Environmental Commission

April 19, 2016

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest
Mr. MacDonald called to order, at 7:36 pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, April 19, 2016 at Borough Hall.

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**Attendance**

*Present*
Paul MacDonald- Full Member  
Steven Isaacson- Full Member  
Thomas Colwell- Full Member  
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison  
Brian Stabile- Full Member/Council Liaison  
Sivert Hagen- Full Member  
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1  
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

*Absent*
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison  
Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member

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**Miscellaneous**

In lieu of the Commission nominating its Chairperson for the calendar year 2016, the incumbent, Mr. MacDonald, continued to serve in such capacity for the evening.

The Commission did not entertain a motion to approve the minutes for the March 15, 2016 meeting.

Chairman MacDonald opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Steven Lopez, 89 Union Street, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He felt the recent Borough-wide cleaning/recycling event was successful, noting he concentrated on collecting debris in Lenapehoking Preserve located on Ver Valen Street across from the Closter Plaza shopping center. Despite inclement/wet conditions, Ms. Heymann said she volunteered to clean up grounds along Homans Avenue and Ruckman Road. Mr. Lopez stated he and Councilman Stabile also attempted to clean out a very wide tributary of Tenakill Brook located in Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park, which was laden with garbage. Mr. Hagen pointed out that in years past, Bergen County afforded the Borough nets for cleaning out waterways, though waders would be optimal. Ms. Heymann revealed that a trench leading from the Department of Public Works (DPW) facility on Ruckman Road to the Nature Center is extremely littered, but its elevations made it impossible to clear out. Mr. Isaacson questioned whether the public in general is allowed to access waterways regulated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), noting volunteers partaking in the upcoming high school senior service program can continue debris cleanup; Mr. Lopez advised against such, saying used condoms, glass, etc. were visible. Overall, Mr. Hagen said he was pleased with the turnout, which resulted
in 30 bags of garbage, 6 automobile tires and an electric fan being collected. He said all
documentation required for reimbursement of supply costs from Bergen County has been filed
and usually is processed in 6 to 8 months.

Old Business

Trails
Ms. Heymann said Kevin Riley, a Board member and Grounds Manager of the Demarest Nature
Center, was continuing trail improvements as part of the Recreational Trails Program Grant
awarded to the Borough by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP)
in 2014. She noted a clerical error, which caused a delay in having the Governing Body
authorize additional hours of compensation to Mr. Riley, was rectified. She reported Mr. Riley
is installing boardwalks in the southern portion of the conservation easement by Temple
Emanu-El of Closter (180 Piermont Road) due to the wetlands in the vicinity. She further stated
the northern section of Buzzoni Farm Park is linking to the Nature Center’s trails as will the
southern section a few yards north of Ruckman Park; she noted an additional exit would be
established at the corner of Piermont Road near the Park’s southern end. Ms. Heymann said the
absent Dr. Goldberg, a longtime proponent of trail installation in and around Buzzoni Farm
Park, is pleased with the progress. In response to Ms. Bouton-Goldberg’s observation that the
subject area has much garbage strewn about, Ms. Heymann said Mr. Riley has been collecting
debris anywhere he spots it along the trails, for which he is not compensated. She believed the
amount of garbage in the Borough has lessened over the decades, especially along Blanch
Avenue and Herbert Avenue which were notorious for being littered.

Ms. Heymann said Mr. Riley exchanged blue blazes for white in Buzzoni Farm Park, which had
been conflicting with the blazes of the Nature Center. She hoped volunteers for the high school
senior service program could lay woodchips along trails. Chairman MacDonald informed that
he would be overseeing 7 female students for all of May except 1 week and felt they could
perform such a task, noting 5 others would be assigned to Mac Bain Farm; Ms. Heymann said she
could take over supervision the week Chairman MacDonald is not available. She said she is
applying for the 2016 Recreational Trails Program Grant due by the end of April, despite having
available funds from the 2014 Grant (Councilman Stabile believed there to be $18,000.00
remaining). Ms. Heymann said an extension by the NJDEP for the 2014 Grant is possible and
believed there was less money available in it if taking into account labor and materials. She said
the 2016 Grant application would be based upon Mr. Riley continuing his work as well as sign
installations between Mollicone Park and Schauble Park and placing trails along the north side
of Blanch Avenue.

