

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

August 2022



Ila R. Vassallo

Chair, Environmental Commission/Green Team
Evesham Township (Burlington County)

Ila Vassallo serves as the chair of the [Evesham Township Environmental Commission](#) and the [Evesham Green Team](#). For over ten years, she has been a driving force behind sustainability projects in her township and Burlington County. From presenting open space management plans to local decision-makers, to hosting the green team table at [Marlton Main Street](#) events, Ila excels at thoughtfully communicating the facts and pressing need for environmental stewardship within the context of the other challenges the community faces.

In 2020, Ila received the Power of One Award from the Evesham Township mayor and council. The award recognizes members of the Evesham community who dedicate their time to making the township a better place and whose example demonstrates that just one person can have a major impact. The Evesham Township Environmental Commission was selected by the Evesham Township Council as the [Community Impact Award](#) recipient for the month of January 2022.

Combining her professional background in engineering and environmental training, Ila approaches sustainability barriers with critical thinking that usually leads to the policy or structural change that will address the root of the problem.

In 2006, Ila's homeowner association prevented her from adding solar panels to her home. She worked with her local assemblyperson who helped to get a bill passed. New Jersey was one of the first states to pass a law that prevents a homeowner association from denying a homeowner the right to install solar. This experience is what led to Ila's participation in environmental efforts in Evesham Township. Also, Ila successfully added solar panels to her roof in 2012.

Ila said, "I've realized over the years that community education and outreach is rewarding and important for sustainability initiatives but advocating for and influencing policy is also another route to make sure change happens and continues into the future."

Ila also serves as co-chair of the policy committee for [Tri-County Sustainability \(TCS\)](#), which is the Sustainable Jersey regional hub for the 101 towns and 1.2 million residents across Burlington, Camden and Gloucester counties.

Sean Mohen, executive director of Tri-County Sustainability said, "Do you wanna make a real impact? Follow the example set by Ila Vassallo. Evesham is one of the larger, more diverse municipalities in South Jersey. It includes farms and historic homes, a thriving business district, and a major transportation



thoroughfare. Through her tireless work over the last decade with both the Evesham Green Team and Environmental Commission, Ila has been a consensus builder setting the Township on its way to a sustainable future. As a key member of the Tri-County Sustainability leadership team, Ila's helping implement positive change across the region. In her work as TCS Policy Committee co-chair, Ila played a huge role in Burlington County's passage of the Green Amendment. Ila is a mentor to all of us in the South Jersey environmental community."

As chair of the Evesham Environmental Commission, Ila has led the commission in the development of a management plan for a local parcel of open space, helped write an update to the township's stormwater control ordinance that was more stringent than state requirements and succeeded in getting a green development checklist added to the township's land use regulations. The green team conducts outreach and hosts events, including the successful [Marlton Garden Tour](#).



Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified: Evesham Township: The [Evesham Green Team](#) was formed by resolution in 2010 and has been active ever since, working collaboratively with the [Evesham Environmental Commission](#). "Sustainable Jersey is a valuable program because it provides a roadmap to sustainability and allows our township to customize our program; we can focus on the areas that are important to our community," Ila explained. Evesham Township achieved Sustainable Jersey certification at the bronze-level in 2013 and 2016. In 2019, Evesham Township achieved silver-level certification. Evesham is currently applying for re-certification in 2022. Once a municipality is certified, the certification is good for three program years.

Ila said, "Achieving Sustainable Jersey certification is a team effort. We're lucky to have dedicated volunteers and help from local organizations, businesses and the township department staff. We document the sustainability actions for certification after the work is accomplished by many people working together." To read about the actions accomplished, review the [2019 Evesham Township Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#). The Evesham Green Team shares information about local sustainability initiatives and events on their Facebook page: [@EveshamGreenTeam](#).

Evesham Township Green Development Checklist: Ila is especially proud of the [Evesham Township Green Development Checklist](#) that requires potential developers and re-developers to consider and prioritize green site design and building opportunities.

In 2016, Ila conducted research and presented to the Evesham Environmental Commission, on the benefits of adding a green development checklist to the planning board application process. Based upon her proposal, the environmental commission wrote a recommendation memo for the mayor, township council and the planning and zoning boards.

