



Environmental Commission

October 21, 2014

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:37 pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, October 21, 2014 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Paul MacDonald- Chairman
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2 (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
- Sivert Hagen- Associate Member
- Brian Stabile- Associate Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)

Absent

- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- VACANT- Full Member
- Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the September 16, 2014 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 there was no correspondence to read into the record.



Old Business

Trails

Mr. Isaacson said he has not been in touch with the New York-New Jersey Conference, noting the representative he previously collaborated with is no longer employed there. Councilman Kashwick stated the bid proposal utilizing trail grant monies has not been finalized, and Mr. Isaacson urged the Commission to request additional monies in its budget proposal for 2015.

2015 Budget Proposals

Chairman MacDonald believed the Commission's annual operating budget of \$3,000.00 has not fluctuated for roughly a decade. Mr. Hagen suggested Ms. Cummings be consulted on the funds

generated by the Green Team via its annual Borough-wide garbage cleanup/recycling event; Chairman MacDonald reminded that payment from the State of New Jersey for the 2014 event has been delayed due to improper processing of the purchase order. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said funding is needed for previously-discussed upgrades at Mac Bain Farm, most notably the installation of an irrigation system and upgrading of the driveway/parking lot; she reiterated a water utility service on-site accompanied by a spigot at the entrance would negate having hoses strewn across the fields as well as provide means by which volunteers and visitors could wash off and quench thirst. Chairman MacDonald reported that John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, had been sidetracked from doing preparations with the Department of Public Works (DPW) for said projects. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she is due reimbursement for 2 invoices in the amounts of \$91.00 and \$30.00 relating to plantings at Buzzoni Farm Park; she opined a small increase in budget is warranted for additional improvements at the Park. Chairman MacDonald hoped the Commission would stay within budget for the upcoming Harvest Festival, especially given last year's expense towards additional pumpkins. Councilman Kashwick stated the Commission usually expends only a small amount of its budget throughout the year. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that costs were incurred recently for new signage at the Farm (she noted the existing metal sign wrongly indicating the Farm is open until dusk has yet to be removed). Mr. Isaacson said the irrigation project may be better suited for open space funding; Councilman Kashwick interjected saying while said project would be part of capital improvements, it should be indicated in budget requests separately as operating and open space items. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said a row of both blueberry and raspberry bushes is desired at the Farm, and she indicated the Mayor's office approved of a donation box during the Harvest Festival to offset the purchase of the expensive plants; Councilman Kashwick disagreed, saying he was told by the Borough Attorney that such was not advisable being the donations could not be tracked.

Green Team

Speaking on behalf of the absent Ms. Cummings, Mr. Hagen said she had been in touch with the principal of Tenakill Middle School, Justin O'Neill, who had been enthusiastic about forming a Green Team consisting of middle school students; however, he said Mr. O'Neill will be transferring to the Borough of Old Tappan school system in November. As a result, Mr. Hagen said the Superintendent of Closter Public Schools, Joanne Newberry, will become the interim principal, and she has not been as receptive to past initiatives proposed by the Team. Chairman MacDonald said while 1 teacher would be required to oversee such a group, compensation and budgeting for activities could create difficulties.

Dumping & Signage on Public Lands

Chairman MacDonald said the Commission should move forward with a plan of action, specifically a memo to relevant property owners abutting Borough lands. Mr. Hagen reported additional landscaping debris is being dumped at Farrell Woods.

Mr. Hagen informed that there was indication on the aluminum/glass/plastic collection bins at the DPW facility that the Borough accepts only plastic #'s 1 and 2 of the resin identification coding system developed by the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI). Chairman MacDonald replied the Recycling Coordinator, Carol Dacey, stated the Borough's recycling vendor, Miele Sanitation Co., accepts plastic #'s 1 through 7; he said what resulted is the Borough giving its residents mixed messages as to whether certain items are recyclables or trash.

As for the message on new signage regarding illegal dumping, Councilman Kashwick confirmed with the Borough Attorney that it can read that penalties of up to \$2,000.00 per offense may be levied.

