



# **Environmental Commission**

February 19, 2013

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 8:07pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, February 19, 2013 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

*Present*

- Paul MacDonald- Chairman
- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
- Ethel Abrams- Associate Member

*Absent*

- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- VACANT- Full Member
- VACANT- Alternate #1
- VACANT- Alternate #2
- VACANT- Associate Member



**Miscellaneous**

A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Councilman Kashwick, to approve the minutes for the January 15, 2013 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

Chairman MacDonald opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments; no one wished to be heard.

Chairman MacDonald stated no new correspondence has been received by the Commission since its January 15, 2013 meeting.



**Old Business**

*Trails*

In light of Mr. Isaacson's absence, Councilman Kashwick reported that a grant application regarding trails has been filed with the State of New Jersey; he cautioned that last year's award recipients were not announced until nearly 1 year following the application deadline. Chairman MacDonald commended Councilman Kashwick on preparing said application on such short notice.

Mac Bain Farm

Mr. Di Dio indicated there was no progress made on determining the Farm’s existing water resources, a measure necessary to limit the use of the well on-site to the residence only. He reminded that Mary Mayer, former Alternate #1 on the Commission, recently suggested that a water service connection from Hickory Lane to the site may already exist; he informed that he and Ms. Mayer had previously disagreed as to whether such a utility upgrade was worth the cost to do so. Councilman Kashwick stated an estimate for such a project would be needed prior to applying for open space funds. Chairman MacDonald felt the Borough Engineer, Nick De Nicola, PE, could enlighten the Commission as to the price for upgrading a water main line from ¾” to 1” in diameter, the latter size of which Mr. Di Dio would be the minimum necessary to anticipate unknown future use. Chairman MacDonald believed a 1” water main line would accommodate irrigation of the Farm but also add significantly to the water utility bill for which there is no line item in the Commission’s budget. Councilman Kashwick questioned who pays for water usage on-site; Mr. Di Dio assumed such, along with electric and gas utilities, was the responsibility of John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm. Councilman Kashwick agreed, believing they are considered a living expense that Mr. Mc Caffrey, not the Borough, incurs; he stressed such should be confirmed with the Borough Administrator, Richard Sheola.



**Liaison Reports**

Governing Body

Councilman Kashwick stated the Borough’s 2013 operating budget will be voted on in the near future and he pointed out the Commission’s portion will remain at last year’s level, the amount of which he did not know; he noted the figure was \$4,000.00 when he was 1<sup>st</sup> elected to the Borough Council in 2006. Chairman MacDonald believed the current level is \$2,500.00, of which he expressed concern. Councilman Kashwick pointed out that the Commission has been spending only a fraction of the funds available to it in recent years, resulting in the budgeted amount being decreased annually.

Planning Board

Mr. Di Dio stated no applications of significance have been filed with the Board as of late; he noted it is awaiting a response from the owner-in-fee/developer of 19 Ver Valen Street (“Closter Plaza”) on its intentions to redevelop the site. He reminded that a 2012 application filed and deemed complete has since been withdrawn. Mr. Di Dio said it is rumored the withdrawn design would remain in a future re-filing despite the zoning difficulties it presents. He explained that the proposal includes the new construction of a detached building in the parking lot, which would exacerbate the existing, non-conforming number of buildings on the parcel from 4 to 5. Mr. Di Dio noted the 2009 Board-approved application, which was nullified on appeal by the Superior Court of New Jersey (Bergen County Law Division), consisted of a series of additions to 1 or more of the 4 existing buildings. Councilman Kashwick stated the Governing Body introduced in January an amendment to the relevant ordinance that requires a maximum of 1 building per lot in all zoning districts; he informed that the motion, which would have permitted more than 1 building per lot in District #’s 3 (Business), 4 (Commercial) and 5 (Industrial), failed on 1<sup>st</sup> reading. He stated the same amendment was reintroduced a few weeks later and passed with Mayor Sophie Heymann breaking the Council’s 3-3 vote; he revealed that a vote on final passage is to occur in March, pending feedback from the Planning Board. Mr. Di Dio

believed the owner-in-fee/developer of “Closter Plaza” is awaiting the amendment’s fate and if it passes, a re-filing with the Board would immediately follow; he felt that if the measure failed again, either a redesigned proposal would be filed with the Planning Board or the existing proposal would be tried before the Zoning Board of Adjustment since a use variance would then be required.

