Environmental Commission

September 16, 2014

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest
Councilman Kashwick called to order, at 7:35 pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, September 16, 2014 at Borough Hall.

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Attendance

Present
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Brenda Cummings- Full Member
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2 (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
Sivert Hagen- Associate Member

Absent
Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
Jaewook Jun- Associate Member
Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member

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Miscellaneous

In lieu of the absent Chairman MacDonald, Councilman Kashwick chaired the meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to approve the minutes for the August 19, 2014 meeting with a noted correction; the motion passed by acclamation.

Councilman Kashwick opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments; no one wished to be heard.

Councilman Kashwick stated there was no correspondence to read into the record.

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Old Business

Trails
Mr. Isaacson stated there were no matters to discuss.

Green Team
Ms. Cummings said the Team is awaiting response from students enrolled at both Tenakill Middle School and Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest willing to volunteer for
the Team, replacing those who have resigned to attend college, including Commission member, Mr. Jun (who has yet to submit his resignation to the Governing Body).

*Mac Bain Farm*
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg indicated there was nothing to report.

*Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)*
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said there were no matters to discuss.

*Shade Tree Commission (STC)*
Councilman Kashwick announced that Mr. Scholz was resigning from the Commission and his replacement, pending appointment from the Governing Body, would be Brian Stabile, 138 Demarest Avenue, Closter, New Jersey, who was in the audience this evening.

*Trail Grant*
Councilman Kashwick stated that he and Chairman MacDonald recently evaluated the Borough’s trail system, determining that approximately 450’ of damaged boardwalk planking is in need of replacement. He said he would adapt the specifications previously utilized by the Nature Center for its boardwalk project, and put them in as part of the bidding process, which he hoped would be complete by Spring 2015. Mr. Stabile asked if the trail grant awarded the Borough would allow for new signage along the Borough’s trails; Councilman Kashwick replied such was dependent on funds available, noting while signage is within the specifications, the replacement of planks is priority. Mr. Isaacson stressed the Borough needs to coordinate the placement and wording of new signs with neighboring municipalities, especially Demarest, whose trails link together in order avoid confusion. Councilman Kashwick reiterated that several trail map signs on pedestals are in need of replacement (faded and peeling), especially those near the Closter Public Library and Tenakill Street; Mr. Isaacson explained that said signs are comprised of a trail map printed on pressure sensitive vinyl which is laminated. He said several of the signs are 5+ years old, beyond their lifespan, and believed the map should be updated (ensuring collaboration with trails in Demarest) before new pedestal signs are produced. Mr. Colwell stated he conversed with a sign maker residing in Closter who offered his services. Mr. Hagen asked that a revised map identify all Borough open space (parks and playgrounds) to allow for easier navigation. Mr. Isaacson suggested that Google Earth be used as a basis for the trail map instead of an illustration, assuming the photography used is taken during the wintertime when the trails would be most visible.

*Dumping & Signage on Public Lands*
The Commission did not discuss the matter being the absent Chairman MacDonald was spearheading a plan of action.

