Environmental Commission

June 20, 2017
Meeting

Minutes

Prepared by:
Paul Demarest
Ms. Heymann called to order, at 7:37pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, June 20, 2017 at Borough Hall.

2017 Reorganization

Oath of Office
Associate Member: Steven Lopez
(New 1-Year Term Expires December 31, 2017)
*Appointed*

Attendance

Present
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
David Barad, MD- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member

Absent
Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison

Miscellaneous

Due to the absence of Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Heymann chaired the meeting for this evening.

The Commission postponed votes to approve the minutes for both the February 21, 2017 meeting and May 16, 2017 meeting until the July 18, 2017 meeting.

Ms. Heymann opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Shucai Zhu, 26 Cedar Court, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He stated he has resided in the Borough for 5 years and he is a chemical engineer who was recently employed with Suez North America Co. in its waste water treatment facility. He expressed interest in becoming a Commission member.
Old Business

 Trails
Mr. Isaacson informed that a final draft of the Borough’s revised trail map, which he previously emailed to the Commission, is essentially complete. He urged the Commission to concentrate on digitizing the map to allow for trail users to access it via mobile devices using Global Positioning System (GPS)-based mapping or print it from a computer. Mr. Lopez questioned if the Google Maps service could be asked to label the Borough’s trail system; Ms. Heymann replied such is not likely given it is not a large enough area, but Councilman Barad said an overlay system may be an option.

Mr. Isaacson stated there may be opposition to naming the trail traveling through a conservation easement owned by Temple Emanu-El of Closter (180 Piermont Road) after the late former Commission member, Arthur Goldberg, given the contentious history between the 2 parties. He questioned if the dedication should take place without the Temple’s blessing. Ms. Heymann clarified that most of the land within said easement is owned by the Temple except for Hartford Boulevard (paper street) and a 4,000 sf landlocked parcel that is privately-owned; she stressed, however, that by state fiat, the Borough has a right to use the easement, noting the trail section in question dissects Hartford Boulevard but does not enter the private lot. Ms. Heymann also stated the Temple as a whole does not object to the dedication, merely 1 of its members who was recently in litigation with the Borough. She suggested said trail name should be indicated on the revised map in the up section of the white-blazed trail traveling through Buzzoni Farm Park. Mr. Isaacson said a sign can be installed at Ruckman Park indicating the trail section is named for Mr. Goldberg.

Mr. Isaacson believed the revised trail map should remain as 1 large image, not having close-up detail for particular trailheads. He believed an optimal approach would be to have “YOU ARE HERE” indicated on the map with an “X” at the locations of the pedestal signs having trail maps atop their posts. He said the selected sign manufacturer, Fossil Industries, Inc., would provide an actual size printout of the map to the Commission to evaluate its legibility beforehand. In the meantime, he said a vendor he utilizes as part of his own print and graphic design business could make a vinyl copy of the map for the Commission’s consideration.

Ms. Heymann reminded that there are no funds remaining from the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough in 2014 to pay for the trail maps and associated signage. Councilman Barad promised to discuss the funding issue with the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson. Mr. Isaacson offered to obtain 4 vinyl copies of the trail map from his vendor to install atop the pedestal signs, which should survive the weather elements for 1 year until the permanent map signage is available. Ms. Heymann said the Commission had hoped to install an additional 3 pedestal signs at other trailheads to supplement the 4 existing. Mr. Isaacson said he would provide a rendering of the vinyl option at the July 18, 2017 meeting. The Commission thanked Mr. Isaacson for spearheading the trail map and signage project.

 Mac Bain Farm
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she, along with Ms. Heymann and longtime Farm volunteer, Mary Mayer, recently asked the Governing Body to expedite the selection of a fence contractor, preferably Dimick Fence Co., to complete the ongoing fence rehabilitation on-site. Ms. Heymann revealed that Mr. Dolson assured her the matter would be resolved immediately; she noted the urgency by informing that deer had already begun feeding on the bean and pea crops.
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg requested that the Commission provide the Farm with a petty cash fund of $100.00 for incidental/small purchases such as picking buckets, paint, writing utensils, scissors, etc.; she noted such an allowance was precedent in years past.

A motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Councilman Barad, to establish a petty cash fund in the amount of $100.00 for purchase of incidental items by Mac Bain Farm volunteers. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said both Ms. Heymann and Ms. Kuperman have been supervising 4 student volunteers assigned to the Farm as part of this year’s high school senior service program.

