



Environmental Commission

**September 13, 2018
Meeting**

Minutes

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Opening Remarks

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:49pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, September 13, 2018 at Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present

Paul MacDonald- Chairman

Steven Isaacson- Full Member

Thomas Colwell- Full Member

Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison

Nancy Pergament- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1

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

Absent

Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison

VACANT- Full Member

Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the July 12, 2018 meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the August 8, 2018 meeting with noted corrections. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Chairman MacDonald announced he would be resigning from the Commission by year's end; he explained he planned to relocate to the Washington, DC area, noting he would frequently revisit Closter.

Old Business

Trails

Chairman MacDonald informed that 2 new trail map signs atop new pedestals/stanchions were recently installed near the playground in Ruckman Park and along Blanch Avenue, both of which are locations accessing Buzzoni Farm Park. Ms. Heymann commented the 3 replaced trail map signs located in front of the Closter Public Library, near the playground in Memorial Park and along Durie Avenue near Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park look quite attractive; Chairman MacDonald agreed, noting the cost of such was greatly reduced being the Department of Public Works (DPW), not a private vendor, provided the labor. He stated a new trail map sign and new pedestal/stanchion would not be installed on Haring Street near Schauble Park this year due to a miscommunication with the sign fabricator; he noted all of the new signs 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. Chairman MacDonald stated he, with assistance from Borough records, is measuring the strip of land on Demarest Avenue located between the Stop & Shop supermarket and New Jersey Harvest Church to decipher Borough and from private land so a trail map sign and pedestal/stanchion can be newly-installed in the vicinity; he noted the several trees located at the trailhead accessing nearby Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park should not present difficulty to the installation.

Mac Bain Farm

Mr. Colwell said a Life Scout (unnamed) for Troop 63 in the Boy Scouts of America organization (unnamed) has been confirmed to construct a shed replacing the dilapidated one at Mac Bain Farm, believing its dimensions would be 8'x10'; he said while the exact location of the replacement shed is unknown, he said it would be situated inside the fencing. Furthermore, he said being Borough land is involved, the Governing Body must approve the project. Mr. Colwell explained the Scout (unnamed) would be raising funds by himself; Mr. Isaacson suggested the Commission subsidize the project to offset the additional cost to build a larger shed if it wished. Ms. Heymann agreed, saying the pergola recently installed by fellow Scout Connor Goranson (492 High Street), was well done but the Commission will likely want to make enhancements.

Chairman MacDonald stated potential subsidies, in the form of open space monies, for Commission-sponsored projects would require involved and costly legal review due to the need for the Governing Body to adopt ordinance(s) according to the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson; Ms. Heymann expressed frustration with the difficulty the Commission has utilizing open space funds, especially since the Governing Body already earmarked its 2018 requests, yet none of its projects have been started for lacking of funding. In reviewing the memo prepared by Ms. Heymann to the Mayor and Council relaying her dissatisfaction, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested the proposed fencing at Buzzoni Farm Park be removed from this year's goals to free up monies that could be rerouted to the installation of a new heating system at the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) as part of the site rehabilitation spearheaded by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC); while Ms. Heymann responded both projects are worthy, Mr. Isaacson believed the Commission should not intermingle its projects with those of the HPC. Ms. Heymann reiterated that she has been assured the Recreation Commission does not use open space funds but rather general account/budget monies only, negating ordinance adoption. The Commission agreed that an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request should be made to the Borough's Assistant Chief Financial Officer, Maria Passafaro, to obtain an accounting of the open space funds. Mr. Isaacson recalled that during the initial years following the 1% tax levied by the Borough to fund open space, the accounting practices consisted mostly of handwritten notes and scarce transaction records; Chairman MacDonald said he was surprised by such given government spending is normally tracked meticulously. Ms. Heymann reiterated that open space 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 said an ordinance should have been adopted by the Governing Body on May 9th when it approved the Commission's approximately \$21,000.00 in open space funding requests for 2018. The Commission intended to relay its concern to the absent Councilman Devlin. Ms. Heymann informed that the likely 2-month delay to adopt an ordinance would result in large electric utility bills for 421 Durie Avenue because multiple inefficient space heaters are operating inside due to a faulty hot air furnace. Ms. Heymann said she would forward her memo to the Governing Body and those wishing to co-sign could do so. The Commission agreed its members should attend the Mayor and Council's next meeting on September 26th to hopefully solicit change.

