



Environmental Commission

**January 11, 2018
Meeting**

Minutes

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

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, January 11, 2018 at Borough Hall.



2018 Reorganization

Oaths of Office

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

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

Full Member/Council Liaison: Scott Devlin
(New 3-Year Term Expires December 31, 2020)
Appointed

Election of Officer

A motion was made by Mr. Colwell and seconded by Ms. Heymann, to nominate Mr. MacDonald as Chairperson of the Commission for the calendar year 2018. The motion passed unanimously.



Attendance

Present

Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Thomas Colwell- Full Member
Keren Kuperman- Full Member
Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Shucaï Zhu- Associate Member

Absent

Steven Isaacson- Full Member
VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
Steven Lopez- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

The Commission postponed a vote to approve the minutes for the December 19, 2017 meeting until the February 8, 2018 meeting.

Referring to correspondence received by the Commission, Chairman MacDonald said a complaint was filed by a resident, Leslie Brunell (2 Taylor Drive), 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, which resulted in DPW snowplows strewing those items left at curbside all about her neighborhood. Ms. Heymann responded residents should have enough common sense to realize the DPW would be occupied clearing thoroughfares and collection would not happen; Chairman MacDonald concurred, saying snow began to fall on January 3rd and it should have been obvious to residents not to place anything at curbside. He also mentioned that often residents do not place the cardboard/paper in a secured container or, at a minimum, tie them up. He said that the January 4th forecast was correct, but when it is not or if snow arrives late into the evening, the Borough might need to somehow notify residents about the DPW's intention. Mr. Colwell commented that some residents had placed their cardboard/paper out a day or week after the storm left believing the DPW would collect to make up for a lost day. He opined that Ms. Brunell was not upset with the DPW but rather the residents not using better judgement; he noted the complainant hoped the Borough would reiterate collection practices to residents. Mr. Colwell suggested she was trying to be proactive because now the strewn cardboard/paper is soaking wet and must be collected by the DPW; Chairman MacDonald agreed, saying catch basins, storm drains, open space, etc. have to be protected from litter. He suggested an article be placed in the monthly newsletter issued by the Mayor's office to make the public aware of proper procedure. He noted that not many residents receive the newsletter online, hypothesizing many are concerned about their email addresses becoming public. Councilman Devlin explained that the Borough cannot sell email addresses, however, they are public record if in the possession of the Mayor's office; he noted that such stems from case law involving pet store(s) filing record requests for dog/cat licenses in a municipality for marketing purposes. Chairman MacDonald said the "robocall" option would be very expensive and unlisted phone numbers would dramatically lessen its capability. Mr. Colwell mentioned that leaves did not finish falling from trees until very late this season, and they were already blocking storm drains prior to the January 4th storm. Ms. Heymann commended the DPW for its service and noted Closter's last day of leaf pick-up is on or around December 3rd. Mr. Colwell believed residents often follow the curbside practices of their neighbors rather than verifying the DPW's official schedule. Upon inquiring about the threshold at which the DPW would cancel a scheduled collection day in order to snowplow, Councilman Devlin informed that the Governor of New Jersey declared a state of emergency on the evening of January 3rd, but the Borough Administrator did not close Borough offices until 12:30pm on January 4th. Given the Commission's concern, Ms. Heymann promised discuss the matter with the DPW Superintendent, William Dahle.

Chairman MacDonald informed that Nancy Pergament (49 Chestnut Avenue) emailed him about volunteering for the Commission and/or the Historic Preservation Commission; Ms. Heymann assured she would contact her.

Continuing with correspondence, Chairman MacDonald stated Hackensack Riverkeeper, Inc. is celebrating 20 years of clean water advocacy. He also mentioned the \$350.00 annual fee for the Commission's Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) membership is due, noting all Commission members are entitled to be mailed its publications.

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

.....

Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann informed that there are no trail-related grants available to the Borough for the calendar year 2018, including for maintenance, expansion and signage. Chairman MacDonald informed that 5 recently-purchased trail map pedestal signs are being stored at the Police Department. Ms. Heymann reiterated a line item for additional trail signage was requested in the Commission's 2018 budget proposal. With respect to the pedestal sign to be replaced in front of the Closter Public Library, Ms. Heymann confirmed the trail link extends from across High Street through the grounds of Tenakill Middle School and continues past the right-facing side of the Library through Farrell Woods and beyond to Demarest Avenue; she mentioned the trail link does not travel through the parking lot of Saint Mary's School, Convent & Church located to the left-facing side of the Library. Chairman MacDonald stated there are also existing pedestal signs near the playground in Memorial Park as well as along Durie Avenue near Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park. Ms. Heymann reiterated 3 additional pedestal signs are warranted along Demarest Avenue in front of the Stop & Shop supermarket, between Bergenline Avenue and Haring Street nearby Schauble Park and on Blanch Avenue near Buzzoni Farm Park. Mr. Colwell promised to inquire with the local Boy Scout troop about constructing 3 stanchions for new pedestal sign locations as well as replacing the trail signs atop the stanchions at 3 existing locations.

Ms. Heymann reminded that a fence installation to differentiate Buzzoni Farm Park from its surrounding areas has been requested in the Commission's 2018 budget proposal.

