



Environmental Commission

**October 11, 2018
Meeting**

Minutes

Prepared by:

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Opening Remarks

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:36pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, October 11, 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

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1

Absent

Thomas Colwell- Full Member

Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison

VACANT- Full Member

Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the September 13, 2018 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann said despite what may have been relayed to those Commission members present at the Governing Body's September 26th meeting, the Commission's approximately \$21,000.00 in open space funding requests for 2018 initially approved by the Mayor and Council in May, are still pending because the requisite ordinance has yet to be adopted; she said the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., assured her such would be introduced at the Governing Body's October 24th meeting, followed by a 2nd reading, and hopefully adoption, 2 meeting dates thereafter. Until such time, Ms. Heymann said there are no monies available to continue installing trail map signage. Mr. Isaacson expressed frustration and hoped all Borough-related bodies and agencies are required to follow such protocol when they wish to spend open space funds. Ms. Pergament agreed to submit an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request to the Borough's Assistant Chief Financial Officer, Maria Passafaro, via the Borough Clerk's office, to obtain an accounting of Closter's open space funds. Ms. Pergament reiterated the agendas of all future Commission meetings should include a treasurer's report to review its budget accounts on a regular basis. Chairman MacDonald updated that he continues to collaborate with the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works William Dahle, and New Jersey Harvest Church on positioning a new pedestal/stanchion and trail map sign along Demarest Avenue between the Stop & Shop supermarket and the Church near the trailhead accessing Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park.

Mac Bain Farm

Referring to recent and upcoming projects at the Farm handled by Life Scouts in the Boy Scouts of America organization, Ms. Heymann said a pergola constructed on-site, would require a new cover and a table nearby in 2019. She noted the location of a future replacement shed is in question with both Mr. Colwell and Ms. Bouton-Goldberg opting for it being placed ahead of the walking path on-site while John Mc Caffrey, the Farm's caretaker and resident, thinks it should be situated beyond the bend inside the fencing on-site; Ms. Heymann believed it should be installed near the front gate to the Farm. Chairman MacDonald believed Mr. McCaffrey's preference would not be convenient for the Farm's volunteers to access tools and supplies. Again, Ms. Heymann explained that due to the delay by the Governing Body in appropriating open space funds, the shed, along with electrical upgrades and a new irrigation system on-site, would not be realized sooner than next year. In response to Ms. Pergament's inquiry about the location of the proposed spigot for water access, Ms. Heymann said the consensus is that it should be installed outside the fencing on-site to allow for public use to wash hands, pick produce, etc. Mr. Isaacson said Mr. McCaffrey was considering a demonstration in conjunction with the Life Scouts' construction of the replacement shed to highlight the use of railroad ties and milling wood techniques. The Commission agreed the Life Scouts should refrain from selling hats, etc. at the upcoming Harvest Festival, and that it would provide financial assistance directly to fund the shed project.

Harvest Festival

Mr. Isaacson said most of the preparation for the October 13th event is completed, noting he would purchase refreshments the day of and the pumpkin delivery would occur the day before; he said while the weather forecast calls for rain in the morning, the daytime hours would be cloudy and he hoped there would be dry wood to build campfires for making s'mores. In case there are no musicians available to perform live at the Festival, Mr. Isaacson said he would play appropriate music via electronic device. He suggested volunteers arrive between 1:00pm and 2:00pm the day of the event. Ms. Heymann revealed the Commission went beyond the \$850.00 budget set aside for the Festival, not because of more purchases than usual but rather due to rising costs according to Mr. Isaacson.

New Business

Bridge/Culvert Replacement (Harrington Avenue and Knickerbocker Road)

Chairman MacDonald stated the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) indicated the outflow of the nearby Oradell Reservoir from its upper to lower sections (elevations) cannot be altered despite the upgrades underway by Bergen County, which includes the installation of (2) 4'x12' culverts and (1) 4'x10' culvert both of which are significantly larger than those existing; as a result, he said the Reservoir could very well overtop the intersection after construction is completed. Mr. Isaacson reminded that when Bergen County performed similar work at the intersection of Homans Avenue and Piermont Road several years ago, flooding in the area ceased but only because the drainage was transferred to the Nature Center, Ruckman Road and the driving range (Closter Golf, Inc.) located on Homans Avenue. He doubted construction would be completed by November 1st, noting asphalt production ceases during the colder months.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

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

Planning Board

Due to Ms. Heymann's early dismissal, no report was provided.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Ms. Pergament stated the STC completed its community forestry management plan which includes an updated tree inventory. She asked the Commission if the plan should include all trees rooted on Borough land, including farms and parks, in addition to street trees situated in the Borough's right-of-way along all thoroughfares. Chairman MacDonald felt it was not optimal to have 3 Borough entities (STC, Environmental Commission and Nature Center) having their own jurisdiction over trees based on location, believing control should be less fragmented and more centralized. Ms. Pergament said the STC was given a presentation by a vendor recently about purchasing its Global Positioning System (GPS)-based software to provide an initial inventory of all existing trees in the Borough, with details on type, caliper measurement and exact location (street address), which in turn helps with enforcement of tree removal without permits. She noted the cost for such a service ranged between \$2.00 and \$4.00 per tree and pointed out that estimates for the number of street trees in the Borough ranges from 2,000 to 4,000. Chairman MacDonald reacted that to include the trees under the control of the Commission and Nature Center as well would increase the inventory cost exponentially. Ms. Pergament stated the existing database is quite antiquated being it was originally compiled by hand. Chairman MacDonald hoped the honey locust would be added to the Borough's official tree planting recommendation list. Ms. Pergament said Rockland Electric Co. is notorious for trimming trees interfering with its overhead utility power lines without much regard to the trees' health. She expressed frustration about the protracted process of selecting vendors to provide pruning and planting of street trees this autumn on behalf of the STC, noting multiple requests for proposal (RFP's) are required for both.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

In light of Ms. Bouton-Goldberg's absence, there was no discussion.

