



Environmental Commission

July 19, 2011

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

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Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:05pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, July 19, 2011 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Steven Isaacson
- Mary Mayer
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
- Adam Nock- Alternate #2
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Keith Scholz- Associate Member

Absent

- Brenda Cummings
- Arthur Goldberg, MD
- Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member



New Business

A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Mayer, to approve the minutes for the May 17, 2011 meeting; all eligible members present voted in favor; due to the Commission's poor attendance, it postponed a vote on the minutes for the June 21, 2011 meeting until the August 16, 2011 meeting.

John Mc Caffrey, resident and caretaker of Mac Bain Farm, stated he was prepared to both discuss how the Farm would be managed, planted, etc., during 2011 and field questions from the Commission. Ms. Mayer inquired about the make-up of fill currently being shaped in the saturated rear corner where compost was formerly stored and asked about Mr. Mc Caffrey's intentions for that area of the Farm. He replied it is basically bank-run; he elaborated that over several years (with the changes in climatic conditions along the entire Atlantic coast from tornadoes to severe winter storms), the Farm has experienced a few torrential rainstorms that resulted in erosion damage via high velocity of water originating from neighboring properties. He explained that contour plowing would not have prevented the volume of said rainwater. He revealed his approach to abate the erosion is similar to that of beaver dams, saying as water builds inside 1 dam, it slowly dissipates to the next and so on and so forth. He stated that the natural proven theory, in dealing with soil erosion, has worked quite well at the Farm. Mr. Mc Caffrey confirmed that he was preventing any debris from going into the brook running along the site by capturing it; he noted all the topsoil that came out of the lower area has been built up by a bulldozer. He revealed that there is an aquifer underneath the subject area causing its natural moisture. Ms. Mayer asked him to confirm the area he was speaking of was the lowest

point on Hickory Lane; he replied it was, adding that it is close to the stream bed where he removed the compost pile from and that it now serves as a retention area. He explained he stripped off the topsoil to redistribute it onto the Farm; he hoped to have plantings in the vicinity consist of vegetables, bamboo and whatever else is needed for the Farm. He felt the area should be reserved for collection of anything that originates from the Farm so that it can remain on-site and be recycled and redistributed. Mr. Mc Caffrey stated the parking area (from the driveway stretching from the gate to the back section) is in need of a top dressing; he wished to have fresh material from a quarry, rather than recycled material, utilized for putting in a new parking lot base that can be compacted and remain hard. He further stated that to alleviate the high velocity of drainage coming off the driveway (via his residence on-site and other uphill areas) while still maintaining a road bed that is both drivable and walkable, the design should call for water to kick off the road bed and into the woodland area at 100' intervals. Ms. Mayer asked how deep the removed soil had been; Mr. Mc Caffrey responded it was roughly 3' and noted it was not always that high. He explained the topsoil was an accumulation of what had been dried out from the wet compost; he said afterwards, it was renegotiated with machinery, stripped down to a sandy base prior to being spread throughout the fields. Ms. Mayer asked if his vision was that the area coming down the driveway and bearing to the left would remain a very low elevation; he replied it should be merely shallow enough to hold everything back and let water to dissipate; he noted that the current condition on-site is not the finished product, referring to recent mechanical problems with his bulldozer. Chairwoman Ravit stated when the contract renewal between the Borough and Mr. Mc Caffrey was being put together, there was talk of possibly having less of the Farm planted to lessen the time, effort and cost that he had expended during his 1st 10-year contract term; she further stated there was mention of creating a meadow to act as a natural buffer next to the stream as opposed to additional planting. Mr. Mc Caffrey replied that such was possible on the outside of the deer fence, but inside it would accelerate an already widespread weed presence; he noted that at this point, he has resisted using herbicides as part of his maintenance. Chairwoman Ravit asked for other options lessening tilled and planted land on-site. He said he envisioned the Farm having an agricultural/arboricultural park by creating a grassed area with specimen plants. He said, originally, his personal garden on-site was to be Jeffersonian, meaning it would be planted out in a very formal way with an arboretum nearby having a pumpkin patch, etc; he also wished to reactivate the Borough's Garden Club. He reminded that his original plan, during contract negotiations, gave a clear picture of his intentions for the Farm. Mr. Isaacson inquired about trees and having an orchard; Mr. Mc Caffrey stated there are currently several orchards on-site, but that squirrels eat much of their fruit daily. He felt he should trap and release them to halt their destruction, but noted the orchards' back side remains full. Mr. Mc Caffrey stated there were also chestnut trees on-site, but acknowledged more cultivars should be introduced. Mr. Isaacson said his question was more about lessening the amount of work; Mr. Mc Caffrey replied that pruning and weeding would still be necessary. Mr. Isaacson stated he had recently visited the Farm and reported there was no water available near the gate, suggesting a spigot or fountain be installed; Mr. Mc Caffrey agreed, saying his laborers would then not need to drag hoses around the Farm and damage plantings in the process. He felt an irrigation system, consisting of a grand loop around the fence line with intermediate locations to tap into, could be placed above the ground (using heavy wall pipe). Ms. Mayer believed such a project could be funded by an open space grant in the coming year if unexpected costs for the Farm's barn project do not arise; Chairwoman Ravit said an estimate on such a system's cost should be submitted immediately being the grant deadline is approaching for the Governing Body to act. Ms. Mayer felt the system would not have to go around the Farm's entire perimeter; Mr. Mc Caffrey understood and said there is already electric, sewer and water lines running on-site,

