



Environmental Commission

March 15, 2016

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Mr. MacDonald called to order, at 7:36pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, March 15, 2016 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

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

Absent

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



Miscellaneous

In lieu of the Commission nominating its Chairperson for the calendar year 2016, the incumbent, Mr. MacDonald, continued to serve in such capacity for the evening.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the October 20, 2015 meeting, January 19, 2016 meeting and the February 16, 2016 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

Chairman MacDonald opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Steven Lopez, 89 Union Street, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He said he continues to frequent the trails throughout Schauble Park and looked forward to visiting several others in the Borough, especially those near the Borough of Rockleigh, which he confirmed are labeled on Google Maps likely due to their proximity to the Alpine Scout Camp.



Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann said the trail maps for the Closter Nature Center, which should be emulated when the Commission revises its trail map, are posted on the Center’s website. Utilizing the Global Positioning System (GPS), Ms. Heymann said Kevin Riley, a Board member and Grounds

Manager of the Demarest Nature Center, has been logging the trail improvements provided by him to date as part of the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in 2014. Upon reconsideration, Ms. Heymann believed the Commission should not try to congest all of the Borough's trails into 1 large revised map because details would be lost; she said while such a map would only be manageable if viewed on the Borough's website. Once Mr. Riley completes his project, she said Closter's trail map redesign would be done by David Emerson, a founding member of the Demarest Nature Center, who according to Mr. Isaacson, designed its map in 2009.

Ms. Heymann explained there are conflicting blazes between different areas of the Borough's trail system which are leading to confusion. She stated there are trails located in both Buzzoni Farm Park and the nearby conservation easement located to the north of Ruckman Park that are marked with blue and white blaze as are trails in the easterly portion of the Closter Nature Center. She suggested certain existing and new trails should be blazed using varying shapes or patterns to set them apart; Councilman Stabile disagreed, saying people remember color much easier than shape. She said the Center has trails blazed with yellow, white, blue, red and orange. Mr. Isaacson felt the existing trail markers (blazes) cannot be corrected because new paint would not adhere to their surface, suggesting the trees themselves be painted. Mr. Hagen stated the paint manufacturer, Krylon, sells a spray paint that applies to plastic. Mr. Isaacson felt a large overall trail map should be posted at each trailhead with a "YOU ARE HERE" demarcation highlighting that particular trail section; Dr. Goldberg concurred, and Ms. Heymann said such an approach is used in the Center. Councilman Stabile said such a design would be rather expensive being different artwork would be required for each trailhead; Mr. Isaacson countered that since the map could be digitally printed, the cost increase would be nominal. Mr. Lopez revealed that in hiking trails of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference such as those in Harriman State Park, he noticed blazes painted directly on trees but also small plastic tabs nailed into trees. Given his flexible work schedule, he volunteered to repaint blazes throughout Closter's trail system under the direction of the Commission. Mr. Isaacson estimated there to be roughly 100 blazes on Closter trails, noting it would be wise to pay additional for reflective blazes to assist the public using flashlights at dusk. He said a sign manufacturer he researched, Voss Signs Co., charges about \$0.50 per blaze. Ms. Heymann stressed that it would be a waste of man-hours to re-blaze those trail markers recently installed by Mr. Riley; Councilman Stabile agreed. Ms. Heymann said the benefit to painting the existing blazes is that they can remain attached to the trees. Mr. Isaacson said it behooves Closter and Demarest's Commissions and Centers to coordinate their trail markers' colors before re-blazing. He also said that repainting blazes while attached to the trees would result in dripping paint resembling unsightly graffiti. In response to Councilman Stabile, the Commission approved of forwarding Closter's mapped-trails via GPS to Google Maps or similar desktop web mapping service so they can be accessed with wireless devices.

Ms. Heymann read the following email forwarded by Councilman Stabile from Barbara Heskins-Davis, PP of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey:

"The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) has announced that grant funding is available to help local communities complete open space projects, Sustainable Jersey certification actions and Environmental Commission activities. The Land Conservancy of New Jersey will help you with this grant application, working with you to complete the application and ensure its timely submittal to ANJEC by the April 1, 2016 deadline. Our staff will do this for you at no cost to your municipality. Please contact me to find out more about our program and services to determine if you qualify for this assistance and grant support.

ANJEC will provide grants up to \$1,500.00 to Environmental Commissions to support projects which advance local open space stewardship and help raise the profile of the Environmental Commission in your community. Typical projects may include trail and open space mapping, forestry studies, design and establishment of community gardens, invasive species management or easement monitoring programs. These projects promote open space preservation, management, maintenance, restoration and education...”

Ms. Heymann said Mayor John Glidden asked that the Commission investigate the potential of said grant.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Dr. Goldberg, to have the Commission apply for the 2016 ANJEC Grant for Open Space Stewardship Projects in the amount of \$1,500.00 to fund trail mapping and signage. The motion passed by acclamation.

