

# SUSTAINABILITY HERO

## October 2022



### Vicky Binetti

Chair, Washington Township Green Team  
and Environmental Commission (Gloucester County)

Serving as the chair of the [Sustainable Washington Township Green Team](#) and the [Washington Township Environmental Commission](#), Vicky Binetti has implemented a comprehensive sustainability strategy for her community that has earned Washington Township silver-level certification with Sustainable Jersey. Smart and hardworking, Vicky has had an impressive career that includes 30 years at the U.S. EPA's Region 3 Mid-Atlantic division and over 25 years volunteering in Washington Township. She has demonstrated a lifetime commitment to the understanding, improvement and protection of the environment.

Vicky developed and championed the Washington Township Wellhead Protection Ordinance, established a green business recognition program and encouraged participation in the arts through the Painting the Town program. She is currently leading green team efforts to encourage electric vehicles and charging stations and develop a program to promote childhood lead-testing for the community's children.

Serving on the Open Space Advisory Committee since its inception in 2001, Vicky has helped to preserve more than 350 acres of open space in Washington Township. In 2022, Vicky received the [Greater Washington Township Chamber of Commerce Rick Zammer Award](#) that honors those who go above and beyond to make a positive contribution to the community. Because she serves on so many committees, Vicky enhances township projects by creating new opportunities for collaboration. She is a member of the township's Shade Tree Advisory Committee and the leadership team of [TriCounty Sustainability](#), and is on the boards of the [Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library](#), [Music at Bunker Hill](#) and the [Washington Township Rotary Club](#).

**Earth Day, Dr. Ruth Patrick and Mom:** Ever since she participated in the first Earth Day in 1970, a national environmental teach-in event, she has been focused on environmental stewardship and advocating for change. She also benefited from good mentors. Vicky followed in the footsteps of [Dr. Ruth Patrick](#) when she was hired to work at the [Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia](#). Dr. Patrick was a visionary ecologist who proved that biological diversity holds the key to understanding the environmental problems affecting an ecosystem. Vicky said, "In addition to being an extremely accomplished scientist, Dr. Patrick held her own and succeeded with dignity in a male-dominated profession." Vicky learned the value of hard work and community service from her mother Helen who worked a full-time job (and served as a union representative) while raising four children and making time for community service through her church, the PTA and eventually as president of her local AARP chapter.



**Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified:** Vicky and the Washington Township Green Team moved from bronze-level certification to silver-level in 2020 with 360 points. To see all of the actions completed, review the [2020 Washington Township Certification Report](#). The green team includes representatives of the administration, township council, environmental commission, planning board, municipal utilities authority, chamber of commerce, school board, public works department and the public. Washington Township Mayor Joann Gattinelli is an active green team participant which helps strengthen the impact of the sustainability program.

Vicky is methodical in goal planning; she understands the incremental steps needed to reach goals. She said, "I know it is hard to focus on the future when everyone is so busy with life's day to day activities. But to be sustainable, there are things we

can do in our daily routines that will make an impact today and for the future. I try to incorporate tangible steps and model actions that will help our community members take action now.”

Vicky has secured several grants to support sustainability work in Washington Township including environmental education, water conservation, activities to support the arts and artists and a nature trail guide for Washington Lake Park. In September 2022, Washington Township received a Sustainable Jersey and [Atlantic City Electric Sustainable Communities Grant](#) that will provide \$5,000 to restore the Washington Lake Park greenhouse. In [2017](#) and [2019](#), Washington Township was awarded two \$2,000 Sustainable Jersey grants funded by the [PSEG Foundation](#) to support the green team.



**Sustainable Washington Township Creative Team and Painting the Town Project:** Vicky and the Sustainable Washington Township Green Team realized that they could serve as a catalyst for development in the community by linking arts and culture directly to sustainability. In 2019, the Washington Township Council adopted [Resolution 051-2019](#), establishing the creative team as a subcommittee of the green team. The resolution identifies that the purpose of the creative team is to recommend and implement actions that facilitate recognition, support and appreciation of the arts and cultural organizations in the Township.

As a member of the Sustainable Washington Township Creative Team, Vicky has led impressive creative initiatives. “We started the Creative Placemaking initiative to build on our existing infrastructure of parkland, schools and the business sector to stimulate arts focus throughout the Township, and boost business linkages with cultural interests,” she explained.

The [Painting the Town Project](#) includes different initiatives such as the Gallery in the Park which is an outdoor art installation located at the amphitheater in Washington Lake Park. This park is the largest municipal park in New Jersey and is frequented by thousands of individuals. It is the site of community festivals, concerts, entertainment and recreation events. The Creative Team invited artists to submit digital images of paintings or photographs for reproduction on vinyl panels that constitute an outdoor gallery. The first exhibit at the outdoor gallery was entitled “eARTH without ART is just eh” and featured works from artists and photographers throughout New Jersey. The most recent exhibit, on display through November 2022, is entitled “Heritage.” It features 16 artists with 24 works portraying the artists’ interpretations of the “Heritage” theme.



