

Environmental Commission

March 14, 2019 Meeting Minutes

**Prepared by:
Paul Demarest**

Opening Remarks

Chairman Colwell called to order, at 7:35pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, March 14, 2019 in the Council Chamber of Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present

Thomas Colwell- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Miriam Lockhart- Full Member
Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison
Nancy Pergament- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Grace Whitney- Associate Member

Absent

Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
VACANT- Full Member
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Minutes

The Commission postponed votes to approve the minutes for the January 16, 2019 and February 14, 2019 Meetings until the April 11, 2019 Meeting.

Open to Public

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

Old Business

2019 Mac Bain Farm Land Use Plan

John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Mac Bain Farm, introduced himself. In response to the Commission's request, he presented a land use plan, as per his contract/lease with the Borough, detailing his vision for the upcoming season. He said the map submitted includes areas for a tree nursery to be established and wild flowers located on the westerly side of the

Farm would be made possible by reducing the crop space on-site by approximately 20% (1 of 5 acres). He further commented the void area beyond the westerly fencing and roadway is 40' to 50' of farmland bound by Anderson Brook, which would not be protected from browsing by various animals, including deer. Mr. Mc Caffrey said he regularly plants various types of vegetables on-site, including 10 varieties of pepper, 5 of eggplant, 10 of lettuce/herb and 10 cultivars of tomato such as cherry, grape and plum; he also said sunflowers are grown, which require constant weeding. He reiterated his suggestion for the Commission to acquire a plastic mulch layer to greatly simplify/ease the weed maintenance at the Farm. He remembered Ms. Heymann had solicited Whole Foods Market, which presents itself as very community-oriented, to fund the purchase of the tractor attachment when the grocer 1st opened its Closter location 2 years. He informed that the compost area and residence's private garden would remain as is. Ms. Pergament stressed the course of action in maintaining the Farm in 2019 must be planned taking into account that a plastic mulch layer would not be realized this year, a continued reduction of a foreign-born workforce due to international politics was likely and there may still be low recruitment of new volunteers to assist both Ms. Heymann and Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, who spend tremendous amounts of time caring for the Farm; she felt increasing the space between crop rows would lessen the maintenance. Chairman Colwell said he would make his small-scale tiller available to the Farm; Mr. Colwell replied the machine would assist with weeding between lettuce and herb rows, which are separated 14". Ms. Lockhart stressed Farm visitors are very fond of collard greens, bok choy and wax beans. Promising to grow said vegetables, Mr. Mc Caffrey emphasized he always grows 5 cultivars of bean. With respect to Brussels sprouts, he said they were previously grown on-site, however, the picking of their leaves would stunt their growth because the plant then cannot nourish itself; he informed that Brussels sprouts take a lot of time to grow unlike lettuce or pepper, which thrive once the soil warms. He noted the bok choy rotted last year due to the tremendous amount of rainfall; Chairman Colwell agreed, saying he had not seen the Oradell Reservoir at such a high level in many decades.