Chairman MacDonald stated 515 Piermont Road, the former site of “The Farm in Closter”, is up for sale and questioned the parcel’s acreage; Councilman Kashwick replied it is between 3 and 4 acres and he did not know what zoning district it is in. Mr. Di Dio said it is rumored the property could be developed into an apartment complex; Councilman Kashwick said such a use, though residential in nature, would require a use variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment since it involves more than 1 single-family detached house. Ms. Cummings said it has been rumored that the Borough is considering purchasing the site; Councilman Kashwick interjected, saying the Governing Body is not intending to do so. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the Historic Preservation Commission has been receiving requests from the public to retain the site’s use as a farm. Ms. Abrams suggested the site could be converted to a community farm whereby residents maintain individual plots; Councilman Kashwick disagreed, saying city farms work well while those located in suburbs tend not to. Ms. Cummings revealed there is a successful community farm in the Borough of Fair Lawn. Chairman MacDonald felt that if the site was not to be fenced in, it would become an attractive nuisance during the evening hours; Ms. Abrams concurred, saying there could be pilfering.

#### *Shade Tree Commission (STC)*

Mr. Scholz stated the STC is hoping to plant additional trees at Ruckman Park. He informed the estimate of the project is \$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00 for 15 to 20 tree plantings (having a caliper measurement of 2.5”) to be located around the perimeter of the on-site parking lot and along Piermont Road and Ruckman Road (site is a corner lot); he reiterated the Commission, not the STC, would have to approve such an expenditure since the STC has no funding available in its budget for such a project. Mr. Scholz said the species to be planted is not known but the selections will not have shallow root systems. He stated he did not know if and how much the Recreation Commission would be contributing to the project since the site is considered an active, not passive park. Councilman Kashwick felt funding for the Ruckman Park project should come from open space, but noted that if the trees were to survive more than 5 years, such would become a capital expense and, thus, not come out of the Commission’s operating budget.

A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Councilman Kashwick, to request up to \$5,000.00 from open space funds to pay for stipulated plantings at Ruckman Park; the motion passed by acclamation. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg requested that the Commission be informed of the species to be planted once determined; she also hoped the soil/mulch to be used would be properly dispersed so not to affect the trees’ health.

#### *Green Team*

Ms. Cummings stated the Team has chosen April 6<sup>th</sup> as its next Borough-wide garbage cleanup/recycling event with volunteers from both the Girl Scouts and Nature Center participating. She stated the Team continues to collaborate with the Nature Center on programming, including the possible invite of a representative from the Native Plant Society of New Jersey.

#### *Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)*

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC recently voted to designate 421 Durie Avenue (Harold Hess Lustron House) as a historic landmark along with a recommendation for the Borough to purchase the site, which is for sale. She stated the nomination process has commenced for a privately-owned defunct railroad depot, noting the report has been completed. She revealed that the HPC approved a proposal to reconstruct/enlarge a chicken coop at 119 Hickory Lane, the future site of Metropolitan Farm. Chairman MacDonald inquired about the conceived greenhouses and farm stand, yet to appear on-site at 119 Hickory Lane; Councilman Kashwick replied they will apparently be installed in the near future. Mr. Di Dio further commented that no activity, less continuous soil movement, has been noticed on-site in quite some time.



## **New Business**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg distributed a copy of a brochure from the Borough of Tenafly that discusses sustainability, specifically recycling and vehicle idling. Chairman MacDonald asked that the cost of producing a version for the Borough be determined. Councilman Kashwick commented that a more environmentally-friendly material should be utilized in a Borough brochure, noting Tenafly's consisted of coated paper. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg pointed out that in light of the Governing Body's unsuccessful attempt recently to put more emphasis on recycling with respect to the Borough's garbage collection practices, she felt a similar brochure could educate the public; she believed younger generations are cognizant of such a need while the elderly tend not to. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg also believed the Borough's recycling program should be expanded, noting the Mayor's office of New York City is pushing to ban plastic foam containers.

Ms. Abrams informed that Hackensack Riverkeeper, Inc., an environmental advocacy group, prints a newsletter ("Hackensack Tidelines") and distributed its winter 2011 edition, noting there was an article inside on recycling. She stated the Borough, based up its calendar mailed to residents, currently recycles #'s 1 and 2 of the Society of the Plastic Industry (SPI) resin identification coding system, which is identified on packaging inside a 3-chasing-arrow recycling symbol. Ms. Cummings said there is a plethora of plastics disposed of which are not getting recycled. Chairman MacDonald asked that a report be obtained from the Department of Public Works (DPW) as to the percentage of items rejected for recycling. Councilman Kashwick felt the better approach is not to buy items that use materials labeled #'s 3, 4, 5, etc. Ms. Abrams noted that consumers often do not know what they have purchased until a container is empty and its SPI label is revealed.