Councilman Barad said he recently viewed the fence on-site with John McCaffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm and noticed the upper wired portion in certain sections as well as some gates needed repair, though its overall condition was not as bad as he expected. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reiterated that the deer are entering the Farm by going under and over the fence; she noted that proper specifications have been provided to establish an accurate cost for the job. She suggested a periodic inspection schedule be established for the selected fence contractor to evaluate for repairs ahead of the planting season to avoid crop loss. Councilman Barad said he was under the impression the fence rehabilitation project has been prolonged mainly because of the contractor selection process as well as defining a scope of work. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg acknowledged the Commission hoped Dimick Fence Co. would have completed its work last December, noting Mr. Dolson was informed such repairs had been authorized in years past. Councilman Bard stated the contract between the Borough and Mr. McCaffrey is not clear in stipulating which party is responsible for such repairs. Ms. Heymann revealed that former Borough Administrator, Erik Lenander, was asked to peruse said contract and he felt Clauses #’s 17 and 38 indicate the Borough (landlord), not Mr. McCaffrey (tenant), would be responsible for the fence project; Councilman Barad disagreed, saying the contract requires a lot of interpretation to come to such a conclusion. He suggested the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, and the Commission form a committee to ensure the proper verbiage is used. While he did not believe the Borough intended to do so, Councilman Barad said the strict reading of the contract reflects Mr. McCaffrey is responsible for all repairs. He said the document contains words such as “maintain” and “improve” so to protect the Borough from such responsibilities; he noted that is a wrong approach for a Borough- owned property and the contract should state what has been practiced since Mr. McCaffrey has resided on-site. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that the Borough repaved the Farm’s driveway last year. Councilman Barad stated the original contract was written 17 years ago and much has been learned since then through the Borough’s relationship with Mr. Mc Caffrey.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that an irrigation system is necessary at the Farm. She remembered that several years ago, the Commission retained an architect to design a barn with various green elements to be installed on-site, but the project went over budget. As an alternative, she said it contemplated acquiring an historic barn slated for demolition and having it relocated to the Farm, but that also proved to be too expensive. Ms. Heymann explained there was disagreement as to the placement of a barn and whether such was the best use of farmland. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said Mr. McCaffrey lobbied for the barn so his farm equipment could be stored indoors; Ms. Heymann said he offered to construct the barn himself, noting there are still logs on-site for that purpose. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg concurred, saying he hoped to have a barn raising.

Ms. Heymann said the 4 students assigned to the Farm, as part of this year’s high school senior service program have completed their volunteerism; she commended their effort in improving
the appearance of the Farm’s front fields. She said while it is quite an improvement from last year, the subject area only accounts for 10% of the land that requires ongoing maintenance. She requested more volunteers to weed, hoe, pick, mentor and monitor. Mr. Isaacson suggested the Commission solicit volunteers via local Facebook pages such as The Closter Black Book and Are You From Closter? Ms. Heymann noted that those volunteers under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg promised to post signage advertising such at both the Closter Public Library and Nature Center. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the Farm reopens to the public on July 12th. She reminded that a fallen apple tree remains lying atop a picnic table on-site; Ms. Heymann replied the tree as is would not survive replanting unless 1 of its limbs was sawed off. She stated the tomatoes have been staked and tied, in part, and lettuce, kale as well as parsley are ready for picking. Ms. Heymann said she would be available for training volunteers. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg hoped Mr. Colwell could repair the shed on-site as a temporary measure until a new 1 is built by Eagle Scout volunteers.

Liaison Reports

**Governing Body**
Councilman Barad said a private entity recently spoke with Mr. Dolson about moving forward with converting the essentially-decommissioned rail line operated by CSX Transportation Co. that travels through the downtown area into walking trails; he said the group is small in scale and requires better organization to acquire grant money and interact with other municipalities in an official capacity. He explained the railroad has a right-of-way that is 50’ to 60’ in some areas, which would accommodate both bicycle and walking paths. Ms. Heymann suggested Commission members visit Oak Tree Road in Orangetown, New York, which is the nearest location to Closter where a successful rails-to-trails conversion had occurred. While Closter had sought the conversion for years, Councilman Barad said the railroad is now open to the idea.

**Planning Board**
Ms. Heymann said there were no new matters to discuss.

**Shade Tree Commission (STC)**
In the absence of a STC Liaison being assigned to the Commission by the Governing Body, no report was given. Councilman Barad said the STC is still seeking to fill 3 vacancies and pondered if an Environmental Commission member would serve on the STC, thereby filling its own STC Liaison vacancy in the process.

**Green Team**
Ms. Heymann said the recent Borough-wide cleaning/recycling effort was more successful than last year’s. She opined the event was held too late in the season this year and suggested the planning for 2018 be finalized no later than February.

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

New Business
Ms. Heymann said the 4 volunteers from the high school senior student program also assisted Kevin Riley with his trail maintenance project and learned how to install boardwalks. She said Mr. Riley was willing to mentor the students only if he were compensated; Ms. Heymann said she arranged for him to be paid for 100 hours at an hourly rate of $25.00 via the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough in 2014. As a result, she informed that Mr. Riley worked with the students in the morning before they went to Mac Bain Farm in the afternoon. She noted that the students covered the fields at the Farm with fine sawdust, provided by Mr. McCaffrey, as an organic alternative to mulch.

**Plan Review**

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

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**Adjournment**

Ms. Heymann reiterated the need for volunteers at Mac Bain Farm. She reminded that the Farm is open for picking starting in July until the end of the growing season from 9:00am to 6:00pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. She said mentors are needed during such time to prevent public abuse of the Farm. She stated the Farm is open to the general public but picking is reserved for Closter residents only, noting a group/family can pick 1 bucket full of crops per day.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Mr. Lopez, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35pm. The motion passed unanimously.