



Environmental Commission

August 16, 2016

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:43pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, August 16, 2016 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Paul MacDonald- Full Member
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- Sivert Hagen- Full Member
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
- Brian Stabile- Full Member/Council Liaison
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Absent

- VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Councilman Stabile, to approve the minutes for the July 19, 2016 meeting with a noted correction; the motion passed by acclamation.

The Commission postponed votes to approve the minutes for the May 17, 2016 and June 21, 2016 meetings until the September 20, 2016 meeting.

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



Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann said Frank Rossi, LSRP, who is the Director of Environmental Science at Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc., completed an application to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) for the issuance of a General Permit #17 (GP 17) relating to anticipated trail improvements near wetlands surrounding Buzzoni Farm Park; she said the paperwork must be approved by the interim Borough Administrator, John Fry, before it can be submitted to the NJDEP. She reminded such follows a recent inspection of those trails installed/improved upon by Kevin Riley as part of improvements relating to the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded the Borough in 2014. She reiterated Mr. Rossi was pleased with

Mr. Riley's progress. Ms. Heymann said earlier today she informed Mr. Riley of areas in which trails require additional blazing and/or clearing of vegetation.

Ms. Heymann said once Mr. Riley's work is completed, it would be appropriate to hold a celebration for the opening/introduction of the Borough's new and improved trail system to the public; at that time, a revised and all-inclusive trail map reflecting all trails in and outside the Nature Center, can be designed and printed; she reminded that Mr. Riley is utilizing the Global Positioning System (GPS) to log his trail improvements. She said producing such a map would require converting all of the existing and varying maps into 1 scale. Ultimately, she stated the vendor tentatively-selected by the Commission, Fossil Industries, Inc., could produce trail maps to replace those weather-damaged currently adorning the top portion of pedestal signs (measuring 24"x48") located at Memorial Field, by the Closter Public Library and near Tenakill Street. Mr. Isaacson said the sign manufacturer provides a 10-year warranty for its product. He stressed a revised Closter trail map should include those located in the Borough of Demarest and vice versa; Ms. Heymann noted that Mr. Riley holds a position in the Demarest Nature Center so its cooperation is likely. With respect to the size of the map, she felt the illustration should be divided into 4 sections, with 3 depicting the overall trail system while the 4th provides a more detailed close-up of the area where the pedestal sign is situated. Ms. Abrams noted the Teaneck Creek Conservancy has large pedestal signs that provide information on migrating birds in the area. Ms. Heymann said the Nature Center's trail map signs are quite legible. In order to produce the revised trail map as a brochure/pamphlet to celebrate the American Hiking Society's National Trails Day recently, Mr. Isaacson said Demarest's trail maps were partially digitized. Councilman Stabile stated the Commission should act upon the production of a revised trail map, especially being it has been on its agenda for several months. Chairman MacDonald noted there is no mapping of trails in Mollicone Park, and Ms. Heymann stated neither was the case for the trail on Anderson Avenue and Hickory Lane near Mc Bain Farm, though they are blazed; she said Mr. Riley would be asked to prepare such documentation.

In response to Mr. Hagen, Ms. Heymann informed there is a path accessing the Nagel-Auryansen Cemetery (Susan Drive) via Hickory Lane but a key is required to enter as of a few years ago. She explained that while there is a Borough right-of-way abutting the Cemetery, the site is privately-owned though there is an unspecified easement on the parcel. Mr. Isaacson believed such a notable site should be on the revised trail map but not necessarily part of the trail system. Chairman MacDonald pointed out sections of Buzzoni Farm Park are prone to wet conditions resulting in more than usual vegetation which, in turn, requires additional maintenance by the Borough. Ms. Heymann, concurred warning there are several beds of poison ivy in the vicinity where boardwalks were recently installed. Councilman Stabile hoped that the more foot traffic the trails get, the less maintenance would be required. Ms. Heymann informed that Mr. Riley is indicating those trails in need of clearing by posting branches on the side of tree trunks so the public knows there is a path in the area. Councilman Stabile stated such is a better approach than laying peat or woodchips on paths located in the uplands; Ms. Heymann concurred, noting the NJDEP prohibits both materials within wetlands.