making for easy connections. Mr. Di Dio asked about the cost for such an irrigation system; Mr. Mc Caffrey said he could not answer without taking measurements, but he noted it was not a big expense since the material used is polyethylene piping. Mr. Di Dio thought it to be a good idea and said it would be simple to drain in the wintertime.

Mr. Mc Caffrey, speaking of the barn project, hoped the Borough would retain a foreman, like Thomas Hennessey (Hennessey Construction, Inc.), who managed the recent concession stand project at Ruckman Park, whereby only local contractors were hired; Ms. Mayer said the barn's cost requires the Borough to put the project out to bid. Mr. Mc Caffrey questioned how local contractors were retained for the concession stand, having handicap facilities, which he estimated to have cost \$70,000.00 to \$80,000.00; Mr. Isaacson explained that the total cost was actually \$100,000.00, with \$20,000.00 going towards volunteers and \$80,000.00 for materials.

Ms. Mayer expressed concern, on behalf of concerned residents, about the permanency and size of an American flag recently hung at the Farm. Mr. Di Dio asked how she would define "permanent"; Chairwoman Ravit stated it has been displayed 24 hours a day for quite some time. Mr. Mc Caffrey interjected saying flag etiquette, according to the rules of parliamentary process, allows for the flag to be flown 365 days a year during wartime; he expressed that being the nation is battling in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the Commission should be supportive. He noted that prior to the birth of sports arenas, the American flag was 1st displayed on farms and he informed that in western New Jersey where he owns land, all farms show their support for the country's armed forces. Chairwoman Ravit stated that people may have a different point of view and the answer could be to maintain the flag as part of his own residence on-site; Mr. Mc Caffrey believed that if an American flag were installed on a ball field by the Borough's Recreation Commission, there would be no resistance. Ms. Mayer replied that the issue is not patriotism, but rather a large flag dominating a pastoral setting on a permanent basis dating back to Memorial Day. Mr. Mc Caffrey asked if the Commission had receiving any written complaints on the matter; Chairwoman Ravit and Ms. Mayer answered they have only received verbal inquiries. Ms. Mayer felt it was a personal, as well as passionate, statement in the realm of a public setting. Mr. Mc Caffrey said the Commission's viewpoint was insulting and suggested the news media be contacted to cover the flag issue at the Farm. Ms. Mayer pointed out that the 1st opportunity for the Commission to make their concern known was as early as February (when ropes, to hang the flag, began to appear on-site), but Mr. Mc Caffrey kept postponing his appearance; she added that he might consider consulting with the Commission prior to implementing a significant change to the Farm's appearance. Mr. Mc Caffrey asked if he had discretion over the way he plows the fields; Ms. Mayer responded that the issue is how he acts as the primary manager of the Farm with the Commission supervising. He asked about who decides on varieties of plants and vegetables to be grown; Ms. Mayer replied such was his choice. Mr. Isaacson asked if the Governing Body should have jurisdiction over the flag issue at the Farm since it is a borough-owned property. Chairwoman Ravit interjected, saying that Commission members are often drawn into Farm issues because of public complaints received; she noted that the Commission wants to support a vision for the Farm in collaboration with Mr. Mc Caffrey, who concurred. Mr. Nock stated that while it is easy for those not partaking in the labor that comes with the Farm to criticize, nevertheless, it is the Commission's duty to relay such concerns for discussion. Ms. Mayer believed the Commission, not the Mayor and Council, should resolve the flag issue. Mr. Mc Caffrey asked that the Commission take a vote (whether to allow the flag to remain until peacetime or be removed altogether) on the matter this evening; Ms. Mayer disagreed with making such a motion.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson to table the flag issue until the August 16, 2011 meeting; being the motion was not seconded, it failed.

