Environmental Commission

September 19, 2017
Meeting

Minutes

Prepared by:
Paul Demarest
Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:40pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, September 19, 2017 at Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present
Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
David Barad, MD- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member

Absent
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison

Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to approve the minutes for the August 15, 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.

Connor Goranson, 492 High Street, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself as a Life Scout for Troop 63 in the Boy Scouts of America organization. He reminisced about him and his family picking crops at Mac Bain Farm. As a low-maintenance project to fulfill Scout requirements, Mr. Goranson proposed to install an herb spiral garden in the southwestern corner of the Farm as well as a new patio by the fallen apple tree and picnic table on-site. He explained that herbs grown at the Farm are currently exposed to the same amount of sunlight and water in spite of each type having different needs to thrive; he said the spiral addresses such. He stressed minimal watering is required and weeding is vastly easier than with herbs planted in rows. With respect to the proposed patio, Mr. Goranson said it would be ‘10’x10’ in area for use by Farm volunteers and to hold gatherings for classes, etc. He estimated the total project would cost $1,050.00, which could be collected through fundraising via sales of soup, hot beverages and desserts prepared by Scout parents during Borough events such as the upcoming Harvest Festival; he noted any excess proceeds would be donated to the Farm.
Chairman MacDonald advised that the Health Department be contacted for any prior approval relating to food/drink sales to the public; he explained there had been an issue with the sale of ice cream at this year’s Northern Valley Earth Fair. Mr. Isaacson concurred, saying the vendors had to obtain permit(s) and pass inspection prior to the event. Mr. Colwell noted that the garden and patio fundraising would be in the form of donations as is often undertaken by the Nature Center, not sales for profit as was the case with the Fair. In response to Ms. Heymann, Mr. Goranson said beforehand he discussed planting annuals and perennials with the Farm’s caretaker and resident, John Mc Caffrey, given there are herbs already on-site. Ms. Heymann opined there is no need for another patio on-site, noting the Farm volunteers deserve a shaded area/place of shelter to replace the replanted apple tree that likely will not survive; she noted a gazebo was recently built by Eagle Scouts for the Senior Citizens’ Center. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg agreed, believing Mr. Goranson would have been better served to discuss his project first with the Commission, not Mr. Mc Caffrey. She and Ms. Heymann suggested the shed on-site be repaired or replaced altogether. As a compromise, Mr. Lopez felt a pergola or trellis with hanging baskets containing herbs and vines could provide the lacking shade. Given the time/effort invested by Mr. Goranson and being he was misguided through no fault of his own, Mr. Colwell suggested the Commission approve of his proposal and require that the next Scout project address the Farm’s shortage of shade/shelter; he emphasized that the Boy Scouts of America organization could reject a change in design. Ms. Heymann pointed out she had been a Girl Scout leader for 12 years and wants Mr. Goranson to be successful.

Andrew Baron, DDS, 90 Durie Avenue, Closter, New Jersey introduced himself as a Scout leader and asked if the Commission would approve of a patio with a pergola atop it; the Commission answered in the affirmative. Dr. Baron indicated the project must be completed by this coming spring. Instead of fundraising, Mr. Isaacson asked if the monies for such a project could derive from open space taxes given it involves the improvement of a Borough park. Mr. Isaacson reasoned that the Commission would be asking for donations at the 2017 Harvest Festival because the cost of putting on the event is expensive (pumpkins, etc.) and those collections should benefit the Farm solely. Dr. Baron pointed out that fundraising is not mandatory for Mr. Goranson’s project. By utilizing open space monies, Mr. Isaacson said Mr. Goranson can focus exclusively on the project, not raising money. Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Ms. Heymann agreed to advise Mr. Goranson on the patio and pergola project moving forward to avoid miscommunication. Ms. Heymann informed that the use of open space funds is ongoing (occurring throughout the calendar year), but noted obtaining approval is much more involved at the state and county levels than at the municipal; she believed such a project is a good candidate for the Governing Body to approve of building materials being paid for through open space.

