



# **Environmental Commission**

**August 9, 2018  
Meeting**

**Minutes**

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

## **Opening Remarks**

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:50pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, August 9, 2018 at Borough Hall.

## **Attendance**

### **Present**

Paul MacDonald- Chairman

Steven Isaacson- Full Member

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**

Thomas Colwell- Full Member

Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison

VACANT- Full Member

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1

## **Miscellaneous**

To allow for further review, the Commission postponed a vote to approve the minutes of the July 12, 2018 meeting to the September 13, 2018 meeting.

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

## **Old Business**

### **Trails**

Chairman MacDonald informed that the Department of Public Works (DPW) recently replaced the trail map signs atop 3 existing pedestal/stanchions located at trailheads. He noted the Superintendent of the DPW, William Dahle, would be ordering 2 additional pedestal/stanchions in the near future, but would likely not use Voss Signs, LLC as the Commission had in the past; he noted a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> sign currently in storage are customized (site-specific) in that each indicates "YOU ARE HERE" on the map with an "X" corresponding to a particular section of the trail system. He reminded that the Commission previously determined the location of the 4<sup>th</sup> sign would be along Demarest Avenue between the Stop & Shop supermarket and New Jersey Harvest Church near the trailhead accessing Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park and the 5<sup>th</sup> sign would be situated in Ruckman Park near the playground and trailhead that accesses recently-installed trails in and around Buzzoni Farm Park. Mr. Isaacson commented the Commission had discussed that future sign locations could be on Blanch Avenue at or near the now-defunct Closter Swim Club as well as the Nature Center, Mac Bain Farm and Schauble Park. The Commission hoped a larger share of the public, in turn, would soon discover the existence of Buzzoni Farm Park nestled among woodlands in the eastern side of the Borough, though, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted there are a plethora of deer and coyote in its vicinity.

Chairman MacDonald said person(s) have been dumping brush, tree branches, etc. at the trailhead off Eckerson Avenue near Mollicone Park and the Girl Scout cabin; he said while there are no logs outlining the related path, which is customary, it is obvious a trail is present. Ms. Heymann explained the Governing Body adopted approximately \$21,000.00 in open space funding for the Commission this year; she said such can be used in part to compensate 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 provided trail improvements for the Commission last year and who would be available to do such in 2018 at a \$25.00 hourly rate. She clarified, however, that the Governing Body must adopt an ordinance for the funds because they relate to a trust fund, not the municipal budget; Mr. Isaacson agreed, saying the transactions need to be accounted for. Chairman MacDonald asked if such protocol is required of the Recreation Commission when it uses open space monies for its active parks. Ms. Heymann replied that the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, said that Commission never utilizes open space funding; both Chairman MacDonald and Mr. Isaacson doubted such statement was accurate. Ms. Heymann suggested an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request be made to the Borough's Assistant Chief Financial Officer, Maria Passafaro, for information about the financials of the Recreation Commission. Ms. Heymann noted that unused open space monies accrue unlike an operating budget whereby the funds do not carry over to the following year. Mr. Isaacson said the Borough acquired several parcels in years past to preserve as open space.

### **Mac Bain Farm**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said a new table is needed on-site to replace the existing damaged by a fallen tree; she stated it would accessorize the pergola recently constructed by Connor Goranson (492 High Street), a Life Scout for Troop 63 in the Boy Scouts of America organization. Ms. Heymann commented that the absent Mr. Colwell had secured the service of another Eagle Scout candidate to replace an existing dilapidated shed that is likely to be threatened by rainwater draining from the pergola uphill. Chairman MacDonald said the new shed should be larger than that which is being replaced, noting open space monies should be used to finance the project. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg pondered if the proposed shed should be installed in or outside the fence on-site.

During a recent visit, Mr. Isaacson said he noticed the rear grounds of the Farm are not being used optimally; he suggested fruit trees and blueberry/raspberry bushes be planted in the area, which would require little maintenance. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, has been asked about doing such in the past.

