



Environmental Commission

**February 8, 2018
Meeting**

Minutes

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Ms. Heymann called to order, at 7:48pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, February 8, 2018 at Borough Hall.



2018 Reorganization

Oaths of Office

Full Member: Steven Isaacson
(New 3-Year Term Expires December 31, 2020)
Reappointed

Alternate #1: Ethel Abrams
(New 2-Year Term Expires December 31, 2019)
Reappointed



Attendance

Present

Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Scott Devlin- 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

Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member
Shucaï Zhu- 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 both the December 19, 2017 and January 11, 2018 meetings until the March 8, 2018 meeting.

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

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Old Business

2018 Borough-Wide Outdoor Cleaning/Recycling Effort

Ms. Heymann reminded that the Effort would be held on March 24th, and that she is assisting Ms. Kuperman in the organizing and promoting. While advertising for the event is usually sufficient, she said recruiting is often poor with 1st time volunteer participation being lackluster. Given it will be held in late winter, she stated weather could be a deterrent. Ms. Heymann said the Effort would be promoted in the newsletter issued by the Mayor's office, local publications as well as via postings at the Closter Public Library and religious centers. She said the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) provides a \$300.00 grant to the Borough for purchasing gloves, bags and trash pickers to distribute to volunteers while refreshments and other supplies would be supplied through the Commission's budget. She stated locations where volunteers gather on the day of the event are normally the Borough Hall and Nature Center, the former of which has received few visitors the past 2 years. She noted she is awaiting a response from the Board of Education as to whether Tenakill Middle School and/or the Library could be alternative staging area; she opined either location is preferred since they are further west and consist of more land. Ms. Heymann emphasized the Nature Center and its surroundings are usually very well cleaned during the event as are Ruckman Park and Lenapehoking Preserve. Both Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Mr. Isaacson suggested an optimal location for volunteers to meet would be the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) especially since Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park is nearby and its breezeway and attached garage could be utilized for shelter in case of inclement weather. The Commission agreed that the Nature Center would serve as the eastern staging area, and the House would become the western so a larger swath of the Borough would be given attention. Ms. Heymann said the event would culminate with all the trash collected during the day being piled on display in front of Borough Hall to warn the public the impact of littering, etc. on the environment. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Effort was started as a project of the now-defunct Green Team, an arm of the Commission, to gain points towards various levels of certification through Sustainable Jersey, a nonprofit organization that provides tools, training and financial incentives to support communities in pursuing sustainability programs; Ms. Heymann pointed out the Team found attaining the bronze, silver and gold certifications to be quite difficult.

As a follow-up to a recent complaint about the Department of Public Works (DPW) not informing the public it was cancelling cardboard/paper collection on January 4th in light of the winter storm that hit resulting DPW snowplows strewing those items left at curbside all about, Ms. Heymann informed that the DPW Superintendent, William Dahle, and the Governing Body agreed in the future an outgoing telephone call would be made to residents, when possible, about curbside collection during substantial storm events. She clarified that Miele Sanitation Co., a private vendor, collects the Borough's recyclables whereas the DPW collects all other trash items. Ms. Heymann revealed that while recyclables were not collected on January 4th, the DPW did collect trash. Mr. Isaacson believed a better contract should be negotiated with the vendor; he explained recyclables are currently collected 2 times per month while they ought to be every other week especially with the increase in cardboard packaging from online shopping. He further commented that often collection is delayed due to holidays. Councilman Devlin interjected and confirmed that Borough's online calendar indicates recyclables are collected every other week, a recent change in the schedule that bodes well for the Borough. Ms. Heymann replied Miele Sanitation Co. has contemplated discontinuing its service in the past, at which point the Borough would have the DPW take on the task or another vendor would be retained.

2018 Northern Valley Earth Fair

Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Fair would be held on April 21st at Northern Valley Regional High School (NVRHS) at Demarest, taking advantage of the parking lot fronting on Knickerbocker Road, which allows for plenty of public exposure and on-site parking; if inclement weather arises, he said the cafeteria, library, media center as well as the school's wide corridors could be utilized for vendor booths, etc. He believed the event will be especially successful this year. He said he is currently coordinating the entertainment/music talent. He noted this year the Fair would be less reliant upon the municipal governments being the event has been set up as a 501(c) nonprofit organization; he stated the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) would be providing electric-powered vehicles. He said he is advocating for both NVRHS at Demarest and Old Tappan as well as Cresskill High School to become the permanent alternating venues for future Fairs so to simply the organizing and coordination of 5+ municipalities each year.

Trails

Ms. Heymann hoped the local Boy and/or Girl Scout troop would construct 3 stanchions for new pedestal sign locations as well as replacing the trail signs atop the stanchions at 3 existing locations. Mr. Isaacson felt another option would be for Eagle Scouts to build a kiosk to house the revised trail maps or, in the alternative, to hang them between 2 posts. He explained even though the new map signs are weather-resistant, they will remain in good condition beyond their 10-year warranty if they are shielded from the outdoor elements. He also cautioned that the existing trail map signs are situated at an angle atop the stanchions allowing for snow, etc. to settle and erode their protective coating.

