Environmental Commission

August 15, 2017
Meeting

Minutes

Prepared by:
Paul Demarest
Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:43pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, August 15, 2017 at Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present
Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
David Barad, MD- Full Member/Council Liaison
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member

Absent
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison

Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Councilman Barad and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the July 18, 2017 meeting with a noted correction. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Shucai Zhu, 26 Cedar Court, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He said he previously expressed interest in becoming a Commission member. Councilman Barad responded that the Governing Body would soon appoint him to serve in conjunction with filling the vacancies for both the Shade Tree Commission (STC) and STC Liaison for the Environmental Commission.

Old Business

Borough Hall Parking Lot Project
Councilman Barad revealed that the design for the proposed lot expansion was discussed extensively by the Governing Body at its July 26th meeting, taking into account the Commission’s strong objection to the project. He said it was decided the initially-proposed 11 new parking spaces would be eliminated and only those curbs that are damaged would be replaced as opposed to installing all new curbing. As for removing the existing green space peninsulas, Councilman Barad informed that all would remain except possibly 1 located midway in the aisle closest to Lewis Street, pending recommendation by the Borough Engineer. He said the final design would be determined soon enough so construction can coincide with the pavement milling of Homans Avenue before the start of winter, noting during the public bid for
the now-completed pavement milling of Ver Valen Street occurred, the Borough was able to purchase asphalt at a reduced price. Regarding identification of certain spaces to deter illegal parking, he said while there is signage at the ends of each aisle closest to Borough Hall relaying a warning, the Borough will stripe particular spaces with certain colors and patterns (instead of installing unsightly signs at each space) when the lot is repaved.

**Trails**
Mr. Isaacson said the sign manufacturer (Fossil Industries, Inc.) selected to provide the signage for the revamped trail map informed him the artwork for 6 pedestal signs was finalized, the designs of which he promised to forward to the Commission. He stated 5 of the 6 need to be chosen as per the purchase order issued by the Borough; he hoped the design for a 6th pedestal sign could be budgeted for in 2018. He specified final recommendations have been included into the final design, including the caption “YOU ARE HERE” indicated on the map with an “X” at the particular location where a pedestal sign is posted. He said other corrections were made to a few link/trail depictions and a small pond was included within the Nature Center; he said the map would measure 24”x48” in area. In reviewing the artwork, he said he increased the view of the Portable Document File (PDF) images to 800% to ensure there was accurate representation and all lettering was uniform, etc. Mr. Isaacson said being there is currently a pedestal sign situated on High Street in front of the Closter Public Library, along Durie Avenue at the Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park, at Memorial Park and Buzzoni Farm Park, a 5th pedestal sign would have to be made. To protect the maps against the weather, he said they would consist of a ½” thick ultraviolet-proof/high-pressure laminate board guaranteed for 10 years and be accompanied by tamperproof bolts/nuts to be mounted atop the existing signage of each pedestal sign. In response to not keeping a pedestal sign at the Library, Councilman Barad opined its location promotes the trail system to children and the general public alike. Mr. Isaacson said because the map artwork was provided via PDF, it can be reproduced for future uses, including brochures and online postings whereby the website visitors can zoom (screenshot) a specific portion of the map so it is legible. He suggested the construction of additional pedestal signs, possibly made of cinderblock, could serve as an Eagle Scout project.

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**Liaison Reports**

**Governing Body**
Councilman Barad said the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, is preparing guidelines to ensure optimal communication between Closter’s various boards and commissions.

Chairman MacDonald stated the Borough would be convening a Joint Meeting sometime in October to discuss various land use topics without formal action being taken. Councilman Barad explained that the original intent was to have such a gathering bi-annually but has been occurring only once every couple of years. He said a Joint Meeting was being scheduled now because the Planning Board would be reexamining the Master Plan next year, the Closter Plaza shopping center redevelopment is entering its final stages and the Borough is finalizing 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); given such pressing issues, he felt the Joint Meeting must convene no later than October being little progress could be expected during the holiday season.

Speaking of affordable housing, Councilman Barad explained a trial judge would adjudicate Closter’s obligation following conclusion of the ongoing negotiations between the Borough and...
housing advocacy group(s) on the number of units it must provide. He noted some municipalities are proposing overlays for zoning districts which allow/encourage developers to construct housing units if certain bulk requirements are met. Ultimately, he said the Borough must produce a plan ensuring units would be realized within a 10- or 20-year timeframe, and providing a significant number in a short period indicates good faith by Closter to the trial judge. Councilman Barad opined the stated goals of affordable housing are understandable but the means by which New Jersey is implementing such are unreasonable and, to some extent, benefit developers more than those truly deserving of housing. Mr. Isaacson stated the density of a municipality matters and Closter cannot, unlike rural areas, sustain such a housing need. Councilman Barad replied a counterargument would be that people need to be close to public transportation, not the boondocks, to travel to/from places of employment.