Chairwoman Ravit believed that a formal vote, in sync with *Robert's Rules of Order*, could be handed down on the matter or a compromise could be reached, of which she preferred the latter. Ms. Mayer reiterated that the Commission had been waiting for Mr. Mc Caffrey to appear since February and asked that he curtail his unwarranted grief; he apologized. She explained that if he could not discuss the issue in a calm fashion, a date must then be set to do so.

Turning to other matters regarding the Farm, Mr. Mc Caffrey informed that he is looking forward to the upcoming crop but emphasized the need for volunteers; he believed some protection was needed against the public randomly accessing the Farm. He said he needed assistance educating visitors to be gentle with the crops, such as picking properly and not stampeding. Ms. Mayer asked if he felt the 3-day-a-week picking schedule is working well; he said it was, especially since the other 4 days are reserved for visiting and educating. Ms. Mayer said she was pleased to see the Farm is 2 weeks ahead of last year's pace; Mr. Mc Caffrey agreed, saying he was able to plant out 3 to 4 crops at off-site greenhouses earlier in the year. He said by doing so, it prevented squirrels, woodchucks, chipmunks and birds from eating seeds out of the ground. He remarked that, on the secondary crop planting, he used canisters and pots; he explained that he planted material with caps to allow it to germinate and grow a minimum of 3". He noted he has also thrown out sunflower seeds to fool the squirrels and save the desired plants. Mr. Mc Caffrey hoped that Commission members would visit the Farm to see it in all 4 phases (including the early planting); he revealed the pepper plants are thriving due to the recent heat and watering conditions. Ms. Mayer inquired about the trail formerly leading to the rear gate, which now goes to the new compost area, noting that the rows were planted straight; Mr. Mc Caffrey replied that the trail would quickly get "walked" into creation by visitors' footsteps. Ms. Mayer informed that he built a 3' high landscaped berm, consisting of sunflowers and other cultivars, to serve as a barrier around his private garden.

Mr. Nock asked if the Farm had the need for a bicycle rack; Mr. Mc Caffrey stated that a simple model, which holds a maximum of 10 bikes, would be beneficial; Mr. Isaacson concurred, saying a rack being present on-site makes it a destination.

Mr. Isaacson inquired about a planting map to indicate locations of the various plants and vegetables on-site; Mr. Mc Caffrey said it was still being worked on. Ms. Mayer stated volunteers had drawn up a draft recently, which will get refined during the summer, and stored in the Farm's kiosk. Mr. Mc Caffrey pointed out that there is a crop succession, whereby 2nd and 3rd crops serve as reserves once the initial crop has been depleted; he said that cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, etc., as well as the winter crops (winter kale, lettuces, string beans, etc.) follow such a layout. He noted that while there was a lot of redundancy, he did not want to have a visitor inform him the Farm was out of certain produce; he equated one's search for a 2nd or 3rd helping of crop to that of a treasure hunt, adding to the Farm experience. Mr. Isaacson suggested a sign be posted to instruct visitors as to which material could be picked on a given day; Mr. Mc Caffrey replied there was some existing signage that states the size, amount and maturity of plants that can be picked. He and Ms. Mayer believed such educated the public and relayed the idea of the Farm is to take a free, fresh taste and not hoard produce.