Mr. Mc Caffrey stated the number of trees that could be supported in the nursery depended on row spacing, likely to be 4' to 5'. He explained 1 option is to plant seedlings in very tight rows and once they begin growing, they can be dug up bare root and separated to conserve space. He estimated a single row of 60 trees could fit in the reserved area given its length is 200' to 250' measured from the front of the westerly fencing to the compost area. He believed such would allow for a seedling to develop into a whip with a caliper measurement of 1½", noting any larger would require heavy machinery to relocate them. Mr. Mc Caffrey said the seedlings could be planted in root sacks whereby the soil controls the root development; he explained while the sack's material is permeable, it is a root blocker. He said another option would be the pot-in-pot approach, a much more time-consuming process, whereby a pot having a sleeve is buried in the ground and another pot having handles is placed into the other pot. He said depending upon the soil quality, a seedling the size of a pinkie finger can grow to a solid 1" caliper measurement in 3 to 4 years. Ms. Lockhart opined the pot-in-pot approach could be problematic given the limited laborer and unskilled volunteer resources expected; Mr. Mc Caffrey agreed the root sack method is more practical and would ease harvesting. He mentioned that vendors selected by the Shade Tree Commission (STC) each year to plant street trees could have written into their contracts with the Borough that the trees must originate from the Farm's nursery, resulting in the Borough saving money; he noted the vendors could easily remove trees from the nursery with a skid-steer loader. Mr. Isaacson suggested temporary fencing be placed around those crops that grow slowly to prevent premature picking. Mr. Mc Caffrey expressed frustration with uninformed/disrespectful Farm visitors abusing privileges and said he banned flower picking altogether at the Farm as a consequence; for example, he said zucchini flowers were decimated recently because Farm visitors were picking females only thereby limiting fruit growth. He mentioned the Farm has grown tremendous beautiful-leafed squash plants in the past, but over-picking impacted fruit production. Ms. Lockhart said former Commission member and Farm

volunteer, Mary Mayer, had the best response when she caught visitors picking too much; she said she would politely confront the offender and ask them to leave the excess picking with her before exiting the front gate. Mr. Mc Caffrey said crop row spacing could consist of 5' wide footpaths of ryegrass at every 6th row, noting the paths must be reseeded each year due to tilling; he said the ryegrass could be mowed every other week when the residence's lawn is cut. For pricing of root sacks and a plastic mulch layer, he suggested the Commission contact Ashbel Merrel (AM) Leonard Horticultural Tool & Supply Co. and Rain-Flo Irrigation Co. respectively.

Referring to the proposed irrigation system at Mac Bain Farm, Mr. Mc Caffrey informed that he contacted Mark Schwartz, operator of Precision Sprinklers & Outdoor Lighting, LLC, who is licensed in New Jersey to perform large scale installations involving backflow preventers. While distributing a proposal, he said Mr. Schwartz provided an estimate based on a system originating from the residence's water utility main line (2" diameter/copper) with frost-free hydrants (see trade name *Murdock*) branching off at 4 specific locations (pits); in the future, he noted the installation could accommodate either a drip or overhead (impact) irrigation system, the former (or hybrid) of which he would suggest because a plastic mulch layer requires a drip system, which saves on water while curtailing weed growth. With respect to the hydrants, Mr. Mc Caffrey said prices range from \$100.00 to \$850.00 each; he informed that between his farm in western New Jersey, his landscaping business and the Farm, he has installed 16 hydrants, of which 3 were the most expensive (*Murdock*) and the oldest is still operating 24 years later and the other 13 are cheaper models and have been replaced (arduous task) once or twice. He explained the trench for the water lines will be 2½' to 3' deep and the water well's bore, usually 6" in diameter, is 8" and is near the residence; he noted the well is not indicated on the proposed map. Ms. Pergament said the well's proximity is important because it allows for flexibility, when weather permits, to use well water instead of the water utility. Mr. Mc Caffrey said the well is quite deep at 243', explaining when he installed its submersible pump, tremendous water flow was discovered. He informed that well water is collected, not from the bottom of the well, but rather from veins along the sides of the shaft; he further commented that after a 3-hour test, the well's water level barely dropped from 20' to 35'. He said the well has never run dry during droughts, has been tested twice and produces icy cold water.