Ms. Abrams informed there is an organization, Green Faith, which assists religious organizations in making their practices and facilities more sustainable. She continued to say that Green Faith has started a residential solar campaign and recently held an event in Tenafly. She explained that if a resident wished to participate in the campaign, they would approach a representative of both Green Faith and the solar panel industry at 1 of their events, who would in turn evaluate the resident's property via satellite imaging, taking into account the house's orientation to the sun as well as the age of its roof (older than 10 years would disqualify the residence). She stated that if the home meets the initial criteria, the resident's utility bills are reviewed to determine the number of solar panels necessary for the roof. Ms. Abrams clarified the resident must own the house and have no liens/judgments. She stated the final procedure is to have a structural engineer visit the property to compose a detailed proposal which itemizes

costs and savings, the latter of which is derived from electricity being sold at wholesale rather than retail rates. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned if solar panels have been considered for any municipal buildings; Councilman Kashwick responded an inquiry was done a few years ago. Ms. Abrams suggested new home builders could benefit from such a program. Councilman Kashwick stated a brochure, promoting such topics, would be funded out of the Commission's \$2,500.00 operating budget. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she would inquire about the potential cost of printing a brochure. Mr. Di Dio expressed concern over the upfront cost to a homeowner who participated in the Green Faith solar campaign, indicated on a distributed brochure as being \$20,000.00 to \$40,000.00. Ms. Abrams mentioned she recently received \$50.00 from New Jersey's Clean Energy program in exchange for her dated refrigerator; she clarified the rebate pertains to no appliances other than refrigerators and freezers. Chairman MacDonald stated the DPW normally charges residents to take away appliances at curb side.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested all previously-mentioned topics be put into a Borough brochure including The Freecycle Network, a free on-line service that connects members who wish to get rid of and/or obtain items that would otherwise be discarded; she stated she used the service to exchange her antiquated stereo equipment.

Chairman MacDonald reported he recently attended a conference at which the regional public affairs manager for Public Service Enterprise Group (PSE&G) spoke of tree removals caused by Hurricanes Sandy and Irene; he said PSE&G is concerned by the number and type of trees planted along thoroughfares under secondary and primary power lines, which are of higher voltage and feed into both transformers and customers' buildings. Chairman MacDonald further commented that a representative from New Jersey Tree Foundation was present, who confirmed that the Callery pear and purple leaf plum are the 2 least desirable species to plant along municipal right-of-ways; both Mr. Scholz and Mr. Di Dio concurred, saying those trees do not survive storms. Chairman MacDonald informed that the conference included a discussion on roots of newly-planted trees being compromised when wire baskets, used for shipping purposes, are not removed. He said also present were a representative from the Bergen County Parks Commission as well as Joseph Crisfasi, Director of the Bergen County Public Works Department, who indicated his agency's grant writer would collaborate with the Borough on seeking funds for planting trees along county roads in Closter (Harrington Avenue/Closter Dock Road/Piermont Road/Durie Avenue/Knickerbocker Road). Councilman Kashwick stated there is no source of funding for such plantings because the State of New Jersey has redirected monies collected through the sale of special interest license plates ("Treasure Our Trees") to general funding. He explained the Borough has received \$33,000.00 in the past 7 years, with \$25,000.00 coming from the license plate program and \$8,000.00 derived from stimulus awarded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the latter of which went towards planting at Pollack Square. Chairman MacDonald asked if there are ways to solicit private donors in light of shrinking public funding; Councilman Kashwick commented the Borough currently has more trees than locations to plant. Mr. Scholz agreed, saying there are times when a fallen tree should not be replaced since the location is hazardous or it is unlikely to thrive. Councilman Kashwick stated that subsequent to the Borough being awarded funds for tree planting, there is often an effort to reduce the STC's budget and offset the grant received.

The Commission went into closed session at 8:49pm to discuss a personnel matter.

The Commission reopened the meeting to the public at 8:52pm.

A motion was made by Chairman MacDonald and seconded by Mr. Scholz, to increase the stipend paid for preparation of the Commission's minutes from \$100.00 to \$120.00 per meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.



**Plan Review**

Being no land use board applications were forwarded to the Commission for its consideration, plan review was not conducted.



There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Councilman Kashwick, to adjourn the meeting at 8:54pm. The motion passed by acclamation.