Mr. Isaacson noticed that large amounts of produce picked from Mac Bain Farm are being provided to the Food Pantry. He suggested the Closter follow the practice of the City of Englewood whereby those who volunteer at their farmland are offered fruits, vegetables,

flowers, etc. in return; he felt the idea was more poignant now given the Supreme Court of New Jersey-mandated affordable housing would soon be constructed in the Borough. Ms. Heymann reiterated the need for Farm volunteers, noting that weeds are out of control due to excessive rainfall and overplanting by John Mc Caffrey, the Farm's caretaker and resident; however, she mentioned cherry tomatoes have new growth on-site which is unheard of this late in the season as well as Crookneck squash, eggplant and herbs being plentiful as always. She acknowledged that sweat equity is a possible approach to attracting volunteers. Ms. Pergament inquired about community gardens. Ms. Heymann replied the Borough had done well providing a farm free to its residents for 16 years until recent maintenance issues lessened the experience. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that Englewood experimented with community gardens but it had a problem with people picking others' crops. As an alternative, she suggested a portion of Mac Bain Farm be dedicated to growing an orchard comprised of blueberry bushes and apple trees or a wildflower meadow. Mr. Isaacson mentioned an overgrown rear portion of the Farm could be converted to 5 community gardens consisting of personal plots that can be rented to individuals or local food establishments for a small scale version of farm-to-table. Perusing the Farm's visitor log, Ms. Pergament noticed mostly regulars and few newcomers; Ms. Heymann responded that while there are many repeat visitors that over pick, there are several parents that visit to educate their children. Mr. Colwell suggested the Commission select a date annually during the summer in which children especially volunteer at the Farm, similar to the Commission's Borough-wide cleaning/recycling event held each year. Ms. Heymann clarified plenty of weeding had occurred recently but then seedlings sprout, at which time the area should be hoed clean to lessen future growth significantly. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stressed Mr. Mc Caffrey must be held to account with respect to the conditions of his contract with the Borough; Mr. Isaacson believed Mr. Mc Caffrey's required \$25,000.00 annual worth of value related to the Farm's upkeep, in exchange for free residency on-site, should be renegotiated when said contract is up for renewal in a few years.

Foam Food & Beverage Container Ban

In light of Councilman Devlin's absence, the topic was not discussed.

Tick-Borne Diseases

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated the Nature Center seem enthusiastic about spearheading a program in March 2019 to educate the public prevention of such diseases, most notably, Lyme disease, through a series of lectures by science and medical-related participants. Several Commission members gave anecdotes on those close to them who have been impacted by Lyme disease.

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 despite that in the winter of 2017, 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). On a recent bus ride to New York City, she noticed how vegetated and appealing a potential path between Englewood and the Borough Cresskill could be, but how unattractive the vicinity in and around the railway is further north and into Closter. Ms. Heymann noted the idea is ultimately to have the Greenway connect to the Joseph Clarke Rail Trail, an approximately 4-mile stretch from Tappan to Blauvelt, New York. She summarized until the railroad gives its consent, the Greenway would not become a reality.