Ms. Heymann also reminded there is a $1,500.00 grant available through the Association of
New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC). She spoke of the copious amounts of
paperwork in the form of clarifications and resubmissions required of a municipality in order to
be considered for the relatively small ANJEC grant, which could go towards trail signage, blazes,
map revisions, etc. She expressed that if not for volunteers, it would not pay to have Borough
employees doing research on such grants. Chairman MacDonald said it seemed ANJEC was
questioning how $1,500.00 could cover all such trail expenses when it clearly could not.
In response to the Commission’s recent request to have the Mayor and Council consider the purchase of 375 Blanch Avenue, a 3.88-acre lot adjacent to the now-defunct Closter Swim Club, Councilman Stabile revealed the Governing Body opted not to visit the matter at this time; he said its decision stems from the Borough’s pending submission of a constitutionally compliant fair share plan in response to the Supreme Court of New Jersey’s decision in March 2015 to relinquish oversight of the state’s affordable housing process from the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). He said the parcel in question would not be suitable for COAH-designation given its distance from public transportation in the downtown area. Ms. Heymann interjected, saying open space, not COAH funds, could be used for the land purchase. Councilman Stabile reminded that the Borough has environmental liabilities with respect to the Club site it acquired, of which open space funds will be required to address. He noted while the Borough has applied for grant monies that should cover investigatory costs associated with the Club site, some remediation fees would still remain. Mr. Isaacson stated 75% of such costs can be covered if the Club site were to be kept recreational in nature; while concurring, Councilman Stabile said the total cost in liabilities could exceed $2,000,000.00, in which case $500,000.00 would come from the Borough’s treasury. Chairman MacDonald said he recently spoke with the property owner of 375 Blanch Avenue, John Galcik, and was told his asking price is $895,000.00; he believed Mr. Galcik is anxious to relocate to Maine and likely open to negotiation. Being a substantial buffer would be required by the NDJEP for any development of 375 Blanch Avenue due to its proximity to Dwars Kill, Mr. Isaacson questioned why the Borough could not compel the seller to bequeath the property to it instead of having to pay so much for land it does not need. He opined the Borough has plenty of open space in that section of Closter. He suggested the Borough look into purchasing open space elsewhere such as 681 Closter Dock Road, a parcel given property tax exempt status because the property owner (heirs of the Schaller & Weber Co. cured meats and sausage empire) have deer onsite; he also mentioned considering 515 Piermont Road, the former location of the Trautwein Farm.

Mr. Isaacson questioned if a portion of unused funds from the 2014 Grant could be utilized to replace a bridge that had spanned Dwars Kill, connecting Closter to the Borough of Norwood. Ms. Heymann revealed that $30,000.00 had previously been earmarked (source was not discussed) for such, however, Norwood instead spend it on preserving/developing its western end. She noted the subject bridge should not be confused with an existing stone bridge associated with 102 Blanch Avenue, a former tax-exempt farm site. Ms. Heymann stated a replacement bridge would be extremely expensive; for instance, she said a small bridge she had hoped to have installed, connecting Ruckman Park to the nearby conservation easement, would cost $10,000.00 in engineering and governmental costs alone. Mr. Isaacson pointed out that the Scholz Bridge, completed in 2008, cost $100,000.00+ to complete, and suggested the replacement bridge would cost twice as much since Dwars Kill’s banks would have to be reinforced. The Commission agreed that Norwood must be engaged with such an endeavor. Ms. Heymann stated the NJDEP regulations involved make the replacement bridge so expensive and the price cannot be justified given its anticipated limited use. Mr. Isaacson promised to investigate different areas along Dwars Kill in which such a bridge could be situated that is less involved and, thus, less costly. Councilman Stabile questioned the feasibility of acquiring Bergen County funds to install a road bridge instead. Mr. Isaacson replied in the negative, saying Norwood wanted to vacate that portion of Blanch Avenue to prevent motorized vehicles onto its land; as a compromise, he said Closter convinced Norwood to let a narrow strip of Blanch Avenue remain non-vacated to allow for a walking trail.