*Deer*
Mr. Hagen said that after reviewing the information distributed by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg at the August 19, 2014 Meeting, several obstacles would have to be overcome, such as preparing a deer census, before the State of New Jersey would permit the Borough to conduct a hunt for population control. He inquired with the Police Department as to the number of vehicular accidents in Closter involving deer and was given the following statistics: 4 in 2009, 4 in 2010, 10 in 2011, 4 in 2012, 7 in 2013 and 4 thus far in 2014. He said he would ask the Department for the number of accidents overall for those years to ascertain a percentage. Mr. Stabile questioned if such records include damage to vegetation (ornamental trees, etc.) caused by deer; Mr. Hagen answered in the negative, though the State encourages that such occurrences be tallied. Ms.
Bouton-Goldberg informed that she recently witnessed the damage afflicted on the forests at the Greenbrook Nature Sanctuary in the Borough of Tenafly, which are not regenerating. She emphasized the need for the Commission to transmit a letter to the Mayor and Council telling of its concern about deer overpopulation; Mr. Colwell concurred, especially since he resides on Cedar Court across from the Oradell Reservoir, a deer attraction. He noted he has never seen the Montauk daisies on his property because of deer droppings. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg agreed and noted her property is littered with droppings as well; she revealed that the garden she helped recently plant at Buzzoni Farm Park consisted of supposed deer-proof plants (some of which originated from her residence) but they have proven otherwise. She said another concern is the spread of ailments, noting 2 of her friends who garden as does she, acquired a type other than Lyme disease caused by ticks. Mr. Colwell said he would contact Raymond Cywinski, Mayor of Demarest and employee with United Water Co., about what measures the water utility has taken on its land to curtail the deer. Mr. Stabile stated that bringing about change to the situation, both a deer census and residents’ survey of damage assessment, must be formulated followed by deciding on a method be it hunt, capture, euthanasia, etc. Mr. Colwell felt local landscapers should be consulted to gauge the impact of deer on their business and customers. Ms. Abrams said the residents’ survey could be placed on the Borough’s website to which Councilman Kashwick said the webpage’s traffic cannot be tracked since it does not have a hit counter. Ms. Cummings suggested the anonymous survey used by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, specifically its Division of Fish and Wildlife, be sampled; Councilman Kashwick disagreed given the agency’s bias agenda. Mr. Isaacson said a survey could be placed in the next mailing of property tax bills. During his travels to Fire Island, New York, Mr. Isaacson said he has witnessed a large amount of deer across its approximate 33-mile span, noting its herd reached about 450; despite most properties being equipped with fencing, he said local officials have considered sterilization and even the introduction of pumas onto the island to control the deer, which have no natural predators.

**Harvest Festival**

Mr. Isaacson said the event at Mac Bain Farm, in its 7th year, would be on October 25th from 3:00pm to 5:00pm with the rain date being October 26th. He said, as per the Farm’s volunteer coordinator, Mary Mayer, both Ms. Cummings and Steven Kelman, a local musician, have been budgeted for as providing entertainment. With respect to pumpkins, Mr. Isaacson said to supplement those grown on-site and set aside for the Festival, Ms. Mayer has contacted D’Amico Flower Farm (460 Demarest Avenue). He said the price of pumpkins this year dropped tremendously from 2013 when excess rain caused damage to crops. He stated he would provide 1,000 postcards for distribution to the local school system on or about Columbus Day so the students and their parents have sufficient time to plan. Mr. Colwell said he would ask his son, who participates in a daily live broadcast of morning announcements known as Hillside News Network (HNN), to inform students of the Festival. Mr. Isaacson said last year’s budget for the Festival was $1,000.00 but expenses reached about $1,500.00. Mr. Stabile suggested handing out fliers to shoppers in the downtown area the morning of October 25th; Mr. Isaacson disagreed, saying the event, which is free of charge, is intended for Closter residents only and doing such would entice non-residents to attend. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned if a collection box could be made available during the Festival for donations to fund the planting of blueberry bushes at the Farm next season being they are quite expensive; Councilman Kashwick replied he would discuss the request with the Borough Attorney as to its legality. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the event activities would include pumpkin painting, storytelling and the making of s’mores, the last of which would require forsythia branches to be supplied by Ms. Mayer.

**People’s Climate March**
Councilman Kashwick reminded that the People’s Climate March would be held on September 21st in New York City starting at Columbus Circle to be followed by a rally ahead of an upcoming event at the United Nations the following week; he noted, if anyone wished to join him, that he is traveling to Manhattan from Closter by bus, which departs at 8:10am from Closter Dock Road. Ms. Cummings informed that several organizations are gathering beforehand at the Palisades Center Mall in West Nyack, New York.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body
Councilman Kashwick said the Governing Body will be commencing budget negotiations for 2015 in the coming weeks and encouraged the Commission to think about what projects, activities, etc. it would like funded. He revealed an amendment would be made to Chapters 59 (Shade Tree Commission) and 181 (Tree Preservation and Removal) of the Borough Code so that both reflect the same bonding requirements for mitigation and protection of existing trees.

