



Environmental Commission

**July 18, 2017
Meeting**

Minutes

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:37pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, July 18, 2017 at Borough Hall.

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Attendance

Present

Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
David Barad, MD- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Absent

VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member

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Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to approve the minutes for both the February 21, 2017 and June 20, 2017 meetings. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman MacDonald revealed that former Commission member, Sivert Hagen, relocated to Tacoma, Washington, noting the residence he previously occupied (72 Eckerson Avenue) had been recently purchased by a new home builder and would likely be demolished. The Commission questioned the type of environmentally-sensitive land and/or waterways that surround and encompass the site and believed extensive permitting would be required by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Ms. Heymann reiterated the need for volunteers at Mac Bain Farm and stressed she is readily available for training/mentoring. She stated an article soliciting Farm volunteers recently appeared in the monthly newsletter issued by the Mayor's office.

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

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Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann commended the Department of Public Works (DPW) for clearing a trail link connecting Anderson Avenue and Mac Bain Farm as well as planting shrubbery along its boundaries. She noted a ground sign should be posted at Anderson Avenue near Ruckman Road indicating said link as a blue-blazed trail that travels to the Farm and Hickory Lane. The Commission agreed that a wooden stake with blue blaze would suffice as a temporary sign.

Mr. Isaacson displayed a vinyl copy of the revised trail map produced in collaboration with a vendor he utilizes as part of his own print and graphic design business; having dimensions of 24"x48", he explained it was the actual size that would be mounted atop the pedestal signs throughout the trail system. To protect the map against weather conditions, he said the sign manufacturer would make a 1/2" thick ultraviolet-proof/high-pressure laminate board guaranteed for 10 years. He stated a North star was incorporated into the map for direction and the green border around the perimeter would likely be eliminated to allow for the map's illustration to be expanded to the vinyl's edge. Ms. Heymann questioned if the yellow trail marked on the map is actually blue; she promised to visit the area and confirm which blaze it is. Mr. Isaacson said he researched designing a mobile device application to interact with the trail map and found it would cost a minimum of \$25,000.00.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she inspected recent work done by Dimick Fence Co. as part of the ongoing fence rehabilitation on-site. She said the northern section damaged by a fallen tree, which is currently being held together with clothes line string, had yet to be abated. She said the contractor could not fix other northern and eastern sections of fencing because vines had taken over; she noted the vines help in preventing deer infiltrating the Farm. Also, she said a post with bottom rails was installed at the southwestern corner, but a portion of it is only 5' high, shorter than what had previously been there. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg summarized that while the Farm is in far better condition now than this time last year, volunteers are much needed to improve upon that.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Barad said there were no new matters to discuss.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann said there were no new matters to discuss.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

In the absence of a STC Liaison being assigned to the Commission by the Governing Body, no report was given.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated the HPC would vote on a nomination report designating 511 Durie Avenue, the former Village Middle School, as a historic landmark at its July 24th meeting. As for the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), she said an architectural firm located in Albany, New York was recently selected to prepare a plan to restore and maintain the site. She was perplexed as to why the caretaker, chosen by the Governing Body more than a month ago, had not begun activities on-site.

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New Business

Borough Hall Parking Lot Project

Chairman MacDonald informed that the Governing Body is proposing to rehabilitate the Borough Hall parking lot and install 11 additional parking spaces.

William Brewster, 11 Taillon Terrace, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He explained there are often no parking spaces available for Borough Hall employees and those visiting the Senior Citizens' Center on-site because the general public is utilizing the lot for off-site destinations. He informed that several years ago, the Borough installed a sign reserving certain spaces for Center members attending their weekly meeting on Wednesdays, but such measure could not be enforced because an ordinance to coincide had not been adopted. Mr. Brewster stated the parking issue dramatically worsened, resulting in Center representatives asking Borough officials to resolve the matter. Seeing no response, he said a petition was distributed to compel the Borough to adopt an ordinance limiting parking in the lot to those conducting business with Borough Hall or the Center, an action the Governing Body took in 2016. Mr. Brewster said that despite new signage being installed to make the public aware of the new regulations, parking space availability has not improved, mainly due to the Police Department not enforcing the ordinance and disregarding the illegal parking. He stressed the Borough had sole jurisdiction over regulations such as vehicle size, meter installation, etc. Mr. Brewster reported that on a recent Wednesday there were 9 spaces available at 10:00am for the 50+ Center members who would be attending their weekly meeting at 1:00pm.