The Sustainable Washington Creative Team works in collaboration with the Township’s Economic Development Office, the Department of Parks and Recreation and business interests represented by the Greater Washington Township Chamber of Commerce. Additional partners include the Washington Township School District (WTSD), the Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library, the Washington Township Historic Preservation Commission and the Washington Township Rotary. The Painting the Town project won [Arts Tank](#), the [South Jersey Cultural Alliance](#) Creative Placemaking Competition, in 2019.



For these activities, Washington Township received 10 certification points for the Sustainable Jersey certification action [Establish a Creative Team](#) and 30 certification points for three activities that satisfied the action: [Utilizing Your Creative Assets](#).

**Community Garden, Bluebird Buddies and the Monarch Rescue Project:** The [Washington Township Community Garden](#) was established by the Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC) in 2016. The garden is on Township-owned open space within Washington Lake Park. The Washington Lake Park Rangers tend four of the 30 garden plots and several are being farmed by a local Boy Scout troop. Vegetables from those plots are donated to Mother’s Cupboard, the town’s food bank, and the garden is bordered by milkweed to promote the Monarch Rescue Project.



As a member of the OSAC and the Environmental Commission, Vicky spends a lot of her time helping to manage the community garden and facilitate the Monarch Rescue and Bluebird Buddies projects. She said, “We developed the Bluebird Buddies and Monarch Rescue projects to encourage protection and boost populations of birds and butterflies. I love this work because we reach many people in the community. For example, monarch migration is an awe-inspiring story that offers a

lesson about the delicate balance and interdependence of the natural world and helps people understand the importance of sustaining it. Community members line up to get a milkweed plant when we distribute them.”

Milkweed has become scarcer in the landscape, owing to land development and widespread use of herbicides. The Environmental Commission asks residents to plant milkweed to provide a place for the adult Monarchs to deposit eggs and food for Monarch caterpillars. Washington Township Open Space Committee member Jim McCann grows the milkweed in the Washington Lake Park greenhouse. Vicky said, “The reward comes when we observe the seemingly magical changes undergone from caterpillar to butterfly, and the breathtaking vision of a Monarch lighting on a flower in the garden.” In 2022, more than 350 packages of milkweed, each containing four plants, planting instructions and educational information, were handed out to community members.

The Environmental Commission partnered with the [Gloucester County Nature Club](#) and the [New Jersey Bluebird Society](#) to manage the Bluebird Buddies project. There are 17 nesting boxes in the Township. Volunteers monitor the boxes on a regular basis to check nests for the presence and number of eggs and fledglings. The young Bluebirds are banded by the NJ Bluebird Society when feasible. Washington Township received 15 Sustainable Jersey certification points from the outreach that was done for these projects through the action [Community Education and Outreach](#).



**Washington Township Wellhead Protection Ordinance:** Washington Township was fortunate to have Vicky leading the Environmental Commission as she brings extensive professional knowledge in water protection. For over 15 years, Vicky served as the Associate Director for the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region 3 Mid-Atlantic Water Protection Division.

All of Washington Township’s drinking water is supplied by ground water. The [Washington Township Municipal Utilities Authority](#) (WTMUA) operates 15 community water supply wells. Four wells are shallow, screened from 60 to 120 feet below the ground’s surface, in the Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer. This aquifer is sandy and porous and does not have a protective confining layer and groundwater is especially vulnerable to contamination from pollution on or beneath the ground surface.

Based on a project she saw a community do in Pennsylvania, Vicky realized that the sustainable approach to protecting water quality should focus on regulations to prevent contamination. She developed and then championed the Wellhead Protection Ordinance to the Washington Township Council for consideration.



In 2002, Washington Township Council enacted the [Wellhead Protection Ordinance](#) (Chapter 273), which regulates land uses and activities that may occur near these shallow wells. The Land Development Checklist requires applicants to identify project locations relative to wellhead protection areas. Project applications are reviewed by Planning and Zoning Board professionals as well as by the Washington Township Environmental Commission. Vicky collaborated with the WTMUA to revise and update the town’s Water Conservation Guide and organized educational activities regarding ground water protection including exhibits, presentations and information sharing at public events.

**Education & Experience:** Vicky studied at Georgian Court College and the University of Pennsylvania. She worked at the Academy of Natural Sciences as a research assistant and a staff technician, project manager and project coordinator for its Environmental Research division. Vicky went on to work for the EPA’s Mid-Atlantic Region (Region 3) serving Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington D.C, West Virginia and seven federally recognized tribes. At EPA, she worked in programs focused on surface water, groundwater and drinking water protection; permitting; and water and sewer infrastructure. She was responsible for regulation, enforcement, technical assistance and coordination with state colleagues in environmental and health departments, emergency incident management and public outreach. Vicky retired from EPA in 2014.

**More About Vicky:** Vicky is a Phillies fan and enjoys birding, cooking and, when there is time, reading mystery novels. Vicky was born in Perth Amboy and is the youngest of four children. She has lived in Washington Township for more than 30 years. She treasures family and is an aunt to 10 nieces and nephews as well as 14 grandnieces and grandnephews. She met her husband Ray when they were college students and they married when in graduate school at Penn. Although Ray passed away in 2015, he is still a guiding force in her life. Vicky said she is thankful for the 42 years they had together and that she thinks about him every day. Vicky is a true sustainability hero and community leader who continues to make an impact in New Jersey.