Ms. Lockhart stressed Mr. Mc Caffrey must provide detailed plans and specifications for the Borough Administrator, Arthur Dolson, to commence the public bid process; Mr. Mc Caffrey confirmed his submittal this evening includes a material list and map. He said Mr. Schwartz' quote for material and labor, not including electrical work, was \$21,400.00; he noted 3 pits were anticipated, but a 4th was added for a water spigot at the front gate. The Commission agreed the spigot should be located inside the fencing for security. Mr. Mc Caffrey said an electrical line for the irrigation system could be installed in the trench where the water line will be laid as required for the valve control, but he estimated 600' to 700' of conduit would be necessary; instead, he suggested a larger wire gauge to allow for a shorter run of conduit from the residence to the kiosk at the front gate via a path along the base of the fence avoiding roots of a nearby Borough-designated landmark tree (beech). Ms. Pergament reminded that only \$6,000.00 in open space funding had been approved for the project by the Governing Body this year, but she believed the electrical and plumbing work should be done at the same time to cut costs. Mr. Isaacson said the map/plan should be clarified to show the proposed pits and hydrants would be connected directly to the existing water utility main line. Mr. Mc Caffrey said a 2" water utility main line is quite rigid and its expansion will have to be run in 20' lengths at right angles. Assuming a drip irrigation system is installed, he estimated there would be roughly 20 zones, which would cost about \$400.00 each. He reiterated that the 2" water utility main line would permit 10 to 12 impacts to run simultaneously, much like a golf course system, whereas the water well allows for 3 at once. Chairman Colwell said if the Commission must request additional monies from the Governing Body, he wants all costs involved to complete the project

to be known beforehand. Mr. Mc Caffrey said he would ask Mr. Schwartz the difference in price between a drip and overhead (impact) irrigation system. Ms. Pergament acknowledged the Commission's request for more funds may not be approved, equating it to the pending request by the Nature Center for deer fencing. Mr. Mc Caffrey replied that Warren County pays for material relating to deer fencing installed in its jurisdiction, however, the installation cost is the responsibility of the property owner. He suggested the Commission inquire with the Bergen County Agriculture Development Board about such a program, and Councilman Devlin replied, while he is doubtful, he would ask. Mr. Isaacson said the grocery chain, ShopRite, employs nutritional chefs who could pick the Farm's crops and use them as ingredients, creating a true farm-to-table experience, and the public could purchase the meals.

Mr. Mc Caffrey said the shed replacement at Mac Bain Farm has essentially been completed by Eagle Scout candidate, Tyler Pendleton; unfortunately, he said Mr. Pendleton could not utilize milled wood due to his tight schedule as a result of his family relocating to Texas. Mr. Isaacson said a much needed ramp/landing accessing the shed could be comprised of milled wood. Mr. Mc Caffrey noted clean gravel was not used for the base, rather reprocessed concentrate was. Chairman Colwell informed that he knew of volunteer(s) who could assist in finalizing the shed, such as staining and addressing the change in elevation around the shed. He was impressed with the shed's size, noting it has a loft.

Speaking of the Governing Body's recent decision to designate the house at Mac Bain Farm, in which he resides, as a Historic Landmark upon the request by the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), he noted the HPC's nomination report contained the following errors: 1.) Kenneth Mac Bain did not install water lines under the basement floor in the 1930's but rather air ducts ("poor man's air conditioning"); 2.) Boy Scout volunteers did not install the original patio/walkway/gated area to accommodate the handicapped and elderly but rather expanded upon the existing appurtenances originally installed by Mr. Mc Caffrey and his family. Chairman Colwell promised to forward the aforementioned corrections to the HPC. Mr. Mc Caffrey revealed that Mr. Mac Bain reduced his real estate tax liability by installing a root cellar in the house's basement as well as another in a carport which had been built into an embankment. He said Mr. Mac Bain outfitted the house with a forced hot air heating system, attic fan and lamb's wool shot into the walls to serve as insulation.

Ms. Pergament informed Mr. Mc Caffrey that his reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses relating tree damage and removal at Mac Bain Farm was being processed by the Borough. He informed that there is a tree rooted at 213 Hickory Lane that is encroaching upon the Farm's driveway, which requires pruning or removal.