Mr. Brewster questioned the veracity of the Borough's reasoning to create additional parking spaces in the Borough Hall lot at the expense of several existing green space peninsulas. He opined the Police Department can opt to give illegal parkers a warning in lieu of issuing summonses. He believed the secondary argument for the proposed lot reconfiguration, which is to ease the task of snow removal by the DPW, is not valid. Mr. Brewster said he supported the issuance of decals to automobiles permitted to park in the lot. Ms. Heymann concurred, saying the existing lot consists of 79 spaces with a significant portion being utilized by the Police Department and Borough Hall employees. Councilman Barad said the recently-adopted ordinance called for signage indicating 14 parking spaces for Borough Hall and/or Center visitors' use only. Mr. Brewster interjected, saying while said ordinance resulted in signs being installed, they do not specify which spaces are reserved.

Ms. Heymann believed the proposed parking lot project does not address the poignant issue, but rather it creates new problems. In speaking with the Borough Engineer, Nick De Nicola, PE, she found that directly replacing the lot with pavement and fixing the existing drainage components would cost \$130,000.00 and if the additional 11 spaces are installed as well, the expense would raise an additional \$60,000.00 to a total of \$190,000.00. She stated such a price is too high and the lot would lose its uniqueness and become much less inviting. Furthermore, she felt the proposed elimination of 3 green space peninsulas, which serve as a traffic/speed control mechanism, is shortsighted.

Joseph Bianco, 7 Mac Arthur Avenue, Closter, New Jersey, introduced himself. He revealed that in 1977, the present Borough Hall was slated for demolition. He said there had previously been a referendum to construct a new Borough Hall for an estimated \$1,000,000.00 on Ruckman Road at the current location of the DPW facility. He described the proposed square-shaped building, comprised of a marble facade, and its offices consisting of glass having views of an atrium/garden located in the center of the structure; he said there was a public outcry

against the proposal, noting the Closter Plaza shopping center was considered for a multiple-family housing complex at the time. He described the Borough Hall site, at the time, as having been an urban village consisting of cinderblock, concrete and garage doors. Mr. Bianco explained that in 1977, Lewis Street terminated as a cul-de-sac at Campbell Avenue, which was a muddy road, and had no access to Homans Avenue. He said a \$500,000.00 grant was then secured from the State of New Jersey to upgrade the Borough Hall, including expanding the Police Department with the Fire Department being relocated off-site, and the installation of an elevator. He stated the parking lot was a 2-phase project with extending/opening Lewis Street to Homans Avenue being the primary focus. To counteract its increased traffic volume, he said Lewis Street was made to resemble a boulevard by planting greenery (grass, oak trees, etc.) in the area. He noted he along with Mr. Brewster help obtain a \$330,000.00 grant from the State to construct the Senior Citizens' Center a few years later.

Mr. Bianco explained the green space peninsulas' main purpose is not aesthetics but rather to have a traffic-calming effect and serve as areas of refuge/safety. While he commended the Governing Body's attempt to provide additional parking spaces, Mr. Bianco said the elimination of the peninsulas, along with 1 oak tree, would jeopardize patrons of the lot because automobiles would then be forced to parked immediately adjacent to the driveway aisles. In order to address snow removal obstacles, he displayed a marker/stake that could be placed in the ground (a description of the object was not given). Mr. Brewster believed the sole reason for the elimination of the existing curbing between parking space #'s 67 and 68 as shown on the proposed layout was to ease snow removal, not enhance the parking on-site. Chairman MacDonald noted the redeveloped Closter Plaza has a plethora of green space islands throughout its parking lot. Mr. Brewster revealed that as a former member of the Police Department, he helped design the original Plaza and Closter Commons shopping centers in terms of safety concerns. Councilman Barad stated that the proposal includes the replacement of damaged curbs; Mr. Bianco reacted that 1,300+ sf of curbing would be removed and recast, potentially resulting in the mature oak trees' root systems being compromised. Ms. Heymann believed many of the curbs on-site were recently-installed and to replace them would be wasteful spending.