Bee Ordinance

Chairman MacDonald inquired about a strategy to compel the Board of Health to revisit Chapter 250-30 of the Borough Code. Ms. Heymann believed the artificial controversy that centered around the debate leading to the Board's adoption of strict beekeeping regulations in 2004 has since dissipated due to the growing concern over the demise of the honey bee population. She said the existing requirements include having a minimum of 5 acres per 2 hives and a permanent water source. Ms. Heymann believed the Board, in light of the recent resignation of its Secretary (Elvira Caputo), will be more willing to ease restrictions; Mr. Colwell countered, saying in his discussion a few years ago with the Board's Vice President, Anthony Neusch, it was apparent the Board felt the existing ordinance, which also stipulates electrical accommodations and fencing, was appropriate. Mr. Colwell noted his recent discussion with Board member, Andrew Baron, revealed that if proof were now to be submitted to the Board that warranted an amendment, it would likely pass. Ms. Heymann stated that in years past, prominent figures in the New Jersey beekeeping community have spoken at the Nature Center and before the Governing Body attempting enlighten the public on the simplicity of maintenance and the importance of a thriving bee population. Referring to the minutes of the Board's March 15, 2012 meeting, Mr. Colwell read that the Board reaffirmed its existing bee ordinance. Ms. Heymann explained the Board is autonomous and is not under the authority of the Mayor and Council. She continued saying that at various times in the recent past, Mac Bain Farm has housed beehives on-site; Mr. Colwell stated privately-owned farms must abide by New Jersey Department of Agriculture regulations, but being Mac Bain Farm is publically-owned, it must follow the local health code, and the essence of the bee ordinance is to discourage beekeeping on residential properties. The Commission concluded it would soon officially contact the Board on the matter.

2018 Borough-Wide Outdoor Cleaning/Recycling Effort

Mr. Colwell emphasized the Commission should begin planning for the upcoming Effort. Chairman MacDonald reminded the 2018 Northern Valley Earth Fair would be held in April; Mr. Colwell agreed, saying it should occur prior to poison ivy blooming and noted last year the Effort was held on April 29th. The Commission decided the 2018 Effort would take place on March 24th, 1 week prior to Easter. Ms. Kuperman, under the direction of Ms. Heymann, agreed to spearhead the organizing and promoting, the former of which includes setting up tents, recruiting volunteers, buying supplies, etc. and the latter involving the local Boy and Girl Scout troops, newsletter from the Mayor’s office, Borough website and local newspapers. Ms. Heymann reminded that the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) provides a \$300.00 grant to the Borough for purchasing gloves and bags to distribute to volunteers. Mr. Colwell encourages the Commission members to take advantage of its Google Docs and Google Sheets, web-based programs that allow them to simultaneously reference the notes and procedures of past Efforts.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Devlin said there were no new matters to discuss.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann said the Borough’s acquisition of 511 Durie Avenue, the former Village Middle School, would have an environmental impact relating to density as a result of potentially 40 families residing on-site. She explained there have been several extensions of time granted by the assigned judge in which the Borough must provide 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); she informed that the most recent extension ends in February 2018. She believed the extensions will soon end and sometime next year the Planning Board will hold public hearings on the matter, then the Governing Body would take up the matter before final submission to the judge. Councilman Devlin informed that the title transfer should occur in a few months contingent upon the seller removing asbestos from the existing building. Chairman MacDonald said the cost of doing so would supposedly come out of the purchase price; Ms. Heymann believed cost for the asbestos removal is cheaper if a private, not public, entity undertakes it.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Councilman Devlin said there were no new matters to discuss. Chairman MacDonald commented he is against fruit trees being placed on the STC’s preferred species list, acknowledging though they are not shade trees, residents desire flowering.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

In light of Ms. Bouton-Goldberg’s absence, Ms. Heymann said former HPC member and resident, Irene Stella, would soon become President of the recently-revamped Closter Historical Society, which would be primarily involved in the rehabilitation of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue). She further commented that local painting contractor, Michael Pisano, who was recently hired as 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. Councilman Devlin explained that last year the architect retained to design a preservation plan appeared before the Governing Body to discuss the following improvements contemplated for

the site: 1.) basic (prevention of freezing pipes, etc.); 2.) exterior painting; 3.) museum-caliber upgrades. Ms. Heymann clarified that much of what was discussed has already been completed, and future items would be realized at much less of a cost than the architect estimated. She reiterated the public is welcome to visit the site, and Mr. Pisano would gladly provide a tour.



New Business

Diversity Park

Chairman MacDonald 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; he opined the proposed location would not be ideal to have a period of reflection.

Foam Food & Beverage Container Ban

Councilman Devlin agreed to consult with the Borough Attorney on the potential passage of an ordinance banning the use of foam products by food and drink merchants located in the Borough as well as continue the research of his predecessor, David Barad, with respect to an ordinance adopted by the City of Rahway and 5 sample regulations endorsed by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) slated for passage throughout communities in New Jersey.



Plan Review

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



Adjournment

Chairman MacDonald announced the next bi-monthly meeting for the committee organizing the 2018 Northern Valley Earth Fair is on January 18th in the Borough of Demarest.

Ms. Kuperman and Ms. Heymann informed there would be an environmental assessment of trees located in the Nature Center on January 13th to determine which are in danger of succumbing to disease, etc.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to adjourn the meeting at 9:08pm. The motion passed unanimously.