Old Business

Speaking of the Farm's barn project, Ms. Mayer reminded that its original placement on-site had to be somewhat rotated to optimize sunlight (to be on a North-South axis) for the proposed solar panels. Chairwoman Ravit said the green roof, to be located above the outdoor classroom, would consist of sedum being they are the lightest planting media; she also reviewed that a compost (waterless) toilet would be installed as well as rain gardens instead of seepage pits. She stated that pervious concrete could potentially be used for the new driveway area leading to the barn, which would require yearly maintenance (power washing); Mr. Mc Caffrey believed gravel would be a better choice. Chairwoman Ravit explained that the barn project would be demonstrating green elements in use that the public can view firsthand. She stated the upfront cost would be a bit more, but hoped the solar panels would offset Mr. Mc Caffrey's residential electric bill; she informed that the Planning Board suggested a plugging station be installed to accommodate electric-run vehicles, an idea that must be first be explored by the contractors. She revealed that the Borough would know, in October, if it will receive a state grant, which would cover 60% of the green elements' upfront cost. She further stated the feasibility of how to install the green elements would be part of the bidding process; she said, for example, if testing reveals the soil contains too much clay, rather than sand, the pervious concrete idea would not be possible. She said the Borough Administrator, Quentin Wiest, believed a contractor could be chosen by September 1st and that since any long-lead items, such as solar panels, would not be known for awhile, the phasing of the construction would be such that it moves along with the supply chain of the project.

Upon Mr. Mc Caffrey's departure for the evening, Ms. Mayer stated there was an imbalance between what he feels are his Farm responsibilities and the Commission's duties. Mr. Di Dio asked for clarity on the complaint(s) received about the American flag at the Farm; Ms. Mayer said certain residents felt it was a concept intrusion because the flag becomes the focal point, not the Farm. Mr. Di Dio asked if the use of a smaller flag would appease the complainant(s); Chairwoman Ravit said there are other options as well such as either displaying it on certain holidays only or permanently within Mr. Mc Caffrey's personal residential area only. Mr. Isaacson believed the flag's size matches that of the 1 that adorns the George Washington Bridge. Councilman Kashwick asked if any harm has been done to the trees to which the flag is attached with rope; Ms. Mayer felt such would be difficult to prove and stated her 1st choice would be to allow a permanent flagpole within his personal residential area. She asked that the Commission think of 3 to 4 alternatives to present to Mr. Mc Caffrey at the August 16, 2011 meeting.

Mr. Isaacson asked if there was a way for volunteers to pick plants on behalf of visitors in order to regulate and preserve the crops; he also mentioned some of the produce could be sold to offset costs of the Farm. Ms. Mayer disagreed and stated the Farm could not become a competitor of local farms; she further believed that its purpose should be remembered and the exceptions of abuse should not hinder its accessibility to the public.

Turning to the "Green Team", Chairwoman Ravit stated that *Sustainable Jersey* has given an August 5th deadline for another request of proposals which entails collaborating with a group of students, attending The College of New Jersey, on a sustainability program; she felt they could help form a long-term management plan for the Farm. Mr. Nock believed Mr. Mc Caffrey would want to carry the staff on such a program. Chairwoman Ravit reminded that several ideas were pitched by Mr. Mc Caffrey during his 1st 10-years of living on-site, many of which never came to

fruition; she believed the college students, having no preconceived ideas, could help him create a collective vision. She explained they would complete the project over the course of 1 year, and the Commission would decide whether or not to implement their proposal. Mr. Isaacson suggested both a sculpture and formal garden be placed in Buzzoni Farm; he felt such a measure would appease Mr. Mc Caffrey's wish for a reactivated Garden Club. Based on the Commission's belief that Mr. Mc Caffrey would perceive the college students' presence as a threat to his role as the Farm's caretaker, said grant proposal was decided against.