Councilman Barad stated the impetus of the Borough Hall parking lot project began several years ago and it was the need to have it repaved along with fixing some storm drains and curbing. He revealed that when the public bid for the now-completed pavement milling of Ver Valen Street occurred, the Borough was able to purchase asphalt at a reduced price and such led to making the parking lot project a priority. Mr. Isaacson said the proposed layout indicates the unsightly storage container, which houses files/records and is currently situated in parking space #'s 8 and 9, would be relocated to #'s 5 and 6, making it more visible to the public; he believed it should be stored at the Fire Department/Ambulance and Rescue Corps facility on Ruckman Road. He agreed that distributing decals to Borough employees and providing stickers for patrons to place in the rear window of automobiles for head-in parking only would make surveillance for illegal parking simple for the Police Department; he opined that summonses, not warnings, should be issued immediately. Councilman Barad said the Governing Body was advised by the Borough Attorney that enforcement of the parking lot is limited because it was constructed with public funds; Mr. Brewster disagreed. Mr. Isaacson said the lot should also be divided into short- and long-term parking areas. He said the Borough owns a skid-steer loader that it currently uses to remove snow expeditiously. Councilman Barad said the Governing Body is still undecided about the proposal despite the public bid already having begun for the pavement milling of Homans Avenue and stressed the parking lot project could be modified at any time; he noted it would be best to have all completed before winter. Mr. Bianco said Ver Valen Street was completed at an ideal part of the year to avoid crocodile

cracking, which occurs when the asphalt does not adhere. Mr. Isaacson inquired about installing curbs consisting of bluestone or cobblestone; Mr. Bianco replied the cost would be high and it would be no more sensitive to the environment. Ms. Heymann stated the curbing installed near the Borough Hall's newly-constructed addition/enclosure, which houses equipment for the monopole on-site, is too steep and needs to be rectified; Mr. Bianco responded the proposal indicates a new curb ramp would be installed and the catch basin relocated.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to have the Commission advise the Governing Body that the proposed Borough Hall parking lot project, specifically, the installation of 11 additional spaces and removal of 3 green space peninsulas and 1 oak tree, would be detrimental to the surrounding environment and negatively-impact traffic safety. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bianco informed that he previously served as the Director of Urban Renewal for the City of Newark and has resided in Closter for 47 years, noting the Borough had been a very rural suburb with several farms and is gradually becoming more suburban/urban. He said his in-laws have been rooted in Closter for 92 years and hunting was permitted in the municipality up until 1955.

Plan Review

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



Adjournment

Ms. Heymann said the Nature Center is not part of the Commission's jurisdiction, noting the land upon which the Center lies belongs to Closter. She said that although the Commission does not administer the site and the Center is fairly autonomous, its long-term lease does not clearly define the lots it is comprised of. Specifically in question, she said, is the land east of Reuten Corporate Park. She produced old maps which could possibly assist in confirming metes and bounds; while copies had been forwarded to the Borough Engineer, she said the Borough should be the custodian of such documents. Mr. Isaacson revealed the issue arose in the past when the Borough sought land to construct a 3rd public school and/or new Borough Hall. Ms. Heymann said the issue has also been mentioned during the Borough's preparation of a constitutionally-compliant fair share plan in response to the Supreme Court of New Jersey's decision in March 2015 to relinquish oversight of the state's affordable housing process from the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). Councilman Barad said a surveyor would likely have to be retained in order to resolve the confusion.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Councilman Barad, to adjourn the meeting at 8:56pm. The motion passed unanimously.