Mr. Isaacson said the Commission must assign a date for the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Harvest Festival at the Farm, suggesting October 13<sup>th</sup> with a rain date of October 14<sup>th</sup>; he noted it is better to hold the event as much before Halloween as possible to avoid snowfall issues. He said supplies must be purchased and paperwork, such as insurance requirements, must be addressed, noting he filed a letter with the Mayor and Council to discuss same. Mr. Isaacson reminded the Festival includes 300 pumpkins being situated throughout the fields which can be painted, a fire pit to make s'mores and storytelling. He said the 2-hour event always attracts several hundred people, many of which are from surrounding communities. He said the original premise of the event was to commemorate the harvest and promote the Borough-owned Farm by educating the public on how food is produced naturally. Mr. Isaacson said he usually makes postcards to advertise the Festival which are distributed throughout the local school system. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that Mr. Colwell created a Google Doc/Google Sheet for the Commission last year, which is a web-based program it can use to organize and be more efficient in its planning of events such as the Festival. Mr. Isaacson suggested a donation box be available during the event to collect funds for maintaining the Farm. Ms. Heymann replied having

sufficient funds are not a concern but rather the access to those monies is hindered by labor, insurance and auditing protocols.

Ms. Heymann said there are areas of the Farm having 5' high weeds which block the view of/sunlight for plantings. She noted while the front section of the Farm is better-maintained this year as opposed to last, the northern fields in the rear section are grossly neglected. She stated both she and Ms. Pergament recently placed landscaping cloth underneath staked tomatoes, a \$60.00 expense approved by the Borough as well as a few dollars for 6" staples for which Ms. Heymann did not want reimbursement. Ms. Heymann informed that there is a plethora of yellow and green squash available, much of which was donated to the Borough's Food Pantry; she urged that the squash be picked before growing too large. She explained if the ripe fruit is not picked off reproducing vegetation, new seeds are produced from the ripe fruit instead of from the new fruit and, therefore, if the squash is not picked soon, the plant will die off; she noted the broccoli on-site also became overripe earlier this year for that reason.

Ms. Heymann said unfortunately Mr. Mc Caffrey does not utilize his cultivator for secondary tillage between the rows of crops at the Farm, opting instead to have his labors use string trimmers for weeding the outskirts of the Farm; Chairman MacDonald said such a tool would decimate the plants. He said in years past, the Commission has required that Mr. Mc Caffrey submit a planting plan for the upcoming season; Ms. Heymann replied a plan is useless if he does not abide by it. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated Mr. Mc Caffrey has been told several times that additional pathways are needed to no avail. Ms. Heymann said a volunteer has been making signs for identifying crops. Mr. Isaacson suggested Mr. Riley be retained to make such improvements to the Farm as he has done for the Borough's trail system. Ms. Pergament mentioned that those issues related to growth on-site are exponential due to the tremendous amount of rainfall this year. She inquired what, if any, checks and balances are provided in Mr. Mc Caffrey's contract with the Borough to ensure he upholds his obligations. Ms. Heymann responded he is required to provide \$25,000.00 worth of value related to the Farm's upkeep annually in exchange for free residency on-site. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said Mr. Mc Caffrey easily submits invoices for labor and purchases totaling far in excess of that amount each year; Mr. Isaacson opined the \$25,000.00 requirement should be greatly increased. Ms. Heymann commended Mr. Mc Caffrey on his knowledge, noting he holds a degree in agriculture from Cornell University; however, she said he is quite unreliable and unresponsive to the Commission. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg agreed, saying he often overplants but tends to become overwhelmed. Ms. Heymann noted he is a landscaping contractor by trade and is likely very busy this year due to the weather. Chairman MacDonald said Mr. Mc Caffrey is able to reach the \$25,000.00 threshold with ease (reaching approximately \$60,000.00 within any given year) because he allocates a majority of his costs from snowplowing, mowing grass and rental equipment; Ms. Heymann stressed he also buys seeds and plants.

Chairman MacDonald said Mr. Mc Caffrey removed wood piles long being stored in the driveway on the Farm at the request of Mr. Dolson. He said abandoned motor vehicles still remain on-site; Ms. Heymann said Mr. Mc Caffrey's family members and friends regularly disregard parking regulations on-site.

Chairman MacDonald revealed that to curtail overharvesting of the Farm's crops, a reduction in the hours when the grounds are open to the public is being contemplated; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted the Farm's current open hours are from 9:00am to 1:00pm and from 4:00pm to 6:00pm on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays; she said during off-hours, the 3 gates accessing the driveway are locked. She noted, however, there are a few regular visitors that know the location of the key to said gates, in particular, a florist who over picks regularly and is very unpleasant.

