Environmental Commission

May 16, 2017
Meeting
Minutes

Prepared by:
Paul Demarest
Mr. Isaacson called to order, at 7:38pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, May 16, 2017 at Borough Hall.

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Attendance

Present
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Absent
Paul MacDonald- Chairman
David Barad, MD- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison

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Miscellaneous

Due to the absence of Chairman MacDonald, Mr. Isaacson chaired the meeting for this evening.

The Commission postponed a vote to approve the minutes for the February 21, 2017 meeting until the June 20, 2017 meeting.

Mr. Isaacson opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Steven Lopez, 89 Union Street, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself.

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Old Business

Trails
Mr. Isaacson hoped a draft of the Borough’s revised trail map would be ready for the Commission’s review later this week; he explained that his print and graphic design business, in collaboration with colleagues in India, has been updating the map. He revealed that local graphic artist, Timothy Blunk, had been retained by the Commission, but he did not proceed with the map project. Mr. Isaacson opined that the legend on the map could be eliminated because the symbols for trails, bridges, etc. are obvious. Once the Commission approves of the draft, he said the sign manufacturer, Fossil Industries, Inc., can produce the map signs having a pressure-treated laminate, and 10-year guarantee, which would replace those that are weather-beaten atop pedestals located at certain trailheads; he hoped there would still be funding available for such through the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough in
2014. Mr. Isaacson said the existing pedestal signs have an adhesive-backed vinyl with a laminate film atop the maps.

During his review of the existing trail maps, Mr. Isaacson said he was displeased with the lack of uniformity relating to trail blazes; for example, he said Mollicone Park has an orange blaze for a trail in its center with black blazes for 4 trails that link to the thoroughfare.

**Mac Bain Farm**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she recently inquired with the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, about the status of having the fence rehabilitation completed on-site. She noted this past December she walked the areas in question with Dimick Fence Co., which performed much of the necessary work. She noted, however, that despite being informed the threshold for public bidding was $6,000.00 (the Dimick Fence Co. estimate was for less), the Mayor’s office contacted her and said 2nd quote would be required for the project. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg hoped Dimick Fence Co. would be selected again because its workmanship has been exceptional and it provided additional services above and beyond what was specified in its contract with the Borough. Mr. Isaacson noted that the public bidding system in New Jersey requires that a government entity select the lowest bidder. Despite assistance from the Mayor’s office to acquire a 2nd quote, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg expressed concern that the issue would not be handled while she is on vacation over the next few weeks; in response, Ms. Kuperman and Mr. Colwell offered to monitor the situation in her absence.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said John McCaffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, has not been able to supervise the 4 student volunteers assigned to the Farm, as part of this year’s high school senior service program, due to work obligations; as a result, she said she led them in cleaning up brush in the southern portion of the trail on-site. She said once the northern portion of the trail is cleaned, the students would paint the buckets used by visitors for crop picking while policing the fence for deer infiltration. Ms. Kuperman agreed to provide supervision on May 22nd when Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Ms. Heymann are both unavailable.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed that an apple tree recently fell at the Farm, with its root ball now exposed, damaged the nearby picnic table and likely cannot be replanted. She hoped Mr. McCaffrey would remove the tree and have it replaced. She suggested planting a new tree, installing a tent or building a pavilion or arbor to regain a source of shade that the fallen tree provided for both visitors and volunteers. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg also informed that the existing shed needs to be replaced no later than July, especially since Gary and Mary Mayer, longtime Farm volunteers who have utilized their garage (12 Mc Cain Court) to store many Farm items, are moving out of Closter. She said such a purchase could be funded with open space money, noting the initial proposal was to have a new shed built by Eagle Scouts but no interest was shown. Mr. Colwell interjected, saying the Eagle Scouts already had obligations for 2017 but believed 2018 would be a possibility; in the meantime, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked Mr. Colwell to repair the existing shed.

