eatontown Outdoor Lighting Ordinance](#) has helped to reduce light pollution in the Borough and is part of the Environmental Commission’s Site Plan Review process which is used when projects are studied by the Planning Board for approvals. For this ordinance, Eatontown Borough receive 10 certification points with the Sustainable Jersey action: [Upgrade/Retrofit-Light Pollution](#). Laura is now working with the Environmental Commission to update the ordinance to address the use of LED lighting in site plans. The Environmental Commission is advocating for lower color temperatures to reduce blue light emissions to decrease the harmful effects to wildlife and enhance safety and well-being in the community.

### **Red Bank Green Garden and Eco Tour**

While she was the chair of the Red Bank Environmental Commission, Laura and the Environmental Commission developed the Red Bank Garden and Eco Tour. The Eco Tour was a self-guided excursion designed to educate the local population on the individual and environmental benefits of incorporating sustainable living practices and provide residents an opportunity to build and grow together. Laura said, “The event provided a great opportunity for residents to not only learn about some of the eco-friendly lifestyles of their neighbors, but also a chance to meet other people and support businesses who feel environmental sustainability is



important.” She added, “This event was popular and had a great impact by connecting people who use sustainable practices. It extended not just to solar panels, compost bins and rainwater barrels, but to beehives, pollinators, electric vehicles and front-yard farming.”

### **AWE - Abuzz for Wildlife in Eatontown**

Laura is now working with a newly created team to get Eatontown certified with the National Wildlife Federation's [Community Wildlife Habitat program](#). The program promotes the use of native trees and plants, the reduction or elimination of pesticides and chemicals and the integration of wildlife-friendly practices into sustainability plans and park master plans. Communities earn community-wide certification by certifying individual properties (homes, parks, schools, businesses) in their community as Certified Wildlife Habitats and by doing education and outreach in their community. Eatontown’s progress is tracked on the [Abuzz for Wildlife in Eatontown](#) page. Laura said, “This effort is a fun way for our community to work together to create ecologically significant habitats in our back yards.”



### **Education & Experience**

Laura attended the University of Delaware where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Geography and minor in Spanish. In 1995, she worked at AT&T and NCR Corporation until 2002 when her department was downsized. In 2002, Laura began working in a support staff role, eventually advancing to serve as a Supervising Advocate, with the [Community Health Law Project's](#) Monmouth/Ocean office where she represented clients in administrative law matters. She was honored at Ocean County's Mental Health Awareness Community Awards in 2019 where she received a "You Make a Difference Award". The award recognizes those who have made outstanding efforts to promote mental health awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. Laura was a founding trustee of the [Whale Pond Brook Watershed Association](#) and participated in many cleanups as a member of the [Navesink Swimming River Group](#). Laura is a life member of the Sierra Club and she served at the state and local level before participating on the Red Bank and Eatontown environmental commissions. Shortly after joining the Red Bank Environmental Commission, New Jersey Environmental Federation (now [Clean Water Action](#)) recognized Laura at their annual conference for her work in helping Red Bank reduce the use of toxic herbicides and pesticides by implementing integrated pest management (IPM) practices on borough property.

### **More About Laura**

Laura was born in Wisconsin and grew up in the mid-west before moving to New Jersey when she was 12. Laura’s mother and sister Lisa live locally in Monmouth County and often partner with her on environmental efforts. Lisa is an artist who creates art from found objects and discarded materials collected from the beach and households in New Jersey ([Lisa Bagwell](#)). In her free time, Laura enjoys hiking, biking, reading, wildlife photography, birdwatching and spending time with family and friends. Laura lives in Eatontown with her partner Jeff King and their two adopted parakeets. She was introduced to Jeff at a lake clean-up event where the pair bonded over their work implementing integrated pest management (IPM) in their towns. This summer after planting Bee Balm, a native plant that attracts pollinators, two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visited her garden and started a nest nearby. Reflecting on this triumph in her backyard habitat, Laura said, “It’s amazing--the birds, bees and butterflies that show up when you plant native plants. Even plants on a patio can attract pollinators. It’s truly a joy to know you are helping provide the essential habitat they desperately need. I encourage everyone to do it.”