Plastic & Reusable Bags

Mr. Hagen said several reusable bags donated by “Zendiggi Kebab House” (224-228 Closter Dock Road) and bearing its store logo were handed out during the most recent Borough-wide garbage cleanup/recycling event with some leftover; he saw such an approach as both serving the environmental cause and giving free advertising for participating merchants. Councilman Kashwick informed that 2 sets of recycling bins having slots for trash, paper and comingled recyclables were recently ordered for placement in the downtown area.

Solar Panels

Chairman MacDonald said installation of such devices on municipal buildings is a large endeavor that should be considered, noting that the City of Teaneck has done such with its schools in recent years.

Deer

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she and Mr. Colwell authored a draft to the Governing Body outlining the Commission’s concerns about deer population control. Mr. Colwell stated he recently read a news article written by a naturalist from the Greenbrook Nature Sanctuary in the Borough of Tenafly about how deer have diminished the population of native plants, insects, birds, etc. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg acknowledged that organizing a deer hunt would be a controversial and difficult task, but insisted other measures could be taken such as educating the public not to feed deer; Mr. Hagen concurred, saying they are fed corn, grain, bread, etc. Mr. Isaacson disagreed, revealing he feeds deer, as well as birds, that frequent his residence in hopes of eating the landscaping. Mr. Stabile clarified that the problem arises when food for deer is left near roadways, causing a vehicular hazard due to the congregating deer. Mr. Hagen said the Police Department verified the number of vehicular accidents in Closter involving deer equated to approximately 2% of all vehicular accidents in total; he cited the following statistics for the number of deer-related vehicular accidents in recent years: 4 in 2009, 4 in 2010, 10 in 2011, 4 in 2012, 7 in 2013 and 4 thus far in 2014. In contrast, he said there were a total of 457 and 346 accidents in total for 2011 and 2012 respectively. In terms of road kill, Mr. Hagen said last year the Bergen County Animal Shelter & Adoption Center reported 7 animals were removed from public roadways in Closter while in 2012 there were 24 (the agency does not enter onto private property); he noted that generally there are more carcass removals reported than actual police reports filed. Mr. Hagen stated that between 2008 and 2013, Closter had 69 carcass removals, the Boroughs of Demarest, Haworth and Norwood had 25, 46, and 48 respectively while the Boroughs of Mahwah, Oakland and Franklin Lakes had 280, 196 and 238 respectively; he concluded that the deer population has not reached dangerous levels in terms of motor vehicle safety. Chairman MacDonald noted that a municipality’s acreage must be taken into consideration when evaluating said statistics. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reiterated that deer are the 2nd leading cause of vehicular accidents statewide. Chairman MacDonald said the most urgent matter is the depredation by deer on the local ecosystem. Mr. Colwell said he recently viewed a program on National Geographic Channel about the introduction of wolves and/or coyotes into the Yellowstone National Park; Councilman Kashwick confirmed such occurred in 1988, and Mr. Hagen explained the action saved the Park’s landscape.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Kashwick said the Commission must soon notify the Borough Clerk of its 2015 meeting schedule; despite conflicting, at times, with both Mr. Colwell's Cub Scout obligations and long-running sessions of Municipal Court (prohibiting use of the Council Chamber at Borough Hall), the Commission decided to keep its current schedule of gathering on the 3rd Tuesday of each month, less December, at 7:30pm.

After reminding that budget proposals are due to the Governing Body no later than November 7th, Councilman Kashwick announced he decided against accepting the Borough Administrator position because he would be remaining with his current employer, The New York Times; in addition, being he is not running for re-election as Councilman, this evening may be the last meeting he attends as a Commission member being the New Jersey State League of Municipalities Conference runs from November 18th to November 20th, interfering with the Commission's next meeting.

