

Environmental Commission

July 11, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Prepared by:
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Opening Remarks

Chairman Colwell called to order, at 7:40pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, July 11, 2019 in the Council Chamber of Borough Hall.

Oath of Office

- ▶ Grace Whitney (Elevated to Full Member);
Existing 3-Year Term Expires: December 31, 2020;

Attendance

Present

Thomas Colwell- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Miriam Lockhart- Full Member
Grace Whitney- 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

Minutes

The Commission did not vote on the minutes for the April 11, 2019 and June 13, 2019 Meetings.

Treasurer's Report

Chairman Colwell provided a summary of the Commission's expenditures to date from its 2019 operating budget ([see appended account report](#)).

Chairman Colwell noted that there is a pending order for the purchase of spray paint, clipboards, plastic whistle, bolt latch for a fence gate at Mac Bain Farm and brightly colored duct tape. The Commission agreed to add 50 galvanized steel sign holders with 2-sided vinyl sign

cards for identifying crop rows at the Farm, to said order; Ms. Heymann emphasized sign holders must be greater in height than previously so they are easily noticed by Farm visitors. Mr. Isaacson questioned why the Farm, a Borough park, is being maintained in part through the Commission's operating budget; Ms. Heymann replied the Farm is a passive park which falls under the control of the Commission. Mr. Isaacson reiterated that the Recreation Commission always seems to receive much greater funding for its active parks than the Commission does for its passive parks. Ms. Heymann said as long as the Commission presents a realistic budget proposal to the Governing Body that covers its needs in a particular year, there would be no problem in that amount getting adopted; she noted the Commission has regularly failed to request sufficient funding in years past. For instance, she said the Commission habitually spends far more for the Harvest Festival each year than is budgeted for in the associated subaccount. Chairman Colwell agreed, noting this year the Commission shifted monies from less utilized subaccounts to those more active while noting its overall operating budget for 2019 remained unchanged at \$5,290.00; he said the Borough's budgeting is based on the fiscal, not calendar, year. Ms. Heymann revealed that the Improvement Commission asked and received a doubling of its operating budget for 2019.

Open to Public

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

Old Business

Schauble Park Complaints (Tree Maintenance & Illegal Bicycle/Motorcycle Activity)

Chairman Colwell said based on the Commission's recent tour of Schauble Park during which it evaluated the condition of trails and woodlands in response to neighbors' complaints about tree maintenance and illegal use of the grounds as bicycle/motorcycle obstacle course(s), it would provide a written response to those making their concerns known to the Commission (either in person or in writing): Thomas and Susan Mc Tigue (81 Poplar Street), Nils Abate (63 Forest Street), Martin Schiffman (94 Pine Street) and Christine Hofmann (134 Bergenline Avenue).

Chairman Colwell said according to Councilman Devlin, the Governing Body determined that the Borough is indemnified from the bike activity on Borough grounds through its insurance policy. He also reported that a garbage receptacle will again be placed in Schauble Park near a trail path; he noted while the Department of Public Works (DPW) assured it would maintain the receptacle, he was warned that it has been stolen from the area more than once. Ms. Heymann questioned if the Commission wished to take action regarding the bike activity in spite of the Borough being insured for such. She inquired if the Borough should authorize the area in the Park which experiences bike activity and transfer oversight to the Recreation Commission. Chairman Colwell said he and Mr. Isaacson would mark those trees in the Park which pose a danger to the public, and in turn, the DPW would abate the hazard by either pruning or removing them; he emphasized those fallen trees which are not deemed dangerous shall remain as is. Ms. Lockhart felt the complainants would likely not be happy if the Borough were to take no action against the bike activity. Chairman Colwell suggested the Commission notify the Governing Body whether it is for or against the use of a passive park in such a way. He and Ms. Heymann reminded that the both the Commission and Recreation Commission already co-administer Mollicone Park as well as Schauble Park since both have ballfields. Mr. Isaacson said there is obviously a public need for such activity, thus, the Mayor and Council should decide the matter. Chairman Colwell said the DPW would install signage at Schauble Park informing the public about dumping yard debris being prohibited; he said the DPW

Superintendent, William Dahle, would discuss the specifics with Interim Borough Administrator, Edward Hynes. Chairman Colwell said that any complaints received about littering along thoroughfares would be forwarded to the Governing Body and/or DPW. Mr. Isaacson suggested, and the Commission agreed, it would request that if the Governing Body is, in effect, approving the bike activity in the Park, it should be limited to bicycle use only; it opined motorcycles are loud, polluting and dangerous, therefore, inappropriate for a passive park. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked that the penalty for illegal motorized activity be large enough to serve as a deterrent unlike the penalty the Borough assessed for illegal dumping, which is miniscule; Chairman Colwell said a request for increasing penalties should be discussed when Councilman Devlin is present.