Ms. Heymann said a trail section near the conservation easement between the southern part of Buzzoni Farm Park and the northern part of Ruckman Park requires a substantial amount of boardwalks, the purchase of which has been requested by Mr. Riley. Chairman MacDonald reminded all material purchased by Mr. Riley has been through Dykes Lumber, Inc. (23 Naugle Street). Mr. Isaacson questioned if the installation of boardwalks in or around said easement would require permission from Temple Emanu-El of Closter (180 Piermont Road); Ms. Heymann said such would not, but the Temple would be notified as a courtesy. She estimated the cost of additional planks by the easement would be \$1,000.00 to \$1,200.00; she noted 100 additional hours for Mr. Riley's future labor should be endorsed by the Commission and revealed the remaining grant funds are plentiful.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Hagen, to have the Commission recommend to the Governing Body that 100 additional hours, at a \$25.00 hourly rate, be allocated to Mr. Riley to complete trail improvements relating to the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded the Borough in 2014. The motion passed by acclamation.

In response to Mr. Isaacson, Ms. Heymann reported that Mr. Riley installed an additional boardwalk in a flood-prone area by Scholz Bridge. Councilman Stabile inquired if the Commission is running the risk of installing boardwalks instead of trails. Ms. Heymann replied he could travel the entire blue trail of the Nature Center beginning at Ruckman Road entirely on a boardwalk, noting wetlands are throughout the area; she further commented that such a layout is appropriate in this particular instance because the Center is an education tool and the wetlands are a subject matter for the public. Councilman Stabile said he has witnessed people using the blue trail and skirting the wetlands during dry conditions, which potentially increases the width of the footpath and harms the wetlands. Ms. Heymann agreed saying signage should be posted there and in some sections of Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park to deter such from occurring.

Mr. Isaacson questioned if the Health Department should spray trails to curtail the arrival of mosquitoes, ticks, etc. this summer; Councilman Stabile answered such falls under the jurisdiction of the Bergen County Mosquito Control, which was recently approved to spray in Closter by the Mayor and Council. Mr. Isaacson said the Control usually confines its treatment around Oradell Reservoir only. Ms. Heymann said the spray used consists of hazardous chemicals while noting poison ivy is problematic as well; Chairman MacDonald noted Mr. Riley has removed large amounts of poison ivy from trees as he performs trail work.

Coordination of High School Senior Service Volunteers

Ms. Heymann said the Borough requested the Guidance Department at the Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest provide volunteers in May to lay woodchips throughout the Borough’s trail system; Chairman MacDonald stated 7 students are tentatively available to assist.

Signage Prohibiting Dumping on Public Land

Councilman Stabile asked if the signage, to be installed at trailheads, could be considered part of the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded in 2014 so there would be no cost to the Borough; Mr. Isaacson interjected, saying the issue of illegal dumping is not a Commission matter, but rather the signs would be enforcing an ordinance. Ms. Heymann said there is a 20% match requirement for the Borough to be funded through open space monies. Mr. Isaacson agreed to prepare an illustration with dimensions of the proposed signage but asked that the Commission determine what variant of a “no dumping” message should be indicated. The Commission agreed the penalty assessed for a violation, along with an ordinance citation, must be included to have the signage carry legal weight. Councilman Stabile noted the established penalty amount is far more than the Borough would prosecute.

Fencing Corrections (Mac Bain Farm)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reported she is still awaiting John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, to supply the Commission with specifications provided by a fencing contractor (Dimick Fence Co.) so the Borough can secure funds for the project.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

In conferring with Temporary Chief Financial Officer, Maria Passafaro, Councilman Stabile suggested utilizing open space funds for fencing corrections at Mac Bain Farm in the event the cost cannot be subsidized by the Bergen County Agriculture Development Board as previously suggested by Mr. Mc Caffrey. He said the project is estimated to cost \$10,000.00; he reiterated proper specifications are required beforehand. Chairman MacDonald concurred, saying only a rudimentary 1-page sketch was submitted by Mr. Mc Caffrey. Ms. Heymann explained requests for capital improvements by the Commission are financed through open space funds and, thus, do not impact the municipal budget. She stressed the fencing must be corrected within the next 2 months to prevent substantial loss of crops due to deer infiltration. She stated the fencing in question is designed for farm use and is comprised of sturdy netting and heavy duty posts. She believed the need to replace the fairly new existing fence is due to how it was installed, not the materials selected. Councilman Stabile questioned whether Mr. Mc Caffrey should even plant this season if he cannot provide proper specifications in a timely fashion. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg promised to relay the urgency to Mr. Mc Caffrey.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann said the Construction Official, Gary Montroy, who is also a Board member, is in negotiations with the Borough about compensation and proper funding of the Building Department; she said he is very qualified and his knowledge is needed in light of the Closter Plaza shopping center being redeveloped. She further commented that he was previously

employed with the Borough of Allendale and the Borough of Mahwah, sits on the Bergen County Construction Board of Appeals as well as the Ramapo College of New Jersey's Board of Trustees.