Planning Board
In light of Ms. Heymann’s absence, no report was given.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)
In response to Chairman MacDonald, Councilman Barad stated both the STC’s Chairman (Nils Abate) and administrative support (Leslie Weatherly) maintain a database of tree plantings on Borough land. Chairman MacDonald said there had been several fruit trees recently planted on Columbus Avenue just south of Durie Avenue (possibly outside the Borough’s right-of-way). Councilman Barad stated many pear trees were planted throughout the Borough a few decades ago. He noted STC member and landscaper, Todd Bradbury, has been providing much of the plantings in the recent past and the STC has approved its upcoming autumn planting schedule, which he agreed to forward to the Commission. Chairman MacDonald agreed it was wise to plant short trees when utility lines are of concern but stressed it is vital to have majestic trees line the thoroughfares whenever possible. Councilman Barad informed that the STC had a request by the new property owner of 200 Closter Dock Road to remove a tree in the downtown area because it would block signage for her future tenant. Mr. Colwell revealed there are several overgrown trees along High Street which encroach upon the sidewalk. In response, Councilman Barad said the STC’s pruning season is in the autumn as well and suggested he contact Ms. Weatherly about abating the overgrowth. He said public utilities often prune vegetation without care for the appearance afterward.

Mac Bain Farm
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, replanted the fallen tree that recently damaged a picnic table, hoping it would take root.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said Mr. Mc Caffrey has not seen deer on-site since Dimick Fence Co. completed the ongoing fence rehabilitation on-site. She said the final adjustment made was the installation of chicken wire at the top of the southwestern section of fencing to bring its height up to 6’, noting the overgrown vines at the northeastern corner would remain since they serve as a natural barrier against the deer. Councilman Barad agreed to endorse that final payment be given to the contractor; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg believed Dimick Fence Co. provided service above and beyond what was called for in his contract. Councilman Barad stated the Borough’s last audit revealed it has been lacking oversight when confirming that a product/service has been satisfactorily provided prior to paying a vendor.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stressed the need for more Farm volunteers, and she said Ms. Heymann recently spent 5 hours staking tomatoes. While Eagle Scouts have done projects for the Farm such as installing a patio, and she hoped they could build a shed in the near future, she felt their talent should not be wasted on more menial tasks such as weeding. She said non-resident
volunteers are offered picking privileges. In response to Mr. Lopez, she informed the Farm’s official tax record address is 189 Hickory Lane but its mailing address is 203.

**Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the contract with local painting contractor, Michael Pisano, to become caretaker of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) has been finalized, but the rehabilitation of the site cannot commence until an historic preservation plan has been prepared by the architectural firm retained by the Borough; she noted basic yardwork and cleaning of the interior could occur in the meantime.

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**New Business**

There were no new topics discussed.

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**Plan Review**

**Zoning Board of Adjustment**

91 RUCKMAN ROAD: This is an application for Use Variance Approval involving the tenancy by a children’s indoor swimming instruction establishment within a mixed-use building. The Commission made the following comments: 1.) refrain from planting pear trees and select hardwood species such as pin oak and honey locust; 2.) indicate where swimming pool water would be drained to if necessary; 3.) consider retaining portion of pervious surfaces proposed for removal.

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**Adjournment**

Mr. Isaacson said there are those who feel the dedication/naming of open space (both active and inactive parks) should be reserved for those killed while serving in the military; he, however, suggested the field located at the southeastern corner of Closter Dock Road and Piermont Road known as Pollack Square, be planted with trees which can be named after deserving people. Furthermore, he stated because Third Street abuts the parcel, the Borough could improve the paper street to a commuter parking lot for those utilizing the bus route along Piermont Road.

Mr. Colwell inquired about the status of proclamations he drafted (and emailed to Ms. Heymann) honoring former Commission members Brenda Cummings, Sivert Hagen and Arthur Goldberg; he noted he did not complete Mr. Goldberg’s because he was not privy to his background. Councilman Barad suggested Councilwoman Victoria Amitai be contacted given she was very close to the deceased. Chairman MacDonald promised to follow-up on the matter.

Mr. Isaacson said it is rumored New York-operated park(s) were considering placing mountain lions within its grounds to eliminate the deer overpopulation, noting Fire Island once contemplated importing pumas being they are nocturnal and are not preyed upon. He also
believed bowhunting should be authorized on a limited basis with the venison being provided to the poor. Councilman Barad said contraceptive methods are quite expensive and meaningful reductions are slow to come by.

Mr. Colwell reiterated the Commission should utilize Google Docs and Google Sheets, web-based programs that allow multiple users to simultaneously prepare for events such as the upcoming Harvest Festival. Councilman Barad agreed, saying the Commission could create a calendar and others can then link to it and overlay their personal calendars onto it. The Commission decided the Festival would be held on October 14th at Mac Bain Farm. Mr. Isaacson felt a suggested donation should be asked of guests to help fund a future Farm project or event. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that such was done at prior Festival and $200.00 was raised (with that amount being matched by the Borough) for the purpose of planting blueberry bushes on-site but Mr. Mc Caffrey had yet to do so. She stressed the need to ensure there would be enough pumpkins for the event either originating from the Farm and/or another source. Councilman Barad said that frost impacts the vine but not the pumpkin. Mr. Isaacson mentioned a church located in the Borough of Cresskill routinely offers a very large amount of pumpkins for sale to the public annually and should be contacted; otherwise, he noted D’Amico Flower Farm (460 Demarest Avenue), Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane) or Mr. Mc Caffrey’s farm located in western New Jersey are options as well. He highly recommended that small-sized pumpkins be acquired.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:59pm. The motion passed unanimously.