Ms. Pergament noted that the complainants initially sent their concerns to the former Chairman of the Commission, Paul MacDonald, because the Borough website remains outdated with respect to its directory, etc., resulting in an unnecessary delayed response by the Commission. Chairman Colwell promised to address the matter with Councilman Devlin and Mr. Hynes.

Special Meeting Dates

Chairman Colwell informed that the Borough recently provided public notice for the Commission to convene Special Meetings on July 23, 2019, August 22, 2019 and September 24, 2019 during which formal action may be taken on the following issues: 1.) Mac Bain Farm; 2.) trail system; 3.) Schauble Park; 4.) Harvest Festival; 5.) emerald ash borer; 6.) Eagle Scout projects; 7.) Sustainable Jersey certification program.

Eagle Scout Projects

Chairman Colwell informed that a local resident, Travis Brueck, would be flying his unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) over Mac Bain Farm this weekend to assist the Commission in generating current maps of the farmland's layout; Ms. Lockhart asked if Mr. Brueck could conduct his flyby when the Farm is not open to the public as a safety measure. Ms. Pergament said having a video link of the images captured by Mr. Brueck posted online would provide tremendous advertising for the Farm. Mr. Isaacson said he could utilize the aerial images to create a map sign of the farmland to post at the front gate of the Farm, and volunteers could use an erasable marker pen to inform visitors at the entrance which crop sections are open/closed to the public on a daily basis.

Chairman Colwell said Eagle Scout candidate, Connor Goranson, who recently constructed the replacement shed at the Farm, provided him a list of materials needed to build a picnic table to match the 2 benches he also constructed on-site; he hoped the funding for materials could be taken from the Commission's operating budget.

Chairman Colwell said Mr. Dahle is researching prices for gravel to fill voids in the weather-damaged roadway located on Mac Bain Farm.

The Commission went into closed session at 8:08pm.

Chairman Colwell reopened the meeting to the public at 8:39pm; the topic(s) of discussion were not divulged.

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)

Following up on a recent ANJEC meeting attended by both she and Ms. Pergament, Ms. Heymann urged that the Commission purchase the handbook provided to them at said meeting for each Commission member; she said it details all of the responsibilities of an environmental commission, many of which Closter has neglected due to time constraints. Ms. Pergament agreed, saying the Commission should organize a subcommittee to concentrate solely on

ANJEC-related matters. Ms. Heymann stressed the Commission should take advantage of its affiliation with ANJEC, which she believed to be the most organized and thoughtful county- or state-wide organization she has worked with in her 50+ years serving in government. Chairman Colwell noted that instead of having to purchase multiple copies of the handbook, each Commission member could hopefully download it from the ANJEC website.

Ms. Heymann said ANJEC emphasizes that municipalities must be versed in storm water/drainage topics. Also, she said trash collection was discussed at the ANJEC meeting, pointing out the Commission has been lobbying for a ban on the use/sale of foam-based food and beverage containers by merchants to no avail. She further commented that contrary to popular belief, reusing plastic bags is much less detrimental to the environment than paper or fabric bags as well as less expensive. Ms. Heymann distributed literature from the Sierra Club to Commission members which contained articles about recycling. She reiterated that foam is far worse than plastic being it cannot be recycled. She suggested the Commission approach the Governing Body and demand action on the foam ban which has been lagging with the Ordinance Committee for 3 years. Ms. Lockhart stated according to ANJEC, there are 6 municipalities in New Jersey with bans on foam containers: 1.) City of Lambertville; 2.) Borough of Leonia; 3.) Borough of Little Silver; 4.) Township of Maplewood; 5.) Borough of Monmouth Beach; 6.) Borough of Ocean Gate.