Old Business

Trails
Ms. Heymann stated she recently obtained a plan depicting the improvement of Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park that dates back to 2006; she distributed a copy to the Commission, noting it pre-dates the construction of Scholz Bridge.

Mr. Isaacson distributed a copy the last-revised trail map; he reminded that 5 pedestal signs were ordered from Fossil Industries, Inc. but only 3 locations are slated for an installation. He said a banner showcasing the revised map will be posted at Mac Bain Farm during the upcoming Harvest Festival to promote the trail system. Ms. Heymann informed that 2 blazes were recently installed along a trail link at Anderson Avenue. Mr. Isaacson reiterated his
suggestion to have Pollack Square enhanced by installing benches and walking paths as well as having trees planted in honor of local volunteers in conjunction with Third Street (unimproved portion adjacent to Square) being converted to a commuter parking lot, a project long-contemplated by the Borough.

**Harvest Festival**

Mr. Isaacson said the Improvement Commission would be overseeing storytelling activities during the Festival, including a few non-English speakers. He felt Mr. Mc Caffrey should be asked to make his beehives at Mac Bain Farm available to the Festival patrons.

Upon Mr. Isaacson’s showing of the postcards he produced to advertise the 2017 Festival, Ms. Heymann stated 3 quotes were sought by the Commission for the postcards; she mentioned that if the cost exceeded $5,000.00, public bidding would be required as per New Jersey regulations. She stated Mr. Isaacson’s quote was the least of the 3, but the Borough is making a concerted effort to improve its financial practices as per the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson. She noted that because Mr. Isaacson is both a Commission member and vendor in this instance, a conflict of interest was created by him participating in the selection process. To address the conflict, Ms. Heymann proposed the Commission again seek 3 quotes without Mr. Isaacson’s input, though he may submit a quote. Mr. Isaacson clarified the cost involved is a mere $100.00 and questioned if the funds can be via the Commission’s budget, bypassing the quote process altogether; Ms. Heymann replied in the affirmative as to the payment method, but said the choosing of a vendor is where the conflict was created.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Councilman Barad, for the Commission to obtain 3 quotes for the production of postcards advertising the 2017 Harvest Festival. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Isaacson abstaining.

With the Borough becoming more stringent with its financial procedures, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked how arduous previously simple and insignificant purchases will become. Ms. Heymann replied if a vendor has a Certificate of Business Information issued by the State of New Jersey, the process is quick. She believed quotes would not be required for purchases considered to be petty, though she did not know the maximum dollar amount. Councilman Barad explained the postcard purchase highlighted the potential for low-bidding by a vendor that is privy to bids already filed. Ms. Heymann said, ultimately, a purchase order must be generated by the Borough for everything it buys. Mr. Isaacson informed he has produced the Festival postcards for the past 8 years. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg felt the Commission should establish a petty cash fund in the amount of $500.00 to avoid future problems. In its 2016 audit, Councilman Barad revealed the Borough was cited for not properly tracking its purchases. Ms. Heymann said the Borough is intending to have all purchasing conducted by Borough employees only; she said Paul Demarest, who prepares the minutes of the Commission’s meetings, could be asked to do so. She stated all Borough boards and commissions are supposed to advertise their chosen vendors before the convening of their meetings to have full public disclosure. Mr. Isaacson questioned how the collection of suggested donations at the upcoming Festival should be handled given the Commission members are volunteers.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated it is important to inform Hickory Lane and Mc Cain Court residents, along with the Police Department, about the upcoming Festival to prepare for any traffic concerns that may arise. Mr. Isaacson said fliers can be distributed and both Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Ms. Kuperman agreed to bring them to the residences.