**2017 Northern Valley Earth Fair**

Mr. Isaacson stated he along with Ms. Kuperman, Ms. Abrams and Mr. Colwell assisted at the Fair and despite the inclement weather, the event was quite enjoyable and successful. While it is difficult to determine the number in attendance, he said he heard estimates of 700 to 1,000 people were present between 11:00am and 4:00pm. Mr. Isaacson said having use of the gymnasium at Tenakill Middle School was very beneficial given the weather as well as the plethora of children activities. He said planning for next year’s Fair has already begun with the Borough of Demarest tentatively hosting the event at Northern Valley Regional High School, including its grounds, cafeteria, library and gymnasium. Mr. Colwell commended the amount of
vendors and food options that were present at the Fair. Ms. Kuperman appreciated the competitions between students; Mr. Isaacson agreed and said such should be expanded in 2018 to include adults partaking in photography contests, etc., as is done by the Nature Center. He stressed that a large portion of the public want to assist in helping the environment but do not know what/how to do such and, therefore, an event like the Fair serves that purpose, noting the event’s slogan is “Think Global. Act Local.” He further commented that he read a news article earlier today about an uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean that has had 38,000,000 pieces of garbage wash upon its beaches; Mr. Colwell noted the article included a photograph showing how crab had taken permanent shelter within a plastic bottle cap.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed she got positive feedback when she recently spoke with the new chairperson of the Environmental Commission in the Borough of Norwood about the municipality linking its trail system with Closter’s. Mr. Isaacson said a main objective should be to replace a destroyed/washed away cooperative bridge near Blanch Avenue; he noted that monies earmarked for such in the past were apparently diverted by Norwood elsewhere. He explained that due to the steep elevations in the area in and around Dwars Kill, a bridge project would be very expensive. He reminded that another bridge exists in the vicinity.

Liaison Reports

**Governing Body**

Mr. Isaacson stated representatives from East Coast Greenway were present at the recent Northern Valley Earth Fair, and he explained there is an effort to convert the essentially-decommissioned rail line operated by CSX Transportation Co. that travels through the downtown area into walking trails. He said the railroad plans to transform a section of the line into light rail transit as part of the Northern Branch Corridor Project, which would come as far north as Englewood Hospital and Medical Center; he hoped that from there the line could be made into trails and ultimately linked with those in Sparkill, New York. Mr. Isaacson said there was also mention of allotting a period of time in the mornings and afternoons for a sort of electric vehicle to transport commuters along the converted rail line to stations using the pathway of the trails.

Mr. Colwell said he made contact with a representative of the Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization (MEVO) who is willing to speak with the Board of Health about easing its regulations on beekeeping. Mr. Isaacson reminded what led to the Board adopting such a restrictive ordinance was a complaint filed with the Health Officer by a resident on Mc Cain Court who feared hives located at nearby Mac Bain Farm would present a danger to the neighborhood. He further commented that the public does not realize the difference between honey bees and hornets/yellow jackets/wasps, noting the latter are prevalent at active parks in Closter where they hover around the garbage containers filled with soda cans, candy wrappers, etc. Mr. Isaacson said a beekeeper who operates a nursery in Rockland County, New York and was featured in the documentary, Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us?, is certain people should not fear the honey bee so much so that he recently built a hive on the grounds of a private school. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that the Commission attempted to obtain approval to have hives at Buzzoni Farm Park, which was rejected by the Health Department. Mr. Colwell said the Board is adamant that a very large area requirement, water and electric sources are necessary for beehives to exist safely in the Borough.

**Planning Board**

Due to Ms. Heymann’s absence, 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.

Green Team
Due to Ms. Heymann’s absence, there were no new matters discussed.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed that a firm based in Albany, New York has been retained to prepare guidelines for what must be done to the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) to retain its historical accuracy.

She mentioned the HPC is also writing a nomination report to designate 511 Durie Avenue, the former Village Middle School, as a historic landmark in response to potential redevelopment of the site.