Signage Prohibiting Dumping on Public Land

Mr. Isaacson stated the suggestion to mail postcards to owners of properties abutting Borough land that indicate the prohibition of dumping is to educate the public. He believed simply installing signage would not engage the public or act as a deterrent; Ms. Heymann endorsed such an action. Chairman MacDonald stated a message regarding illegal dumping is posted on the Borough's website and the topic will be mentioned in Mayor John Glidden's next monthly

newsletter. Chairman MacDonald said it would be beneficial to know how much traffic the website gets to maximize public exposure. Ms. Heymann revealed that since the inception of the website, less than 250 residents have registered for its email subscription to receive both emergency and informational postings (noting the Borough has approximately 2,200 households). Mr. Isaacson reminded that mailing of the Borough's calendar to residents was discontinued a few years ago. Chairman MacDonald pointed out the Department of Public Works (DPW) collects brush at curbside bi-monthly only which could lead to more illegal dumping of grass clippings, raked leaves, etc. being some residents opt against the inconvenience of transporting their brush to the DPW facility; Councilman Stabile agreed, noting residents are as likely as landscaping contractors to dump brush on Borough land. Chairman MacDonald said he often finds brush dumped in areas of Borough land which are only accessible by private property owners; he noted grass clippings do not deteriorate properly in darkened woods. Councilman Stabile did not favor distributing 1-topic fliers to the public. He believed the matter should be overseen by the DPW and the Building Department, only if they are authorized by ordinance to enforce such; he cautioned the Borough does not want to be seen as harassing its residents.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed that deer droppings were found on-site subsequent to the recent fence rehabilitation performed by Dimick Fence Co. She also mentioned there is a plethora of weeds throughout the fields and suggested John Mc Caffrey, the Farm's caretaker and resident, should be told to perform less planting (limited to blueberry/raspberry bushes and a few fruit trees) in 2017 and make maintenance a priority. She complained that many tomatoes did not get staked this year and ended up rotting on the ground as well as basil and dill crops succumbing to weeds. She noted Mr. Mc Caffrey mentioned laying down plastic to curtail the growth of weeds in the future. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the few Farm volunteers feel portions of the Farm may have to lie fallow to rejuvenate the fields. Also, she said Mr. Mc Caffrey has yet to confirm Dimick Fence Co. would provide wire free of charge for her to complete latticework and, hopefully, prevent deer from entering the Farm through large voids in the upper portion of the fence. Ms. Heymann opined the cause of deer accessing the site may derive from Mr. Mc Caffrey's laborers keeping the fence gate open throughout the day. In response to Mr. Isaacson, Councilman Stabile said the DPW is not able to assist in Farm maintenance. Ms. Heymann agreed, noting the DPW's staff has steadily been reduced from 18 to 12 in recent years despite its workload increasing in part due to more developed passive and active Borough parks. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the Bergen County Sheriff's Office assigning prisoners to work at the Farm; Councilman Stabile replied liability concerns for nearby residents would be too great. He noted DPW fringe benefits are quite costly. Ms. Heymann pointed out that the DPW also provides vitally important services such as trash collection, sewer maintenance, etc. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the Farm becoming a cooperative whereby residents are required to volunteer on-site before gaining the privilege of picking its produce (he mention New York City is a proponent of community gardening); Ms. Bouton-Goldberg spoke against such, saying her experience with enforcement was difficult; Ms. Heymann agreed, saying cooperatives require much cooperation and self-control. Mr. Hagen suggested Mayor Glidden's newsletter advertise the need for Farm volunteers.

2017 Northern Valley Earth Fair

Chairman MacDonald said the Superintendent of Closter Public Schools, Joanne Newberry, apparently approved of the Commission utilizing both Tenakill Middle School's building and field as venues when it hosts next year's Fair on April 22nd. Mr. Isaacson cautioned the required application to reserve the School's facilities is clearly geared toward athletic events and will

likely be more costly than the Commission realized. He believed the Board of Education's approval would also be required. Ms. Heymann confirmed the Recreation Commission would have no scheduling conflicts with that date. Ms. Abrams said she has not yet inquired about renting a stage through Bergen County to allow for live music performances. Mr. Isaacson believed reserving both the bandshell at nearby Memorial Park and the School's field would be a better alternative to have musical acts and accommodate potentially 100+ vendors; he noted, however, the event for the most part should be concentrated on either side of High Street. Chairman MacDonald emphasized the Commission must begin to contact possible vendors. Ms. Abrams said while Closter along with the Boroughs of Cresskill, Old Tappan, Norwood, Northvale and Tenafly are associated with the Fair, several nearby municipalities wish not to participate. Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Abrams and tentatively Mr. Isaacson agreed to form a subcommittee that would gather (in addition to the Commission's monthly meetings) to organize and plan for the Fair. Mr. Hagen anticipated that several vendors would not commit to the event until the last minute; he also said it is likely they would supply their own power for equipment. Ms. Heymann suggested John De Rienzo, the former Mayor of the Borough of Haworth and current Chairman of the Bergen County Environmental Council, be contacted to assist with booking vendors. Mr. Isaacson alluded to having a farmer's market during the Fair. Ms. Heymann said the Commission must confirm there would be no scheduling conflicts with organizations such as Riverkeeper, Inc. Mr. Colwell promised to contact Haworth's Governing Body and Environmental Commission as well as the Mayor of Demarest, Raymond Cywinski, who is employed with Suez North America. Mr. Isaacson suggested photographs taken during this year's Fair be collected to use as part of advertising for 2017. Chairman MacDonald reminded that the Police Department would have to handle security, and Mr. Colwell believed both a crossing guard and members of the Ambulance Corp. should be present.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Stabile stated the Mayor and Council informally sanctioned the Borough hosting the 2017 Northern Valley Earth Fair and would do so officially through adoption of a Resolution once the necessary paperwork is completed.