Ms. Heymann informed that the house located at Mac Bain Farm is in need of its pillars being repaired. She said Mr. Dolson and the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., believe such to
be the responsibility of the tenant, Mr. Mc Caffrey, who in turn believes it is the Borough’s. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) recently nominated said house, built in 1932, as a Historic Landmark but the Governing Body has yet to consider its designation. Mr. Isaacson inquired if the house repair could be paid for through open space funds; Ms. Heymann believed it could, but Mr. Dolson and Mr. Mc Caffrey are not in agreement. Councilman Barad said the issue of whose responsible arises because the contract between the Borough and Mr. Mc Caffrey is ambiguous; he reminded that the recent fence rehabilitation on-site was delayed, in part, due to the need to clarify which party was responsible. He agreed to draft a memo to the Governing Body requesting the lease agreement between the Borough and Mr. Mc Caffrey be amended (not extended) to prevent future disagreements, with an emphasis on the urgency to repair the house’s pillars; he noted the existing 10-year contract expires in 1 to 2 years.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body
Councilman Barad said the Borough would be acquiring 511 Durie Avenue, site of the abandoned Village Middle School, with the intention of converting the building to affordable housing units while preserving the structure; he noted the action is part of the Borough’s preparation 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 revealed that said proposal received positive feedback from both the trial judge from the Superior Court of New Jersey (Law Division) assigned to Closter for reviewing of its housing plan as well as from the advocacy group, Fair Share Housing Center.

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

Shade Tree Commission (STC)
Councilman Barad said the STC’s autumn plantings would soon begin. He informed that 1 of the 3 vacant seat on the STC has been filled (appointee was not named). Chairman MacDonald said he admired the honey locust located on the grounds of Tenakill Middle School and was glad the STC approved the species as a planting option; he noted it is beautiful and produces tiny leaflets requiring little maintenance. Councilman Barad revealed the 2017 autumn planting schedule includes the white oak, red maple (official State Tree of New Jersey), London plane, Chinese elm, Persian ironwood, Ohio buckeye and Okame cherry.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said a historic preservation plan for the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) has been received from the architectural firm retained by the Borough; once reviewed, she promised to report on the proposal at the Commission’s October 17, 2017 meeting.

Mac Bain Farm
Ms. Heymann stated she and Ms. Bouton-Goldberg recently witnessed fawns inside the recently-repaired fencing on-site; she said they likely entered the Farm by going underneath the fence rather than jumping over it. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said while Dimick Fence Co. did block
holes at ground level with bars, cement blocks and logs, it appears groundhogs are digging new holes as well as eating tremendous amounts of squash. Being such is a constant problem, she recommended the fence contractor be hired to inspect and repair the fencing on an annual basis.

Mr. Colwell said he created a profile with the web-based programs, Google Docs and Google Sheets so the Commission can be better organized in its preparation for the upcoming Harvest Festival and future events/tasks. While he electronically-invited all Commission members, only Mr. Isaacson and Councilman Barad inputted information. Mr. Isaacson said he would create a tab for a supply list for the Festival; Mr. Colwell said he inputted the need to notify both the Police Department and nearby residents to avoid traffic concerns as discussed this evening; he said he also created a tab indicating the Commission’s meeting schedule. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the Nature Center should be asked if their tables can be borrowed for the Festival and stated forsythia branches need to be cut and stripped to use for roasting marshmallows and making s’mores. Chairman MacDonald promised to distribute fliers and postcards to the Closter Public Library and local school system as well as have an article placed in the monthly newsletter issued by the Mayor’s office. Mr. Colwell said additional tabs could be created for contact information of the Commission’s roster and Farm volunteers. Mr. Isaacson said paint is needed for pumpkin art. Although Mr. Mc Caffrey was instructed not to grow pumpkins this year, Ms. Heymann said he did so anyway, but the Festival’s supply would be purchased. Chairman MacDonald said the home improvement retailer, The Home Depot, is selling sugar pumpkins for $3.98 each; Ms. Heymann said a lower cost can be found elsewhere. Chairman MacDonald said 300 small pumpkins would be necessary and he promised to contact Lupardi’s Nursery, Inc. as well as the Whole Foods Market and Stop & Shop supermarkets for pricing. He stated Whole Foods Market provided both apple cider and crates of apple for last year’s Festival. Mr. Isaacson said empty water jugs could be used to collect suggested donations. Councilman Barad promised to find out if a government entity can ask for donation; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that money was raised at a prior Festival for the purpose of buying/planting blueberry bushes at the Farm, which was never seen to fruition.