Ms. Mayer pointed out that Mr. Mc Caffrey had mentioned his intention to plant bamboo at the Farm, which she believed was not an appropriate species due to its invasive growth. Chairwoman Ravit suggested that the Farm's Subcommittee (Mayer/Di Dio/Nock) meet with Mr. Mc Caffrey on-site prior to the August 16, 2011 meeting; all agreed.

The Commission tabled, until the August 16, 2011 meeting, a discussion on planning the Farm's annual Halloween-associated event (to be held October 30th).

Mr. Nock announced that, effective immediately, he would be resigning from the Commission so he could attend college in Vermont.

Ms. Mayer informed that the Nature Center would be celebrating its 50th anniversary on October 22nd. She said the event would be from 10:00am to 8:00pm, with activities including breakfast, scrap books, movie slides, hikes, canoeing, art sketching, a string quartet and the serving of wine and cheese.

Mr. Isaacson stated he and Chairwoman Ravit completed most of the Borough's trail markings, thus blazes were now in place from the Borough of Demarest to the new entrance of United Water Co.'s parcel. He said he was not pleased with the arrows painted in the streets by the Department of Public Works (DPW), which were not easily visible. He said he would have preferred the DPW had either nailed blazes into the asphalt or marked curbing to better advertise the trails' continuity; he noted additional blazing was needed on fencing, once the poison ivy has been cleared out. Chairwoman Ravit stated that utility poles, and other man-made structures, were used to finish marking the trails' urban connections. Mr. Isaacson reminded that signage was needed at the water utility's property dictating rules for trail usage; Councilman Kashwick informed that Raymond Cywinski, the Borough's Certified Tree Expert who is employed with the utility, stated the following items still need resolution: 1.) trail maintenance within reservoir; 2.) watershed recreation permit required to use trail; 3.) New Jersey-issued license required to fish on-site. Mr. Isaacson wished the Commission was made aware earlier of the utility's permitting requirements, which he said were \$25.00 each; he believed that so long as the Commission posted appropriate signage near the reservoir, it would be the water company's duty to enforce the rules.

Mr. Isaacson's inquired about the member of the Environmental Commission, for the Borough of Norwood, who spoke at the June 21, 2011 meeting. Chairwoman Ravit stated she recently spoke with the speaker, James Elling, who reported that at his last meeting, there was still resistance to Norwood forming an inter-borough trail system with Closter. She said Mr. Elling confirmed Demarest's wish to be a part of the trail system by way of his conservation with Peter Coy, Treasurer of the Demarest Nature Center. Mr. Isaacson asked if Closter has had problems with all-terrain vehicles being used on its trails, a concern expressed by Norwood; Ms. Mayer and Councilman Kashwick said it has. Chairwoman Ravit said Mr. Elling asked where he could locate trail maps to research; Ms. Mayer answered the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference

could be contacted. Mr. Isaacson stated Boy Scouts corrected the plank walkways (from single to double) located at Julia Street and Scholz Bridge.

Chairwoman Ravit informed that United Water Co. is attempting to expand their offerings to the public, such as sailing camp next summer; she believed it wants to make the reservoir a community resource as well as a drinking water supply. Councilman Kashwick questioned why Oradell Reservoir (privately-operated) seemed restricted to the public whereas Round Valley Reservoir and Spruce Run Reservoir, both public entities, are made quite accessible; Chairwoman Ravit speculated such was due to the area's population density and the fact Oradell Reservoir serves as an intake.

Mr. Nock informed that he spoke with the manufacturer of a high-end, stainless steel bike rack line, stating the cost would be \$12,000.00 each; the Commission decided against such a purchase. Mr. Isaacson believed Eagle Scouts could build wooden bike racks for Buzzoni Farm, Mac Bain Farm and the Nature Center; Councilman Kashwick believed using wood was not the ideal material and reminded that the existing bike rack located at Pfeiffer Park should be replaced as well. Mr. Nock stated the current funding allocated by the Governing Body (\$2,000.00) would allow for only 2 of the basic aluminum racks, which hold 15 bikes, to be purchased; Ms. Mayer thought such a price to be unreasonable and asked if smaller models were available. Mr. Nock answered that such racks, which hold 5 bikes, sell for between \$600.00 and \$800.00 each, which would enable the Commission to buy 3 such racks with the existing monies. Mr. Isaacson asked if the bike racks should be put into a concrete base or merely lay on the ground; Chairwoman Ravit said the DPW could probably assist in providing concrete bases. Mr. Isaacson inquired if bike racks are made in recyclable plastics; Chairwoman Ravit replied that recycled metal is far more environmentally-sustainable than plastic. Ms. Mayer questioned why concrete bases were necessary, since they would prevent the racks from being maneuvered by the DPW's maintenance crews; Councilman Kashwick stated such would make the racks permanent and less susceptible to being damaged.