Ms. Heymann informed that with respect to site work at the Heidenberg Plaza shopping center, which began illegally prior to the Planning Board giving its Site Plan Approval for upgrades of the parking lot, plaza areas, lighting and landscaping, includes a replaced sidewalk along Closter Dock that does not match existing red brick pavers along both sides of the thoroughfare in the downtown area; she said the property owner decided instead to install large slabs of rock and grey brick pavers.

Ms. Heymann reported that the Planning Board's decision to deny an application (679 Closter Dock Road) for Subdivision Approval involving the creation of flag lot(s) was overturned by the Superior Court of New Jersey (Law Division); she explained the judge's reasoning included the Board deciding not to retain its own planner during the proceedings. She feared the court order would set precedent for another application before the Board (80 Knickerbocker Road), which also deals with flag lot(s). In response to Chairman MacDonald, she said while flag lots are not permitted in the Borough, variance relief for such can be sought.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

In light of there still being no Liaison appointed by the Governing Body for the calendar year 2016, no report was given.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen said Mr. Colwell was recruiting volunteers from the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for the upcoming Borough-wide cleaning/recycling event to be held on April 2nd (no rain date). Ms. Heymann said there were 2 recent articles in local publications highlighting the event. Mr. Hagen said he has not heard back from the Bergen County Clean Communities Mini Grant Program about a \$300.00 grant for supplies, which the Team is customarily awarded for the event. Ms. Heymann suggested the Team both ask the Police Department to promote the event with its mobile electronic message board and also get approval from the Governing Body to install a temporary banner above Ver Valen Street, which would be installed by the Fire Department. Mr. Hagen said the local school systems' administrators have been less than enthusiastic about the event; Ms. Heymann felt the Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO's) should be engaged because they have telephone numbers for the student bodies. Mr. Colwell said he would reach out to both the PTO's and the Recreation Commission. Mr. Isaacson said postcards could be distributed to advertise the event.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reported she is preparing a nomination report for the designation of Mac Bain Farm as a historic landmark. She reiterated that that electric utility service had been restored at the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue). Councilman Stabile said the Borough is still preparing a contract between it and Michael Pisano, a painting contractor, who has offered to serve as the caretaker of the House in exchange for usage of 1 of its bedrooms as an office for his business.



New Business

Potential Acquisition of 375 Blanch Avenue

Referring to a prior email she sent, Ms. Heymann suggested the Commission consider purchasing 375 Blanch Avenue, a 3.88-acre lot adjacent to the now-defunct Closter Swim Club, which could provide a continuation of open space to Dwars Kill. She said there is a 1-family house situated on-site near the intersection with Piermont Road; she noted a large portion of the parcel is in wetlands and the assessed value of the property is \$698,900. She made the following recommendations: 1.) contact property owner to express interest and forestall private sale; 2.) contact NJDEP’s Green Acres Program to request “at-risk authorization” letter being grant and loan funds were cancelled due to lack of progress on part of Borough; 3.) obtain 3 appraisals; 4.) finance sale (in lieu of NJDEP funding) through existing open space funds (totaling \$900,000.00+), subdivide site so that house and garage at east end of site could be sold (realizing about \$400,000.00 and leaving approximately \$300,000.00 for Borough’s share on presumption assessed value and asking price are same). Mr. Isaacson said he previously suggested to the Governing Body that the Borough purchase 515 Piermont Road, the former site of Trautwein Farm, because the site is part of the local stream system, would add green space to an overly-developed area in Closter, and 3 lots could be sold to accommodate the construction of 1-family houses while retaining the riparian zone on-site for a park; he stated the Mayor and Council responded that they “did not want to get into the real estate business”. He opined that there is plenty of green space near Blanch Avenue, and the Borough should concentrate on other portions of Closter that are lacking open space.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Dr. Goldberg, to have the Commission investigate the potential purchase of 375 Blanch Avenue contingent upon the sale price being similar to the assessed value with Ms. Heymann and Councilman Stabile serving as advocates during negotiations with the Governing Body. The motion passed by acclamation.



Plan Review

The Commission did not receive any land use board applications for its consideration.

Ms. Heymann said the Planning Board is considering a Major Soil Movement application for the remediation/excavation of contaminated soil at 48 and 58 Perry Street. Councilman Stabile said the Commission should welcome the proposed clean-up of the former factory site, noting the property owner (Colgate-Palmolive Co.) has been aggressive in completing the arduous task of remediation.



Adjournment

Chairman MacDonald said he was pleased that the long-abandoned service station located at 121 Schraalenburgh Road was recently demolished following enforcement by the Building Department.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Dr. Goldberg, to adjourn the meeting at 9:10pm. The motion passed by acclamation.