Nature Center

Councilman Devlin reminded that the Governing Body recently approved a public bid for the purchase of supplies relating to fencing installation at the Center without sanctioning its \$50,000.00 open space funding request. He said the Borough will either select the lowest bidder for the materials, noting much of the labor will be provided by volunteers, or choose none of the respondents and rebid. Chairman Colwell mentioned the Commission's irrigation project at Mac Bain Farm would likely require such a process. Councilman Devlin responded such would depend on the Borough's newly-hired Qualified Purchasing Agent, Erik Lenander, who will determine if the Borough can exceed the bid threshold in certain instances.

2019 Borough-Wide Cleanup Effort

Councilman Devlin informed that the Governing Body recently approved the Commission's request for temporary signage throughout the Borough, and both the Nature Center and the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) were approved to serve as the eastern and western gathering points for volunteers. Chairman Colwell said he is awaiting to receive a

digital copy of the artwork for the event's signage acquired last year by former Commission chairperson, Paul MacDonald; Ms. Pergament noted that the only revisions needed on the sign design are the dates for this year and indication that participants under the age of 16 must be accompanied by adults (as per Borough's Risk Management Consultant). She noted the usual \$300.00 grant from Bergen County is forthcoming and refreshments will be bought through the Borough's purchase order process. Referring to public outreach for the event, Chairman Colwell mentioned that the Borough's email system is being switched from Microsoft Outlook to Gmail, creating delayed messaging for the time being. He promised to get contact information for New Jersey Harvest Church (370 Demarest Avenue) to Ms. Lockhart and assured he would inquire with the Scout troops. Ms. Pergament reiterated social media and the local newspapers were vital for advertising the event. Chairman Colwell reminded Commission members to update/add tabs to the Commission's Google Docs and Google Sheets, web-based programs designed to enhance preparation and organization for events, tasks, etc. Ms. Lockhart hoped 100 people would be participating in this year's Effort to be held on April 6, with a rain date of April 13th.

2019 Northern Valley Earth Fair

Mr. Isaacson informed that the post card prototype for advertising this year's Fair, which will be held on April 27th, is complete along with all other preparations. He reminded the event will be held at the Tenafly Middle School this year, though he hoped in the future the venue would permanently rotate between the 2 Northern Valley Regional High School District buildings. Councilman Devlin said 250 tree seedlings were requested of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), with Closter receiving 125 (shoebox full) free of charge to be delivered to the Department of Public Works (DPW) in the Borough of Paramus for pickup. Mr. Isaacson said the STC should set up a booth at the Fair. Mr. Isaacson suggested there be a "Northern Valley Summit" held bi-annually where all relevant Environmental Commissions gather to collaborate on major/common pursuits;

Treasurer's Report

Chairman Colwell provided a monthly summary of the Commission's 2019 operating budget:

- 1.) *Subscriptions & Books*- \$400.00 expended for 2019 membership to Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)/\$100.00 remaining;
- 2.) *Meetings & Dues*- no change/\$500.00 remaining;
- 3.) *Miscellaneous*- no change/\$300.00 remaining;
- 4.) *Secretarial Support*- \$240.00 expended for January and February 2019 minutes preparation/\$1,200.00 remaining;
- 5.) *Mac Bain Farm*- no change/\$1,000.00 remaining;
- 6.) *Fall Festival*- no change/\$1,050.00 remaining;
- 7.) *Earth Day*- no change/\$250.00 remaining;
- 8.) *Clean Up Day*- \$250.00 expended for advertisement printing material provided by GT Marketing, Inc./\$50.00 remaining;
- 9.) *Citizen Camp*- no change/\$300.00 remaining;