The planning board discussed green design at a meeting and decided that the township would refine the sample green development checklist provided by the Evesham Township Environmental Commission. In December 2017, Evesham Township passed [Ordinance No. 30-12-2017](#) amending the Land Use Regulations to require a Green Development Checklist to be submitted by applicants for minor site plans, major site plans, minor subdivisions and major subdivisions. The completion of the checklist is mandatory; however, compliance with the items on the checklist is voluntary. Evesham Township received ten points toward their Sustainable Jersey certification with this ordinance for completion of the action: [Create a Green Development Checklist](#).



New Jersey Green Amendment: Through her work with TriCounty Sustainability (TCS), Ila is working to gain support for a New Jersey Green Amendment. A green amendment, spearheaded by the nonprofit, [Green](#)

[Amendments for the Generations](#), would add environmental rights to the New Jersey State Constitution and recognize and protect the rights to pure water, clean air, a stable climate and healthy environments for all people, including future generations.

TCS partnered with high school students from the [NJ Student Sustainability Coalition \(NJSSC\)](#), a youth-run network of college and high school students working on sustainability initiatives, on this initiative. At a TCS general meeting, NJSSC shared an overview of the New Jersey Green Amendment. In attendance at the meeting was a Burlington County Commissioner who took the initiative back to the Board of Commissioners and asked for their support.

On May 12, 2021, the Burlington County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to pass a [resolution](#) in support of a New Jersey Green Amendment, making Burlington one of the first counties to do this at the county level. Ila said, “Teamwork was a key element in this resolution. It started with the dedicated folks at Green Amendment for the Generations and the impressive students with NJSSC who added their voices. We’re grateful to the commissioners who passed this important resolution.”

Evesham Township Sustainable Jersey Grants: The Township of Evesham has received three [Sustainable Jersey grants](#). In 2022, the township received a \$2,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by the PSEG Foundation to support a community garden/pollinator plot project. In 2021, the township received a \$5,000 Sustainable Communities Grant funded by Atlantic City Electric to update the Township of Evesham Open Space and Recreation Plan. In 2013, the township received a \$2,000 grant funded by the PSEG Foundation for an outreach and educational effort engaging Evesham residents, schools and community groups to raise awareness of sustainable practices. As part of this project a mosaic, entitled “Evesham Green,” was created that represents a collaborative effort involving the Evesham Township Environmental Commission and green team, a local mosaic artist, a third-grade elementary class and the community. Ila said, “Evesham Green celebrates the beauty of what is, and what can be, when a community comes together to build a sustainable hometown. The mosaic was pieced together at the Evesham Harvest Fest as community members visited our green team’s table and added a tile of their choosing to the project.”



Education and Experience: Ila received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mathematics from Ursinus College. She worked for nine years as a software integration and test engineer at RCA/General Electric/Martin Marietta and for 15 years at Lockheed Martin as a lead member of the engineering staff. Most recently, Ila served as the coordinator for the [South Jersey Resource Conservation and Development Council](#), a non-profit organization which focuses on habitat restoration and an annual event promoting local farms. Ila successfully completed the [Rutgers Environmental Steward program](#). Ila’s participation in the program led her to an internship with Organic Diversion, a food and organics recycling company. Her efforts resulted in the diversion of 2,919 tons of food waste from the waste stream and subsequent conversion of that waste to compost. Ila also completed the [Cloud Institutes’ Introduction to Education for Sustainability](#) as part of the NJ Learns Keystone Year Program.

More About Ila: Ila was born in Philadelphia and has lived in New Jersey her whole life, except for the three years when she lived in the Marshall Islands after her father was relocated for his job. Ila and her husband John met at the Jersey Shore; they live in Marlton and have two children: Thomas, who is 21 years old, and Rachel who is 19 years old. In her spare time, Ila likes to visit West Virginia where she is working with her sister on rehabilitating an old family farmhouse that was built by their great grandfather. The property had a water powered sawmill that was used to cut the wood the house was built with. Ila enjoys adding native plants to her yard and she is growing a variety of vegetables including beans, potatoes and asparagus. She has also taken up stained glass making.