New Business

Harvest Festival

Chairman MacDonald said Mr. Dolson is opting against having postcards produced by Mr. Isaacson this year as means to promote the Festival; he said, instead, the Borough would email notification of the event to parents of school children, an approach of which he questioned the effectiveness. He said it was agreed posters could be placed throughout the Borough. Mr. Isaacson reminded that 1,000 attractive postcards (in batches of 30) have been made and distributed to the local school system for less than \$100.00 each of the 11 years the Festival has taken place. He expressed frustration over the obstacles placed on volunteers by the Borough and warned there will be a shortage of them in the near future being most are elderly. Mr. Colwell revealed Mayor John Glidden would be hosting a celebration at his residence recognizing Borough volunteers.

Other than the Borough's Labor Day weekend festivities, Ms. Heymann believed no than Closter event receives more attendees than the Harvest Festival. Chairman MacDonald said the 2018 budget line item for Festival-related expenses is \$850.00. Mr. Isaacson said bids are required for associated purchases despite there being a budget already in place, and he questioned if other Borough entities are held to the same standard; Ms. Heymann replied the Borough's auditor requires such, and the Borough Administrator is held accountable for any deviation from New Jersey's fiscal practices. Mr. Isaacson stated that last year's costs for the Festival, including pumpkins, refreshments and live music, were within budget. Ms. Heymann further commented that if the Commission does not spend the monies allotted within its operating budget in a given year, the more likely an increase request would be rejected the following year. Emphasizing the importance of the Festival's postcards, each member agreed to share in the cost of producing them this year and opted against preparing posters as an alternate form of advertising to save money for larger expenses later in the year.

Mr. Colwell assured he would continue updating the Commission's Google Doc/Google Sheet, a web-based program it have been utilizing to organize and be more efficient in its planning of events such as the Festival. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg again suggested a donation box be available during the Festival to raise funds for Farm-related projects.

Ms. Pergament opined the agendas of all future Commission meetings should include a treasurer's report to review its budget accounts on a regular basis.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

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

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann stated the Board would be convening several meetings in the next 2 months to advise and consent the Governing Body on preparing 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) to the judiciary. She explained the Fair Share Housing Center, an advocacy group involved in several lawsuits against municipalities, acquiesced along with a few additional interested parties, which resulted in a July settlement with Closter approved by the assigned judge; she said the Borough must codify the settlement into ordinances within 120 days. Ms. Heymann revealed while there are significant zoning changes being made to the Borough's business, commercial and industrial districts, none will be draconian in nature. She said the

plan would include the Borough's acquisition of 511 Durie Avenue, the former Village Middle School, which shall be reconstructed to consist of 40+ low and moderate income housing units. She informed the plan would also include the construction of 3 residential buildings at 515 Piermont Road, former site of the Trautwein Farm eatery, each of which would contain 4 dwelling units. She further commented that a group of adjoining parcels (11 & 15 Van Sciver Street/59 West Street) could also be developed in a way agreeable to the Borough; she noted said site had been the subject of an application to construct a new assisted living facility/memory loss center, which was ultimately denied by the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Ms. Pergament reported this autumn, Election District 1 would be the subject of tree planting and Election District 6, along with the downtown area, would have trees pruned. She noted Rockland Electric Co. has been trimming trees interfering with its overhead utility power lines during the past month without much regard to the trees' health. She said the STC also updated its community forestry management plan to ensure the Borough's continuation in the Tree City USA program, which nationally-recognizes municipalities for their urban and community forestry. Mr. Pergament stated the STC is purchasing Global Positioning System (GPS)-based software, accompanying ground action, to assist in updating the Borough's tree inventory. She said the STC confirmed the emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle species, is present in Closter and harming trees throughout. Chairman MacDonald said there are a few species of fruit trees named on the Borough's official tree planting recommendation list which he believed are not optimal where height is of no concern; Ms. Heymann replied when the list was last revised, the STC included such ornamental trees as a planting option in locations where a tree's growth could impact utility power lines.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

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

Plan Review

Zoning Board of Adjustment

20 MICHAELS LANE: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the modifications to an existing substation. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) revise proposed tree planting plan to omit serviceberry and replace with pin oak and/or sugar maple.

Adjournment

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 9:22pm. The motion passed unanimously.