Signage Prohibiting Dumping on Public Land
Mr. Isaacson said he would revise the sign template he created according to Commission feedback in terms of wording and colors. Chairman MacDonald said the Commission agreed on ordering 20 such signs through open space funds.

**Fencing Corrections (Mac Bain Farm)**
Chairman MacDonald stated he was under the impression that if the proposed fence rehabilitation cost less than $6,000.00, multiple estimates would not be required of the Borough; therefore, he said Dimick Fence Corp., initially recommended to perform the work by John McCaffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, was able to reduce its estimate for correcting the 8' high fence (consisting of 2' of wire on top of a 6' high fence) to $5,980.00. To do so, he said the fence contractor lessened the amount of proposed black-coated chain link wire to be installed from 300’ to 270’ along with a few other minor deletions. Ms. Heymann explained given the cost of the job, advertisement for public bids is not required but quotes from 3 different vendors are; Mr. Isaacson believed the point at which public bidding is required to be $17,000.00. Chairman MacDonald said he would get clarification from the Borough. The Commission suggested 2 additional estimates be obtained from Emerson Fence, Inc. and Fesco Fence Corp. in West Nyack, New York. Chairman MacDonald noted that if the threshold for public bidding is $17,000.00, not $6,000.00, then the Commission could select Dimick Fence Corp.’s original estimate of $10,000.00 containing all desired work. Councilman Stabile expressed concern about wording of the new estimate, specifically, a notation to “re-tie 2 strands of existing coil with fence ties” instead of what the Commission intended, which was to drill the coil to posts with eye bolts. Chairman MacDonald promised to get clarification from the fence contractor as to which areas of the decade-old fence will be repaired or replaced as well as any gate work. Mr. Isaacson suggested photographs of the damaged fencing be taken to convince the Governing Body to appropriate the necessary funds.

A motion was made by Councilman Stabile and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to have the Commission request the Governing Body to appropriate open space funds for rehabilitation of fencing at Mac Bain Farm at an amount not to exceed $10,000.00 so to prevent harvest loss due to deer infiltration. The motion passed by acclamation.

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**Liaison Reports**

**Governing Body**
Councilman Stabile informed that Closter recently hired a temporary Borough Administrator (John Fry) for 16 weeks. He stated the 2016 Northern Valley Earth Fair will be held in the Borough of Cresskill on April 23rd, and the Police Department will be accepting unused/expired prescription medication from the public on April 30th.

**Planning Board**
Ms.Heymann reported that the Planning Board’s decision to deny an application (679 Closter Dock Road) for Subdivision Approval involving the creation of flag lot(s) was overturned by the Superior Court of New Jersey (Law Division); she explained the judge’s reasoning included the Board deciding not to retain its own planner during the proceedings. She feared the court order would set precedent for another application before the Board (80 Knickerbocker Road), which also deals with flag lot(s).
With respect to illegal tree removal at 15 William Street, the subject of a recently denied Board application for Site Plan Approval involving a parking lot reconfiguration/upgrade, Ms. Heymann said the penalties assessed were rescinded by the Municipal Court. In response, she asked the Mayor’s office to have the Borough Attorney present for all future court cases involving enforcement by the Building Department and/or Code Enforcement Bureau.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)
In light of there still being no Liaison appointed by the Governing Body for the calendar year 2016, no report was given.

Green Team
Mr. Hagen reiterated the success of the recent Borough-wide cleaning/recycling event; Chairman MacDonald ensured he would be reimbursed for monies spent on refreshments. Mr. Hagen reported the Governing Body approved of his request to install temporary signs advertising the 2016 Northern Valley Earth Fair in the Borough’s right-of-way along thoroughfares; Ms. Abrams said she has since been placing signage along roadways with heavy traffic. Councilman Stabile assured that an email would be sent to the local student body to promote the Fair. Mr. Hagen said Michael Swam, Co-Chairperson of Cresskill’s Environmental Commission and longtime organizer of the Fair, will be moving out-of-state next year.