She said the nomination report for designating Mac Bain Farm as such has been adopted by the HPC; as for the reports on Blanch Avenue and Hickory Lane, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that they will be revisited soon with the former being dedicated to the late, Arthur Goldberg, a former Commission member. She explained Blanch Avenue would be presented merely as recognition due to concern expressed by Lupardi’s Nursery, Inc. (75 Blanch Avenue) on how a nomination would create restrictions and hardship; she noted historic markers would be installed at either end of Blanch Avenue.

Mr. Isaacson stated that several years ago Norwood wished to vacate all of Blanch Avenue and incorporate it into its woodlands to be maintained by the Meadowlands Conservation Trust; he said the measure was to be taken to prevent the use of motor vehicles in the area. In response, he said a group of Borough officials, including him, used Mr. Goldberg’s knowledge that the thoroughfare had been a vital farm road with significant transport importance during the 18th century as means to convince Norwood to vacate all of Blanch Avenue except a 6’ wide strip.

New Business
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested the Commission honor the departing Mayers for their years of service to the community by naming the trail located in Mac Bain Farm in their honor. Mr. Colwell opined a crop field could be named in their honor. Mr. Isaacson suggested a replacement for the fallen apple tree at the Farm be dedicated to them, noting the couple already has 2 trails located in the Nature Center named after them. The Commission tentatively-chose to have a replacement tree in Mac Bain Farm dedicated to the Mayers; it discussed possibly purchasing a mature tree being removed by a property owner and replanting it as a way of preserving a healthy tree. The Commission liked the idea of not having to several wait years for a small/non-established tree to mature and provide badly-needed shade on-site.

Mr. Colwell updated that he is still preparing a proclamation in honor of Sivert Hagen and Brenda Cummings, both recent Commission members who are relocating to Washington.

Plan Review

Planning Board
92 MAC ARTHUR AVENUE: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the new construction of a 1-family house and in-ground swimming pool. The Commission made the following comments: 1.) clarify if sidewalk is to be installed; 2.) clarify if Shade Tree Commission is to replace trees in Borough’s right-of-way; 3.) provide proposed landscape plan; 4.) indicate proposed layout and material of driveway.

Adjournment

Being the Commission had not convened since the passing of Mr. Goldberg (it did not have a quorum for its March 21, 2017 and April 18, 2017 meetings), Mr. Colwell believed it should properly honor the deceased at its June 20, 2017 meeting. Mr. Isaacson felt the trail located in the conservation easement by Buzzoni Farm Park should be dedicated to him and the trail within Buzzoni Farm Park should be named after Ms. Heymann because each were instrumental in said trails being established; he also thought if a new bridge is constructed at Blanch Avenue, it could be dedicated to Mr. Goldberg. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reiterated the pollinator garden located in Buzzoni Farm Park should be named in honor of William Dahle, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works, in appreciation of his assistance with its creation.

Mr. Isaacson said it was important for the HPC to create a program that entices children to learn about the history of Closter’s 300-year history, especially since most families residing in the Borough are transplants and do not have family lineage rooted in it. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg replied the HPC had engaged the local school system through efforts by the Borough historian, Orlando Tobia. Mr. Isaacson suggested Closter should establish a day to celebrate history as the Borough of Harrington Park did when it recently commemorated the 100th anniversary of Camp Merritt in the Borough of Cresskill being activated for World War I. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted while Closter does not have an active historic society, its Commission is 1 of the most active in the New York metropolitan area.

Having served earlier this year on the subcommittee that organized the Northern Valley Earth Fair, Mr. Colwell asked the Commission to take advantage of Google Docs and Google Sheets, web-based programs that allow multiple users to simultaneously prepare for all sorts of tasks, events, etc. He believed the Commission’s various events, such as the Fair, Harvest Festival and Borough-wide cleaning/recycling effort, can be planned more efficiently if such was utilized. Mr. Isaacson agreed, saying it provided the Fair organizers a record of past practices in terms of participation, logistics, payments, supplies, etc.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to adjourn the meeting at 8:44pm. The motion passed by acclamation.