Councilman Kashwick informed that, regarding the commercial vehicles recently staged at Mollicone Park during the sidewalk repair project along Knickerbocker Road, the Superintendent of the DPW, William Dahle granted permission because the ground had already been compressed last year from United Water Co.'s vehicles, which were parked on-site while it replaced water lines; Councilman Kashwick told Mr. Dahle that the parking of commercial vehicles and/or equipment in woodlands must not occur again.

Ms. Mayer revealed that the Farm-sponsored cookbook project has been put on hold due to lackluster participation from volunteers.

Mr. Di Dio stated the Planning Board approved a recommendation to the Governing Body which would tie green building elements into the Borough's Zoning Code; specifically, he said the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification system would be incorporated in the Limiting Schedule, which dictates the Borough's bulk standards. Mr. Di Dio explained that all Zoning Districts would have a 3% reduction in its current maximum building and impervious coverage allowances. He stated in order to go beyond the new limits, projects would have to attain silver, gold or platinum LEED certification through the use of green elements in construction; Councilman Kashwick stated the Governing Body's Ordinance Committee would be reviewing the recommendation next month and that the Commission could review its draft at that time. Mr. Isaacson said he has been told that such an ordinance would favor wealthier residents; Mr. Di Dio acknowledged that the initial public response to the

proposal has not been favorable. Mr. Isaacson felt that the current trend is to build smaller homes rather than “Mc Mansions”.

Councilman Kashwick reported the Mayor’s office was in contact with CSX Transportation to discuss the Borough’s hope to partake in a “rails-to-trails” project; the railroad company indicated it does not want to abandon the rail line but did recommend a rail banking so it could keep it for future usage as a passenger line. Mr. Isaacson asked if it would be possible to obtain an easement off to the side of the rail line to develop a trail; Councilman Kashwick replied it would be if CSX Transportation were to keep it as an active freight line. He noted that such a concept is called “rails-with-trails”, whereby a fence would need to be installed between the rail line and the path trail. He further stated there have been discussions between the railroad company and Capital Hardware Supply, Inc. (10 Railroad Avenue) about the latter using the freight line a few times per week, which may or may not be profitable for the former. Councilman Kashwick believed the only way for the “rails-to-trails” concept to work is to have the path go to the Borough’s downtown area on Closter Dock Road; he explained that since the rail line is a dual track, 1 of which has been removed, the vacated area along Veterans’ Park could be made into a path and a fence could be placed in between. He said, either way, to have the railroad tracks remain is pointless since they are a safety hazard and need to be replaced.



Plans

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

◇ 519 Homans Avenue: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new single-family house. Councilman Kashwick informed that the subject parcel had recently been subdivided, resulting in a newly-created lot (256 Parsells Lane). Mr. Isaacson felt it would benefit the Borough if it could acquire the soil to be exported from this and future project sites. The Commission recommended that the proposed 5 tree removals should be reviewed by the Borough’s Certified Tree Expert.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

◇ 237-241 Closter Dock Road: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals, which involves both the construction of an addition and the conversion of existing office space to 3 apartments, for a mixed-use building. Chairwoman Ravit said she received plans are revisions to the original proposal, previously reviewed by the Commission; she noted that there would be a total of 5 apartments in the 3-story structure once the project is complete. The Commission had no comments at this time.



Other

Councilman Kashwick agreed to chair the August 17, 2011 meeting, in lieu of Chairwoman Ravit who announced she would not be present.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Councilman Kashwick, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 10:06pm.