Planning Board

With a recent defeat in the Superior Court of New Jersey (Appellate Division), Ms. Heymann stated the party contesting the Board's approval relating to the redevelopment of the Closter Plaza shopper center, has essentially exhausted all legal remedies; she noted a petition for certification from the Supreme Court of New Jersey would be highly unlikely.

Ms. Heymann spoke of 2 recent Board applications involving the creation of flag lots, specifically 679 Closter Dock Road and 80 Knickerbocker Road, noting the former would not be the subject of a Board appeal to the Superior Court of New Jersey (Appellate Division) after having its denial reversed by the Court's Law Division.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Chairman MacDonald said he would speak with the Mayor's office on the status of appointing a new Commission member/STC Liaison, a position vacant for several months.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen said there were no new matters to discuss.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded she distributed her final draft of the nomination report to designate Mac Bain Farm as an historic landmark. Mr. Hagen stated he recently saw the breezeway door of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) left ajar and the garage door unlocked. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg believed keys for such had not yet been made. Chairman MacDonald said the grass area between the curb and sidewalk in front of the House requires maintenance; she replied the DPW would be asked to tend to it in absence of a House caretaker being selected by the Mayor and Council. Councilman Stabile explained that the 60-day public bid opening passed because both House caretaker applicants had zero dollar bids and no means of differentiating between each other. As a result, he said another request for proposal (RFP) must be prepared despite the HPC's endorsement of Michael Pisano (44 Columbus Avenue), a local painting contractor. Ms. Heymann countered that the Governing should instead prepare a request for quotation (RFQ) so capability, not money, is the main consideration in selecting a House caretaker; she noted John Mc Caffrey had been selected as caretaker of Mac Bain Farm in a similar fashion.



New Business

Mr. Hagen stated the Borough of Harrington Park recently was awarded grant money to install beehives on property owned by Suez North America; he said the subject parcel is inexplicably considered parkland. As he distributed a local news article on the matter, Mr. Hagen said Closter could possibly do the same being several acres of the water utility are situated within its limits; Ms. Heymann agreed, noting a gated trail within its grounds was to be made available (via key) for residents to travel free of charge, a procedure which was never implemented. Mr. Colwell said he would discuss such with Mr. Cywinski as well. Mr. Isaacson stated the Commission recently oversaw the construction of a pedestrian bridge by Eagle Scouts spanning a stream in a meadow on the water utility's land.

Mr. Isaacson believed the Board of Health, which regulates beekeeping in Closter, should not be involved in the administration of passive parks. Ms. Heymann reminded that the Board of Health, like the Board of Education, is autonomous from the Mayor and Council. Councilman Stabile stated Closter and the Borough of Alpine are the only remaining municipalities in New Jersey which still have regulations prohibiting beehives. Mr. Hagen said the Board of Health may feel it is protecting the Borough from liability concerns. Mr. Colwell explained that even if Closter were to eliminate its 5-acre minimum requirement for beehives, the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture still requires water sources and electricity; he promised to provide the Board of Health's argument in writing at the Commission's September 20, 2016 meeting. Ms. Heymann said Mr. Mc Caffrey may still have 2 beehives at Mac Bain Farm. Mr. Colwell said both Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane) and Abram Demaree Homestead's farm (40 Old Hook Road) are private entities and not subject to the Board's regulations. Councilman Stabile mentioned that when the Commission researches how other municipalities handle beekeeping, it will be important to compare itself only to those communities with similar dense populations, mainly northeastern New Jersey.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

516 Ruckman Road: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) plant 2 trees in Borough’s right-of-way in front of subject property to mitigate proposed tree removal.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

81 Ruckman Road: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the tenancy by a fitness center/health club. The Commission had no comments.



Adjournment

Chairman MacDonald stated a quarterly report was recently submitted by Mr. Mc Caffrey, which included 2 invoices regarding removal of 2 fallen trees for which he was seeking reimbursement; Chairman MacDonald noted while neither was causing a hazardous condition, 1 that could have compromised fencing on-site did cost \$1,250.00 to segment and haul away. He assured he would discuss the bills’ legitimacy with Mr. Fry. Ms. Heymann believed Mr. Mc Caffrey takes liberty at times when he is not entitled to do so; she pointed out he recently planted bamboo in his private garden on-site, which has spread tremendously and will become more and more invasive to neighboring properties.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Councilman Stabile, to adjourn the meeting at 9:14pm. The motion passed by acclamation.