



# **Environmental Commission**

**April 12, 2018  
Meeting**

**Minutes**

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

## **Opening Remarks**

Ms. Heymann called to order, at 7:49pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, April 12, 2018 at Borough Hall.

## **2018 Reorganization**

### **Oaths of Office**

Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison:  
(New 3-Year Term Expires December 31, 2020)  
\*Appointed\*

Nancy Pergament

## **Attendance**

### **Present**

Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison  
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison  
Nancy Pergament- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison  
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

### **Absent**

Paul MacDonald- Chairman  
Steven Isaacson- Full Member  
Thomas Colwell- Full Member  
Keren Kuperman- Full Member  
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1  
Steven Lopez- Associate Member  
Shucaizhu- Associate Member

## **Miscellaneous**

Due to the absence of Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Heymann chaired the meeting for this evening.

The Commission postponed votes to approve the minutes for the December 19, 2017, January 11, 2018 and February 8, 2018 meetings until the May 10, 2018 meeting; she noted being the proceedings for the March 8, 2018 meeting were not digitally-recorded, minutes would not be prepared.

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

## **Old Business**

### **Mac Bain Farm**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated she recently spoke with John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, who relayed that the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, is requiring the irrigation system project to go out to public bid for the selection of a contractor; as a result, she said Mr. Mc Caffrey is preparing specifications. She noted that he was perplexed that a permit, issued

by an unspecified agency other than the Borough, is required to have a controlled burn at the Farm. She said in years past, Mr. Mc Caffrey merely had to inform the Fire Marshal of such, but this year the protocol changed apparently; she assured that if he incurred a fee, Mr. Mc Caffrey would submit a voucher to the Commission for reimbursement. Ms. Heymann stated that for some time, there has been a need to automate the planting and mulching operations on-site by way of special equipment; she noted Mr. Mc Caffrey has likely aborted his failed attempts to convince the Borough to purchase the machinery necessary to do so. She reported that some plowing has commenced at the Farm but was stopped due to recent wet/muddy conditions. She explained the Commission concurred with the absent Mr. Isaacson's suggestion that additional electrical wiring should be professionally-installed for a water fountain, which could be tied into the future irrigation system; she pointed out such would abate an unsafe collection of extension cords that currently links the house on-site with the farmland. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she, as does Mr. Mc Caffrey, believes the public bid process of acquiring 3 estimates for small-scale projects is bureaucratic overkill. While Ms. Heymann agreed, she explained Mr. Dolson is determined to prevent any auditing issues with the Borough's purchasing practices, though noting the New Jersey regulation is more honored in the breach than the observance. She believed small purchases could often be dealt with by the Commission acquiring adequate estimates from familiar/local vendors. She revealed that the 2018 municipal budget contains \$2,500.00 for Farm fencing repairs; in response, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reiterated her request that the fence contractor, Dimick Fence Co., be retained/contracted to provide regular/annual maintenance of the fencing to prevent deer infiltration because a large undertaking would result in a protracted public bid process; she likened her request to that of the Recreation Commission which has regular maintenance provided on its active parks. In response to Ms. Heymann questioning the budgeted \$2,500.00 amount, Councilman Devlin replied Mr. Dolson was not provided specifications by Mr. Mc Caffrey so a precise cost could not be determined for the fencing. Ms. Heymann stated a larger amount was requested by the Commission as part of its operating budget, noting Mr. Dolson has been reluctant to have open space funds utilized for Commission expenses. She explained using said funds would be logical because the Borough's budget would not be impacted, noting the open space account has a large surplus. She said in years past the Commission hoped to acquire additional large parcels to increase the amount of protected open space in Closter, but with continuing residential/non-residential development, land acquisition is now unlikely.

#### **Eagle Scout Project (Mac Bain Farm)**

Ms. Heymann stated Connor Goranson (492 High Street), a Life Scout for Troop 63 in the Boy Scouts of America organization, has been preparing to construct a gazebo and storage bench at the Farm; she noted the appurtenances would provide a shade/rest area for Farm volunteers, improve aesthetics and increase storage space on-site. She said the Commission has not been able to secure funding since last autumn. Ms. Heymann said the \$1,200.00 being requested is quite reasonable, and Mr. Goranson understood he will need to fundraise for supplemental funding to purchase materials.