Plan Review

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

Adjournment

The Commission acknowledged the death of former Commission member, Sivert Hagen, who recently relocated to Tacoma, Washington.

Mr. Isaacson stated Mr. Mc Caffrey's 2nd 10-year contract with the Borough expires in 2 years, at which time there would presumably be a negotiation as to what the terms for renewal would be. He said Mr. Mc Caffrey resides on the 1-family situated on Mac Bain Farm free of charge in exchange for providing \$25,000.00 annual worth of value related to the Farm's upkeep. Mr. Isaacson believed the Commission should, ahead of a contract renegotiation, obtain several appraisals for what the Borough could earn from renting the residence on-site; whatever amount is determined, he said, is what Mr. Mc Caffrey should be required to provide in Farm-related assistance and it would surely be more than \$25,000.00 annually. Ms. Pergament suggested the discussion be tabled since all 3 Commission members who serve on the Farm's committee are not present this evening. She inquired about said committee, which has direct contact with Mr. Mc Caffrey, specifically how official the group is and what its obligations are to the Commission; Mr. Isaacson replied the committee is very informal and originated from former Commission member, Mary Mayer, residing near the Farm on Mc Cain Court, and it has

produced a series of casual agreements between the 2 parties over the years. He said while Mr. Mc Caffrey may be very knowledgeable in the field of agriculture, he does not abide by the Commission's instructions and makes excuses such as weather conditions or being too busy with his private landscaping business. Ms. Pergament suggested the Commission obtain a fair market value for the Farm labor provided by Mr. Mc Caffrey; she said he seems to reach the \$25,000.00 minimum early in the season and tends to lag off during the summer. She said there appears to be a lot of overplanting and unruly weeds throughout the Farm. Mr. Isaacson noted Mr. Mc Caffrey abuses the limit of what personal possessions he should be storing on-site; Chairman MacDonald agreed, saying all the equipment he rents for Farm- and/or private landscaping business-related tasks are billed to the Borough as part of his \$25,000.00 annual obligation. Mr. Isaacson warned that in 2 years Mr. Mc Caffrey could attempt to be reimbursed for all the labor beyond his \$25,000.00 obligation that he has provided for each year of his contract; he hypothesized Mr. Mc Caffrey could offer to buy the residence on-site at a price reduced by the amount he exceeded in Farm labor over 20 years. Chairman MacDonald questioned why the Borough would agree to such an offer. Mr. Isaacson said having the residence on-site deemed a Borough-designated Historic Landmark would add protection from a private sale. As an alternative, he said the Borough could lease the residence to a family and use that rent money to pay for reliable and professional farmhands. He said the Borough needs to realize Mac Bain Farm is a passive park, and all related financial matters should be handled by the Governing Body, not the Commission. He said the Commission should know what Mr. Mc Caffrey is receiving in return for his labor in real cost. The Commission agreed it should be privy to all invoices submitted by Mr. Mc Caffrey, and Chairman MacDonald wished to clarify his lawn mowing and snowplowing bills. Mr. Isaacson said Mr. Mc Caffrey may be paying his laborers a certain hourly rate then billing the Borough at a higher rate (inflated billing).

Mr. Isaacson stressed the Commission and HPC should keep it fiscal matters separate regardless of whether they have similar goals as Ms. Heymann suggested there is with respect to the restoration of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue). Ms. Pergament said Mac Bain Farm appears to be a garden for the sole use by a small number of visitors who do not partake in its upkeep, noting that responsibility is undertaken by Ms. Heymann and a few others. She asked what the Commission's mission/vision for the Farm is. Mr. Isaacson stated that the intent of the Borough acquiring the Farm (189 Hickory Lane) was to educate the public on how food and vegetation is produced naturally. He said several years ago, the Borough of Norwood wanted to vacate a portion of Blanch Avenue and provide it to the Meadowlands Conservation Trust to ultimately become open space. He continued saying that a former Commission member, the late Arthur Goldberg, researched and found that the thoroughfare had ties dating back to the birth of the United States; he said maps showed Blanch Avenue was a means by which farmers in the region could transport to and from the Hudson River in the 18th century. Mr. Isaacson said he also became involved in the matter several years ago when he rode his bicycle along a stretch of Blanch Avenue en route to the now-defunct Closter Swim Club when he was accosted by then-owner of 102 Blanch Avenue, prominent local attorney, David Watkins, Esq., for trespassing on his private driveway. Mr. Isaacson concluded it took 3 years to have the thoroughfare surveyed by Closter so it could reclaim it from Mr. Watkins who was utilizing the land to qualify as a farm to attain real estate tax exemption. He expressed frustration that the younger population living in Closter has no attachment to regional history; he suggested the HPC discuss with the local school boards on how to engage the youth.

The Commission agreed its portions on the Borough website need updating by the Borough's Information Technology (IT) Coordinator.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to adjourn the meeting at 8:27pm. The motion passed unanimously.