Ms. Heymann 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 recently did trail improvements as part of the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded to the Borough by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in 2014, would be available to provide additional service at a \$25.00 hourly rate when spring arrives. She said, however, such a line item was not put into the Commission's 2018 budget proposal, but she hoped the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, could find funding nonetheless. She emphasized that Mr. Riley's service is well worth the expense because he previously maintained/built trails, rehabilitated pedestrian bridges and installed trail blazing all the while providing students with hands-on experience in the field; she opined that asking volunteers to do such tasks is not optimal given the work involves removing large fallen tree limbs from trails. Councilman Devlin stated the Borough's municipal budget has yet to be reviewed by the Governing Body's Finance Committee, let alone introduced. Ms. Heymann reminded that last year the Commission utilized most of a 3-year, \$24,000.00 NJDEP grant from 2014, with a \$6,000.00 match from the Borough, to pay for Mr. Riley's labor and materials. She confirmed through Mr. Dolson that there are no trail-related grants available to the Borough for the calendar year 2018. She informed that Mr. Riley estimated he would require 40 hours to complete the current workload, equating to \$1,000.00 in compensation.

Diversity Park

Ms. Heymann stated the Mayor's office assigned the Chairwoman of the Improvement Commission, Maria Kim, to provide a concept for a monument/open space celebrating the Borough's diverse population, tentatively to be located near the Borough Hall parking lot within a patch of land at the intersection of Homans Avenue and Lewis Street; she reminded that the proposed location is where the Borough had originally planned to install additional parking spaces for the Hall which the Commission successfully lobbied against. She stated the proposed Park would involve paving and/or laying stone over much of the grass area along with benches installed to view a monument-type structure. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg

commented there are no trees located in the vicinity. Ms. Heymann stated Ms. Kim wishes to have several tree plantings as part of the project. She explained that if a passive park is being created, the Environmental, not Improvement, Commission would have jurisdiction over the grounds. As an alternative location with much more public exposure, Ms. Heymann suggested the Park be located just west of Borough Hall where there is an existing and unsightly monument sign identifying the Senior Citizens' Center as well as benches often used by pedestrians. She felt the Governing Body should form an ad hoc committee to design a proposal. Ms. Heymann said the retained architect designing the proposal recently gave a presentation to the Mayor and Council. Mr. Isaacson revealed the design includes a large piece of black granite having a water feature at a cost of \$100,000.00. Ms. Heymann said the local merchants will be solicited for donations. Objecting to the design, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg offered that the Historic Preservation Commission embed plaques into a portion of the sidewalks in the downtown area to enlighten pedestrians about Closter's diverse population; Ms. Heymann noted an ideal location for such would be the wide portion of sidewalk at the northeastern corner of Closter Dock Road and Oakland Avenue. She also noted that a Girl Scout recently made a diversity-inspired piece of artwork that is posted on the fence located near the concession stand in Ruckman Park. The Commission endorsed its alternative location for the Park while opposing the proposed design.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated she has not been in contact with John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, for a long time. Ms. Heymann said the 2018 budget includes funding for the installation of an irrigation system and as well as ongoing fencing maintenance as requested by the Commission. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg hoped Dimick Fence Co. would be selected again to continue the upkeep.

Bee Ordinance

Mr. Isaacson said the State of New Jersey apparently has rerouted jurisdiction of beekeeping away from municipal Boards of Health; he believed the Commission should seek options to ease the existing restrictions within Chapter 250-30 of the Borough Code relating to residential beekeeping. Ms. Heymann explained Mr. Mc Caffrey keeps 2 beehives in the residential garden at Mac Bain Farm. Councilman Devlin explained the New Jersey Department of Agriculture recently promulgated such regulations, noting Closter is much more restrictive than most other municipalities in the State. For instance, he said the State requires a minimum of ¼ acre to keep hives while Closter requires at least 5; however, he said municipalities that are comprised of smaller parcels, such as the Borough of Dumont, would be negatively-impacted by the State's requirement as opposed to Closter which would now be allowed to increase the number of hives within its borders. Mr. Isaacson stated the Boroughs of Closter and Alpine are the lone municipalities that have a de facto ban on residential beekeeping by writing such a restrictive code.

With spring approaching, Ms. Abrams stressed the public should be made aware of the many pesticides used for lawn care that are detrimental to the honey bee; she agreed to pen an article on the topic for publication in the newsletter issued by the Mayor's office. Mr. Isaacson noted most Closter residents have their properties maintained by landscaping contractors.



Liaison Reports

No reports were given.



New Business

Emerald Ash Borer

Ms. Heymann stated the Nature Center, while autonomous, receives a stipend from the Borough and is situated on public land in addition to being in contract with Closter via a long-term lease. She informed that the emerald ash borer is an invasive beetle species that is harming several trees within the Center, which is now evaluating its inventory. She said an option would be to give injections of some kind to the trees preventing the borer from causing damage; she said while the procedure is not harmful in any way, the Center opposes the method. Mr. Isaacson said he would research the cost for injection. Councilman Devlin said recent speakers at the Center implied the injection was in fact a dangerous pesticide to the trees; Ms. Heymann replied her research suggested otherwise. She noted none of the affected trees are located along thoroughfares and so the Shade Tree Commission (STC) would not be involved; Councilman Devlin said he would follow-up with the STC on the matter.



Plan Review

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



Adjournment

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Councilman Devlin, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35pm. The motion passed unanimously.