Planning Board
In lieu of Mr. Di Dio’s absence, Councilman Kashwick reported the Developer's Agreement for the redevelopment of the Closter Plaza shopping center had been signed by both the applicant and Planning Board, soon to be executed by the Mayor and Council. As for the redevelopment of the vacant 515 Piermont Road, commonly known as “Trautwein Farm”, he said there had been no refiling subsequent to the initial application being dismissed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment for lack of prosecution.

New Business

Ms. Abrams said she recently conversed with the Environmental Coordinator for the Town of Secaucus, who told her the municipality banned Styrofoam and other similar products and although plastic bags have not, it has ordered 1,000 reusable bags to distribute to residents at local events. Ms. Abrams said she also spoke about solar projects for all of Secaucus’ municipal buildings and high school as well as an energy audit performed on its recreation center, resulting in significant savings. Ms. Abrams said she was not told how such initiatives were funded but much probably derived from the tax revenue generated by Secaucus' large commercial sector. Mr. Hagen revealed that some time ago a local company offered its services to the Borough via the Green Team for installation of solar panels on its buildings, including Tenakill Middle School, but negotiations never materialized. Councilman Kashwick said in recent years the incentives for taking on solar projects have dissipated. Mr. Isaacson suggested the Governing Body foster the development of specific regulations on solar power within the Borough Code, such as roof coverage, angles, etc.; Councilman Kashwick replied the Sustainable Jersey certification program offers examples of such ordinances in its literature. Mr. Isaacson cautioned that a negative result of solar panel installation is that tree removal is often desired to gain more sunlight and optimize the technology’s potential. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg hoped the Borough could sponsor a “no plastic bag” day to generate public awareness. Mr. Hagen agreed, saying local businesses, such as Trader Joe’s and Zendiggi Kebab House, could benefit from publicity by donating bags having their advertisement to the Borough to be distributed to
residents. Mr. Isaacson hypothesized that based on approximately 2,500 households existing in the Borough and if 1 reusable bag costing $2.00 was given to each household, the cost would equate to $5,000.00, an amount which could be made back through 4 advertisers at $1,250.00 each. He said he routinely has 7 such bags in his car, 3 which are thermal and the others are for carrying. Ms. Cummings felt a 1-day event sponsored by the Green Team could culminate with a screening of the documentary, Bag It: Is Your Life Too Plastic? Ms. Abrams said she questioned Kmart (19 Ver Valen Street) as to what becomes of plastic bags returned by its customers, and she surmised the location does not recycle. Ms. Cummings, in researching for a local news article she wrote, said ShopRite is the only local grocer that can verify the recycling procedures of its plastic bags into composite decking; she noted others, like Stop & Shop and A&P, stymie inquires for details. In responding to Mr. Stabile, Councilman Kashwick said the Department of Public Works accepts all plastics, #’s 1 to 7 of the resin identification coding system developed by the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI), but it does not take plastic bags. Mr. Hagen said #7 is essentially garbage which few municipalities accept. Councilman Kashwick spoke of the motto, “Reduce, Reuse and Recycle”, and said the latter should be the last option.

Plan Review

Being no land use board applications were forwarded to the Commission for its consideration, plan review was not conducted.

Adjournment

Mr. Stabile reintroduced himself to Commission members not present at the August 19, 2014 Meeting; he said he is a life-long resident of the Borough, with his childhood home located on Farrington Street. He revealed he has a wife and 1 child; he noted that by schooling and practice, he is a geologist employed with an engineering/environmental firm based in Morris County.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to adjourn the meeting at 8:19pm. The motion passed by acclamation.