New Business

Tree Mitigation
Chairman MacDonald said the developer that recently purchased former Commission members Sivert Hagen and Brenda Cummings’ former residence (72 Eckerson Avenue) was proposing to remove 4 trees; he explained the Borough Code permits 2 tree removals per 24 months without a fee or mitigation being required. He said 2 of the 4 trees have a 36+” caliper measurement, while the others were deemed to be dead or diseased by the Borough’s Certified Tree Expert. He further stated that unless the tree in question is situated on Borough land, within 10’ of a thoroughfare or designated with landmark status, the STC does not have jurisdiction; he noted the health and/or size of the initial 2 tree removals is inconsequential as far as the issuance of a permit. He also said a tree removed from the footprint of a proposed building or driveway does not require mitigation. Ms. Heymann explained the Governing Body’s intent in writing the relevant ordinance was to refrain from overregulating residents’ private property; Councilman Barad concurred, saying the Borough Attorney advised too much oversight would not be enforceable.

- 6 -

Environmental Commission
September 19, 2017 Meeting
Minutes
Plan Review

Planning Board

11 WILLIS DRIVE: This is an application for Major Subdivision Approval involving the creation of 3 lots. The Commission had no comments.

32 RYERSON PLACE: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the new construction of a 1-family house. The Commission had no comments.

115 MAC ARTHUR AVENUE: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the new construction of a 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) provide mitigation for 12 proposed tree removals.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

91 RUCKMAN ROAD: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the tenancy by a children’s indoor swimming instruction establishment within a mixed-use building. The Commission made the following comments: 1.) indicate where swimming pool water would be drained to if necessary especially given patrons are solely children (accidental defecion); 2.) refrain from planting pear trees and select hardwood species such as pin oak and honey locust.

40 & 49 JOHN STREET: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the continuation of a contractor’s yard operation to supplement an existing 1-family house. The Commission had no comments.

51 & 63 JOHN STREET: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the continuation of a contractor’s yard operation to supplement an existing 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) clarify proposal.

Adjournment

Mr. Colwell stated he emailed to the Commission the proclamations he drafted honoring former Commission members Arthur Goldberg, Mr. Hagen and Ms. Cummings; he noted he did not complete Mr. Goldberg’s because he was not privy to his background.

Citing recent Association of New Jersey Environmental Commission (ANJEC) publications, Ms. Heymann said it is vital for Closter to emulate and gain ideas from other municipalities to implement and make the Borough more sustainable and attractive. She also recommended the Bergen County Parks Guide and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference as resources for brainstorming. She suggested Closter ban its merchants from using/selling Styrofoam-type items which are extremely detrimental to the environment; she believed such an initiative would not be difficult given many businesses are stopping the practice on their own volition. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said plastic bag usage should be regulated as is being done in the Township of Teaneck. Mr. Isaacson informed that the Department of Public Works facility does not provide a container for residents to recycle plastic bags. Mr. Lopez said while participating in this year’s Borough-wide cleaning/recycling effort, he noticed that Starbucks and Dunkin’ Donuts coffee cups were the items most found; he noted the use of corn starch and paper for
such containers are a far better approach. Ms. Kuperman said the local system recently informed parents about high levels of lead found in its water supply and advised students to bring bottled water to class. Mr. Isaacson said the conduits by which the lead travels must be determined, saying pipes/fixtures comprised of solder are the likely culprit. Councilman Barad said public access to testing must be offered, a task which can be undertaken by the Commission. Chairman MacDonald said the water service utility should be contacted about testing, and he stated he would reach out to both the Borough Engineer and Planning Board Chairman (Mark Maddaloni), who is a toxicologist with the United States Environmental Protection Agency, for guidance. Mr. Isaacson said the utility is responsible for the water quality up to a building’s meter and said it is very costly to retrofit structures; he said updated building codes eliminate the possibility of contamination in new construction. Regardless, he said he does not trust the safety of the public water supply, stating he buys 7-gallon jugs of spring water from a company (Tulpehocken Mountain Spring Water) operated by a Native American tribe.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Councilman Barad, to adjourn the meeting at 9:46pm. The motion passed unanimously.