#### **Trails**

Ms. Heymann said the DPW recently provided minimal cleanup of various trails without refurbishing. She stated Kevin Riley, a Board member and Grounds Manager of the Demarest Nature Center who was trained by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference and last year provided trail improvements for the Commission, would be available to provide additional service at a \$25.00 hourly rate (paid with open space monies) when spring arrives; she said such work would include delineating trails and installing boardwalks. With respect to the boardwalks, she said their effectiveness varies year to year because the contours in wetlands change, resulting in varying ground conditions.

### **2018 Northern Valley Earth Fair**

Councilman Devlin said he was unable to obtain seedlings this year being the deadline to request such from the Governing Body past in February. Ms. Heymann said she requested milkweed from the Borough, which will arrive in May, and it will be used to attract monarch butterflies; she noted milkweed, which have attractive pods during wintertime, should be planted immediately and in areas easy to monitor, most notably at residences. In response to Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggesting seedlings be planted at Hillside Elementary School, Councilman Devlin said its students formed a garden club; Ms. Pergament concurred, saying the club will plant trees on-site for Arbor Day. Ms. Heymann said zinnias were planted at Mac Bain Farm last year and butterflies were plentiful as a result.

### **Foam Food & Beverage Container Ban**

Councilman Devlin stated the proposal to ban the use of foam products by food and drink merchants located in the Borough would be considered by the Ordinance Committee in the coming months. Ms. Heymann said several chain stores, such as Dunkin' Donuts, are being proactive and voluntarily weaning from their use.

### **2018 Borough-Wide Outdoor Cleaning/Recycling Effort**

Councilman Devlin reported he did not notice much in terms of foam debris littered throughout the Borough while he collected 5 garbage bags worth of trash mostly from Durie Avenue, especially in and around Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park. Ms. Heymann said both sides along Piermont Road need cleaning. Ms. Pergament informed that she collected debris from Tenakill Brook nearby Brook Street. Councilman Devlin noted the Mayor and Council questioned if it would be best to have the 1-day event later in the season to avoid conflicts with Easter and/or Passover, which hinders resident participation; he noted this year, there was still snow on the ground. While Ms. Heymann sympathized, she said if the event was held any later this year, there would have been a conflict with the annual Northern Valley Earth Fair, and there would also be concern about poison ivy with the warmer weather. Ms. Heymann displayed the reusable signage posted throughout the Borough during the Effort. Councilman Devlin also informed that the Governing Body questioned why the Environmental Commission, not Improvement Commission, organizes the annual Effort as in years past; the Commission agreed to approach the Improvement Commission about co-sponsoring the event in the future.

## **New Business**

### **2018 Open Space Funding**

Ms. Heymann provided a draft memo from Chairman MacDonald to be provided to the Governing Body detailing the following 2018 open space funding requests for the Commission:

- 1.) 3 additional trail map signs and associated stanchions/pedestals <not to exceed \$4,000.00>;
- 2.) trail maintenance/improvements with additional boardwalks <not to exceed \$3,000.00>;
- 3.) Mac Bain Farm fence repairs <not to exceed \$2,500.00>;
- 4.) fence (post and rail) at Buzzoni Farm Park to delineate open space from nearby land along Blanch Avenue <not to exceed \$3,910.00>;
- 5.) Eagle Scout project (gazebo and storage bench at Mac Bain Farm) <not to exceed \$1,200.00>;
- 6.) irrigation system with associated water fountain and electrical wiring at Mac Bain Farm <not to exceed \$6,000.00>;

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to transmit said memo detailing the Commission's 2018 open space funding requests (not to exceed \$20,610.00) to the Governing Body for consideration. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Heymann explained the Commission and its activities are funded 2 ways, 1 being with its operating budget which funds day to day costs; she noted such is usually adopted by the Governing Body in April or May each year. As an open space organization, she stated the Commission also has access to open space funds, which are collected from Borough residents via a 1% tax separate from real estate tax; she said the Borough implemented such in 1998 by referendum. She said such monies are placed into a trust fund unrelated to the Borough's general account and can only be used specifically for open space or historic establishments; she clarified that would include capital expenses such as land acquisition as well as improvements, maintenance and repairs, all of which require approval by the Mayor and Council. She emphasized that the Commission should be able to utilize the open space monies for its related needs and avoid impacting the municipal budget. Councilman Devlin understood but noted the Commission had \$1,759.00 remaining in its 2017 operating account as of December 31<sup>st</sup> after spending only \$1,981.00 of its budgeted \$3,740.00; Ms. Heymann explained the reason for the balance is that the Commission was able to utilize the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough in 2014 through the Green Acres program administered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to pay for all of Mr. Riley's trail work. She noted the annual Harvest Festival accounts for much of the operating budget. She reiterated the municipal budget should be as conservative as possible, noting both the Mac Bain Farm fencing and irrigation system line items have been included within the municipal budget. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said appropriations for the Recreation Commission regularly far exceed that of the Environmental Commission. She reminded that there had been an attempt to construct a large multiple-purpose barn at the Farm which would have highlighted green elements and served as an educational resource, but the project costs ballooned. As an alternative, she hoped the Commission would consider rehabilitating or replacing the existing storage shed (playhouse) on-site, which is in dire condition. Ms. Heymann stated there are several large sheds located at 515 Piermont Road, the former site of Trautwein Farm; she believed if the property owner donated the shed(s) to the Commission, Eagle Scouts could transfer, reassemble and refurbish 1 or more to the Farm, preferably inside the fencing on-site.