Planning Board

Due to Mr. Di Dio's absence, no report was given.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Stabile said he attended his 1st STC meeting on October 13th at which its planting and pruning rotating schedule was discussed. He said a vote on pruning in Voting District #4 in the winter was delayed because the few estimates received were over budget (the highest being \$9,600.00); furthermore, he said a vote on planting in Voting District #3 in the fall was deferred so the STC could plant 33 trees for \$12,000.00, and remain under budget, with the option of 40 tree plantings since several are in distress. Mr. Stabile said there was no consensus as to tree maintenance in the downtown area, specifically, whether to perform full pruning (such as topping off trees) at a cost of \$4,700.00 or a simple pruning to make them more manageable for \$2,600.00; he noted the trees, pear and approximately 50 in quantity, are at the age (25 years old) at which they are expected to die off especially following storm events. The Commission expressed frustration that pear had been the species of choice because it is a relatively softwood tree that grows fast and is in bloom for about 2 weeks. Councilman Kashwick explained the Commission did not approve the tree selection in the downtown area, but rather it was part of the federally-funded Closter Downtown Renaissance project during which brick paver sidewalks were installed and the existing parking layout was converted from angled to parallel in 1997. Mr. Stabile revealed the total planting budget is \$17,500.00 and stressed the proposed plantings would be hardwood, native trees and not ornamental.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen said all relevant topics were discussed earlier in the evening under "Old Business."

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC drafted a nomination report for Hickory Lane in its entirety to be designated as historic; she noted that in her research, she discovered a map showing a hickory existing in the middle of where the thoroughfare now exists. She said the same is being prepared to designate Blanch Avenue as well, both its improved and unimproved (paper street) sections.



New Business

Commission Membership Terms

Chairman MacDonald distributed copies of the Commission roster and the expiration of members’ terms; he noted that Associate Members are given 1-year terms by the Governing Body.

Harvest Festival

Mr. Isaacson reported that preparations for the event at Mac Bain Farm were mostly completed except for acquiring additional pumpkins, which is being handled by Farm volunteer, Mary Mayer. He said the cost for items he purchased thus far tallies \$141.00. Mr. Hagen said Ms. Cummings recruited a few high school students to volunteer during the Festival. Mr. Hagen stated that the advertising postcards made by Mr. Isaacson were distributed to the local school system (up to 5th grade only) as well as the Closter Public Library, Borough Hall and the A&P supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue), keeping in mind the intent is for the event to benefit Borough residents only. Mr. Stabile pointed out that those Closter students in 8th grade are required to perform 10 hours of community per school year and the Festival could be applicable.

Yard Debris

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg recently was informed by the DPW that it is no longer providing pick-up service of debris such as barrels of dried flowers and weeds, which previously were collected with trash. Councilman Kashwick replied he puts his yard debris at curbside during the period in which the DPW does leaf pick-up, which is permitted so long as the debris is not woody.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

165 Herbert Avenue: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comments: 1.) health of 10” dogwood in front yard (not indicated for removal) would be compromised due to location of proposed gas, sewer and water line installations; 2.) tree mitigation should be required for 5 removals.

4 Laurence Court: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comments: 1.) tree mitigation should be required for 4 removals.

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

Zoning Board of Adjustment

515 Piermont Road: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the construction of a new building (containing a restaurant and retail uses associated

with an existing farm field on-site). The Commission made the following comments: 1.) parking lot layout is much improved from original design; 2.) minimize light trespass onto neighboring properties; 3.) reconsider proposed wild flower meadow given difficulty to maintain; 4.) proposed tree removals are being sufficiently mitigated; 5.) energy efficiency of proposed building will be compromised due to number of exterior doors; 6.) increased amount of on-site parking could pollute nearby Anderson Brook via catch basins; 7.) proposed site ingress/egress via Homans Avenue would alleviate traffic flow especially during times of arrival and dismissal to and from Hillside Elementary School (340 Homans Avenue).

59 West Street, 11 & 15 Van Sciver Street: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the construction of a new building (containing an assisted living facility). The Commission made the following comments: 1.) proposed development is too intense for parcel near drinking water supply (Oradell Reservoir); 2.) site would be clear-cut with no proposed tree mitigation; 3.) proposed storm water management system is located in wetlands and in close proximity of Oradell Reservoir.

49 John Street: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the continuation of an existing contractor’s yard operation. The Commission had no comments.



Adjournment

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Colwell and seconded by Mr. Stabile, to adjourn the meeting at 9:16pm. The motion passed by acclamation.