Ms. Heymann stated the public is ignorant about the existence of the Borough's trail system, noting most of its attention has recently been towards seeing the Northern Valley Greenway, a rail trail proposal, become a reality. She informed that National Trails Day falls on the 1st Saturday in June annually, which would be an optimal time to highlight the Borough's vast trail system. Mr. Isaacson noted aerial images could be captured of all the open space located within the Borough so that more accurate depictions of the trail system can be produced moving forward. Chairman Colwell suggested the local school system be asked to form hiking clubs to educate the youth on nearby trails; Ms. Heymann cautioned that if such a club were organized, the students would most likely use the trails during the warmer months, when poison ivy/oak and deer ticks are in abundance.

Rather than a subcommittee being created, Ms. Whitney volunteered to be the Commission's Liaison for all ANJEC-related matters.

Ms. Heymann revealed that ANJEC also provides instruction on how to read engineering and architectural drawings, noting there is more to plan review by the Commission than tree removal only. Chairman Colwell informed that a Planning Board member, Angela Ferullo, recently thanked the Commission for its regular feedback on Board applications; Ms. Heymann agreed, saying the Commission should begin providing comments on drainage when the Borough's land use boards request an administrative report.

New Business

The Commission did not discuss any new matters.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

In light of Councilman Devlin's absence, no report was given.

Planning Board

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

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC restarted efforts to have 511 Durie Avenue, site of the abandoned Village Middle School, deemed a Historic Landmark by the Borough before its redevelopment as a 35-apartment affordable housing complex commences.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Ms. Pergament said the Commission's proposal to establish a tree nursery at Mac Bain Farm and have the STC utilize it for growing trees to plant throughout the Borough, was not endorsed by the STC; in fact, she said STC believed it would ultimately be for show only. She noted that the STC was interested in using a small portion of the nursery for experimenting with a few bare root tree plantings to see if they are superior to container-grown and bald/burlap in terms of transplanting. Ms. Heymann opined the idea of a tree nursery would be a powerful educational tool for children; she noted that the Farm's caretaker and resident, John Mc Caffrey, is an expert in tree transplanting. Ms. Pergament said she was uncertain if the STC would provide its own trees to experiment with being bare roots are quite expensive. Ms. Lockhart said the difficulty with bare root trees is sourcing them, in addition to being a newer concept. Ms. Heymann said the southwestern most corner of the Farm at the bottom of the hill is an undeveloped grass area which would be ideal for growing trees; she said while crops cannot flourish in such a shady area, trees can. Ms. Pergament questioned if the tree nursery would require a lot of effort by the Farm volunteers; Chairman Colwell believed initially, maybe, but not once the seedlings have taken hold. He said the STC should provide a list of preferred species to be planted. Ms. Heymann felt Mr. Mc Caffrey should spearhead establishing the nursery (including acquiring bare root plantings via his private landscaping business) since he inadvertently plowed over seedlings planted by Chairman Colwell that had been provided by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and intended to be the start of a nursery at the Farm. Mr. Isaacson noted the nursery would hopefully save the Borough money by not having to purchase as many street trees from a 3rd party.

Mr. Isaacson revealed that the Borough would be installing a commuter parking lot adjacent to Pollock Square, the passive park located at the corner of Closter Dock Road and Piermont Road; he suggested the Commission should plant various species of trees, possibly originating from the Farm's nursery, at the site in commemoration of Borough volunteers; he noted the Borough could also install a water feature on-site. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the Township of Teaneck donates trees in memory of residents and places markers to commemorate them.

Ms. Heymann said the Borough of Haworth operates a tree nursery, though Ms. Pergament pointed out it is not in the best of care; Ms. Heymann said the offerings are also very expensive.

Given its heavy workload, the Commission decided to hold off on moving forward with the establishing of a tree nursery at Mac Bain Farm until at least this autumn.

Plan Review

Planning Board

273 CLOSTER DOCK ROAD: This is an application for Site Plan Approval involving the construction of an addition to and rehabilitation of a non-residential building as well as site work improvements. The Commission had no comments.

Adjournment

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to adjourn the meeting at 9:13pm. The motion passed unanimously.