She said while that person has been caught ripping sunflowers from their roots, he is the exception not the rule with respect to Farm visitors.

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

Ms. Heymann stated the New Jersey Legislature recently approved a bill assessing fees to shoppers who opt to use plastic bags, but it will likely be vetoed by Governor Phil Murphy. She said several environmental organizations have lobbied the Governor to veto said bill mainly because they fear the money raised by the State (it would receive \$0.04 of every \$0.05 fee collected per bag with \$0.01 paid to merchant) would be placed into its general fund rather than going towards efforts such as removing lead from schools and public buildings.

The Commission agreed to inquire with the absent Councilman Devlin if the Ordinance Committee has begun reviewing a proposed ban on Borough merchants offering foam food and beverage containers to their customers as well as how to improve communication between the Commission and the Governing Body.

## **New Business**

### **Northern Valley Greenway**

Ms. Heymann said the initial idea for a greenway arose more than a decade ago and it is still only a concept. Chairman MacDonald asked what has transpired since the winter of 2017 when the Mayors and Councils of 6 boroughs (Northvale, Norwood, Closter, Demarest, Cresskill and Tenafly) approved initiating feasibility studies for an 8-mile conversion of a defunct railway owned by CSX Transportation, Inc. to trail(s). Ms. Heymann replied the Mayor for the Borough of Alpine, Paul Tomasko, is very involved in said project. She continued saying the railroad, not the 6 municipalities, have control over how the subject land would be conveyed. She noted the Northern Branch Corridor Project, which involves converting said 8-mile stretch of track previously used for freight transport to light rail transit, has been in its planning and funding stages for 20 years. She said after mixed public reaction, it was decided in 2013 to terminate the rail line at the Englewood Hospital and Medical Center, not further northern, because Tenafly objected to a proposed train station being constructed where the Clinton Inn Hotel & Event Center is situated.

### **Tick-Borne Diseases**

While distributing articles from the New York Times and Northern Valley Press, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stressed the Commission should sponsor a program, possibly with the Nature Center, this fall whereby those in the medical field speak about Lyme disease and raise public awareness about the epidemic fueled by the booming deer population in the region; she mentioned a discussion she had with a visitor to the Mac Bain Farm recently, who is dealing with her own diagnosis. She said it is very expensive to fight against the disease and often health insurance companies do not cover associated blood testing. Ms. Heymann said the disease is often transmitted through pet animals. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the Borough's new Registrar of Vital Statistics/Licensing Secretary/Board of Health Secretary, Alexandra Goodman, graciously provided Mac Bain Farm with cases of diethyltoluamide (DEET) insect repellent and posted related literature in her office. Ms. Pergament said her children's former pediatrician acquired Lyme disease, which can have quite an impact cognitively if not treated.

## **Liaison Reports**

### **Governing Body**

In light of Councilman Devlin's absence, there was no discussion.

**Planning Board**

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

**Shade Tree Commission (STC)**

Ms. Pergament stated there were no new matters to discuss.

**Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated there were no new matters to discuss.

**Plan Review**

**Zoning Board of Adjustment**

597 PIERMONT ROAD: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the construction of a new building (daycare center). The Commission made the following comments: 1.) verify proposed impervious coverage calculation of 54% (site plan appears to depict 75%); 2.) provide drainage plan relating to storm water runoff originating from proposed building; 3.) address concern about motor vehicle emissions on-site and prevention of idling; 4.) address concern about material for outdoor play area relating to both its emissions and impact on proposed impervious coverage calculations.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Isaacson said the Commission recently received an inquiry from a developer about the existence of brownfield land located at 84 Herbert Avenue; Chairman MacDonald promised to contact the Building Department for information.

Mr. Isaacson said Rockland Electric Co. would soon be upgrading its substation located at 20 Michaels, a project which requires approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustment; he pondered what impact such would have on the neighborhood; Chairman MacDonald questioned whether there would be an increase in capacity or the electric utility is simply looking for redundancy. Mr. Isaacson suspected the proposal would enable Closter and the Borough of Old Tappan to be interconnected to back each other up during outages.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to adjourn the meeting at 9:02pm. The motion passed unanimously.