Mr. Colwell stated he had not yet spoken with Wayne Sapper, both a Borough resident and principal of King Displays Co. (provider of signs for Broadway venues, etc.) about making a table banner for when the Commission and/or Team attends public events, shows, exhibitions, etc.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said Ms. Heymann will be a recipient at the 2016 Bergen County Historic Preservation Awards being held on May 5th.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she continues to prepare a nomination report for the designation of Mac Bain Farm as a historic landmark. She said that water utility service had been restored at the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), as had the electric.

New Business
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that a downtown food establishment, The Fish Dock (219 Closter Dock Road), requested the Borough’s support in promoting reusable bags to shoppers. Mr. Isaacson suggested local merchants donate towards the production of such bags and, in return, have their businesses’ advertisements printed on the bag itself. Mr. Hagen revealed that Zendiggi Kebab House (224-228 Closter Dock Road) already supplies reusable bags to its customers. Mr. Isaacson hoped Whole Foods Market, which will soon occupy retail space in the redeveloped Closter Plaza shopping center, and the supermarket, Stop & Shop (400 Demarest Avenue), could be approached to fund such an endeavor.

Ms. Heymann said the League of Women Voters of New Jersey is studying the use of plastic in everyday life and will be holding an event at the Closter Public Library on May 17th; she noted the guest speaker will be New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Huttle, who is sponsoring bills in the State Legislature regarding both bottle depositing and plastic bags. Ms. Heymann said at
the recent Annual Soup Supper hosted by the Nature Center, compostable plastic cups were handed out instead of the usual Styrofoam cups. She said Joseph Miele, principal of Miele Sanitation Co. (the Borough's recycling vendor), recently stated at an event in the Borough of Haworth that the collection of plastics is very inefficient because they are comingled with household trash, resulting in them being sent to landfills; she said he stressed residents separating plastics is optimal and while is there is an economic benefit in sorting cardboard and newspaper, there is none with plastic. Councilman Stabile responded that the Borough should not make recycling too arduous for its residents because they will likely avoid the practice altogether. Ms. Heymann said she would take advantage of her contacts at the Palisades Interstate Park Commission to seek funding for recycling projects. In response to Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Abrams said she would find an organization that recycles plastic bottle caps.

Mr. Isaacson pointed out the Commission had not designated a tree for landmark status in quite some time. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she had requested a gum tree located at Mac Bain Farm near Mr. McCaffrey’s private garden be given such distinction; Councilman Stabile said he had not yet discussed such with the Governing Body.

Councilman Stabile stated he has been in discussions with a counterpart in Norwood about transforming unused rail corridors into trails, specifically the inactive railway owned by CSX Transportation Co. that dissects Closter and heads north through Norwood, the Borough of Northvale and into Rockland County, New York. He further commented that he spoke with the Chief of Staff for United States Senator Cory Booker as well as United States Representative Scott Garrett, both of whom were receptive to the idea. He said he has not heard back from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Councilman Stabile hoped that because the Northern Branch Corridor Project, which would reintroduce light rail transit to the region, is endorsed by the City of Englewood but rejected by the Borough of Tenafly, CSX Transportation Co. will withdraw its opposition to converting its rail line within Closter to trails. He reminded that the railroad company experienced public outcry when it started having rail cars use its tracks to transport crude oil via the Bakken Formation from parts of North Dakota, Montana and Canada through Bergen County. Councilman Stabile further noted that the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act was signed into law by President Obama last year and it will fund the rehabilitation of many rail lines traveling through the Northeast Corridor between Washington, DC and Boston. He pointed out that rail mitigation is part of the Act meaning any rail upgrade must be countered with an environmental improvement. Ms. Heymann noted that both Miele Sanitation Co. and Capital Hardware Supply, Inc., both located on Railroad Avenue, have an agreement with the railroad company to apply for freight transport when it sees fit. Mr. Isaacson stated Supreme Oil Co. utilizes the railway in Englewood to move large tankers of its cooking oil/condiment products.

Plan Review

The Commission did not receive any land use board applications for its consideration.

Adjournment
There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Hagen, to adjourn the meeting at 9:12pm. The motion passed by acclamation.