### **National Trails Day**

Ms. Heymann said the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Trails Day is June 2<sup>nd</sup>. She said last year's public invitation to enjoy the Borough's trail system resulted in very poor turnout. She noted the trail expansion provided by Mr. Riley in and around Buzzoni Farm Park last year has been sanctioned by the NJDEP given wetlands were involved. She asked the Commission to brainstorm how to make this year's invitation more successful. Councilman Devlin suggested the event be advertised in the newsletter published by the Mayor's office and the Borough website. Ms. Heymann explained there is a school of thought that the Borough's trails should not be open to the masses, but rather the local population unlike Flat Rock Brook Nature Center in the City of Englewood, which experiences many visitors near and far. As a personal preference, Councilman Devlin enjoyed the solitude of a scarcely-populated trail.

## **Liaison Reports**

### **Governing Body**

Councilman Devlin revealed the Commission's 2018 operating budget would be \$5,290.00, an increase from last year's \$3,740.00.

### **Planning Board**

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

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

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC recently reviewed an application for window replacement at 248 Harrington Avenue, a 1-family house designated as a Historic Landmark.

Ms. Heymann stated the HPC is obtaining estimates to rehabilitate both the heating system and roof of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue). She further commented that local painting contractor, Michael Pisano, caretaker of the House, has made much headway with yard work and the removal of paint from the exterior metal panels of the prefabricated structure. She hoped the HPC and Commission could work together interconnecting visitors of both the House and nearby Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park respectively. Ms. Heymann said the analysis prepared by the architect retained to design a preservation plan for the House grossly overestimated the costs involved. She stressed the \$1,000,000.00 estimate was not credible or affordable obviously. She noted that fundraising can help in offsetting the actual cost. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said HPC member and resident, Irene Stella, is now President of the recently-revamped Closter Historical Society, which would be primarily involved in the rehabilitation of the House; she said future ambitions on-site, such as an *Antiques Roadshow*-like event inspired by the television program, are being contemplated. Ms. Heymann explained 421 Durie Avenue is owned by the Borough and, therefore, the Governing Body has jurisdiction over all decision-making and the HPC is an arm of the municipal government tasked with administering Historic Landmarks. She continued saying to enable more mobility and connection between both entities, much of the responsibilities have been bequeathed to the Society which a non-governmental organization. She mentioned that the general public is technically prevented from entering the House because it has not been issued a Certificate of Occupancy by the Building Department; she believed such would not happen until the repairs are made. She informed that an informal bidding process is underway to select a contractor for the heating system, noting requests for proposals (RPF)/formals bids would not be required so long as the price does not exceed \$15,000.00.

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

Ms. Pergament said the STC recently discussed creating/updating its Community Forestry Management Plan, which references roles to be played by the Commission as well as the Building Department, DPW and STC. Also, she said the STC is hosting post-Arbor Day activities at both Hillside Elementary School and Tenakill Middle School on April 27<sup>th</sup>, at which trees will be planted.

Ms. Heymann said the Nature Center is surveying its trees for those infected by the emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle species. She noted the Center is against the use of chemicals to combat the infections so it is merely monitoring the situation at this time. Ms. Heymann said her own research has shown there are a plethora of ecologically-friendly options counteract the infections. Councilman Devlin felt STC member and local landscaping contractor, Todd Bradbury, is a wealth of knowledge and could advise the Center accordingly.

## **Plan Review**

### **Zoning Board of Adjustment**

597 PIERMONT ROAD: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the construction of a new building (preschool). The Commission made the following comment: 1.) indicate proposed tree removal.

## **Adjournment**

Ms. Heymann said Chairman MacDonald should confirm all current Commission members are signed up to receive publications from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC).

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to adjourn the meeting at 9:13pm. The motion passed unanimously.