New Business

Due to time constraints, the Commission did not discuss new topics.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Devlin said the Governing Body was considering a Borough mobile application (app) as recently pitched by a vendor who said the cost to build would be \$2,000.00 with an annual maintenance fee of \$1,200.00. Mr. Isaacson reminded the Borough currently has an app for the DPW's trash/recycling regulations and schedule. Chairman Colwell expressed his support for such, noting the Commission could have trail maps, recycling practices, etc. on the app. Councilman Devlin said notifications for emergencies and events would be a major benefit to having an app rather than having to resort to navigating through the Borough website. Ms. Whitney questioned if there were means by which to marry the app and website for simplification and avoid redundancy. Ms. Pergament mentioned she already receives mobile phone messages about real estate taxes, school announcements, etc. Chairman Colwell said the Facebook page, The Closter Black Book, was originally intended to be an online marketplace of ideas, but has transformed into a complaint forum and promotion of social events. Councilman Devlin said the vendor has larger municipalities like the Boroughs of Red Bank and Fort Lee as customers. Mr. Isaacson suggested an app be developed which could link all of the municipalities in the Northern Valley to create a much larger interactive community. Chairman Colwell said he finds push notifications on mobile devices much less offensive than landline telephone calls.

Councilman Devlin informed that Jeffrey Lee, a Commission member who has yet to attend a meeting since his appointment by the Governing Body late last year, has officially been removed from the roster consideration. Chairman Colwell recommended Ms. Whitney be elevated from an Associate Member to Full Member as soon as possible. He explained longtime Commission member Ms. Bouton-Goldberg requested she be an Alternate Member because so much of her time is dedicated to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

As for the Commission's reinterest in attaining certification, Councilman Devlin informed that he now has access to Closter's municipal dashboard with Sustainable Jersey, a nonprofit organization providing tools, training and financial incentives to support communities as they pursue sustainability programs.

Planning Board

In light of Ms. Heymann's absence, no report was given.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Ms. Lockhart said the STC hopes to address the emerald ash borer, a beetle species that decimates ash trees; she noted Closter does not have a large number of ash trees unlike the Paramus which is preparing for 5 years of tree removals. She explained that 3 to 4 years after infestation, the crown of the tree dies back, become brittle and breaks off. She stressed virtually the entire ash tree population will be eliminated, calling it a public hazard. Councilman Devlin concurred, saying aerial work platforms ("cherry pickers") are now becoming mandatory for tree services to work on ash trees. Ms. Lockhart explained the STC is brainstorming the contents of a letter that would be mailed out to those property owners with ash trees informing them about the pending danger and liability; she said a fact sheet and referral to an online video would be included. She noted there is a permit process administered by the Building Department (permit is required for removal of tree having caliper measurement of ≥ 6 " diameter when measured at $4\frac{1}{2}$ breast height). She said the letter would educate the public on how to address the matter if ash trees are rooted on one's private property. She said the ultimate goal is to save the Borough's tree canopy. Ms. Pergament stressed mitigation in the form of new tree plantings would be encouraged. She commented that the news of the emerald ash borer coupled with both the resulting permit requirement and likely expensive tree removal would be quite a burden placed on property owners. Councilman Devlin noted an ash tree is not easy to identify, thus, sending a generic letter to all residents rather than targeted recipients, may not be the best

approach. He said he would recommend to the Governing Body that any ash tree removal, after being verified by the Borough, would not be subject to a permit fee or mitigation. Ms. Pergament reiterated Closter belongs to the Tree City USA program, which nationally recognizes municipalities for their urban and community forestry. Mr. Isaacson pointed out that public utility companies are responsible for much of the loss in the tree canopy. Ms. Lockhart noted whether the STC or another government body would be responsible for the letter has yet to be determined. Ms. Whitney suggested 1 tree service be retained so that the more property owners that agree to tree removal, the cost each would have to pay would be reduced.

A motion was made by Councilman Devlin and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to have the Commission support the Borough's initiative to engage property owners/residents about the detriment of the emerald ash borer on the ash tree population. The motion passed unanimously.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

In light of Ms. Bouton-Goldberg's absence, no report was given.

Plan Review

The Commission decided to conduct plan review after the meeting was adjourned.

Adjournment

In the near future, Councilman Devlin said the Borough would be asking the chairpersons of all boards and commissions to attend a meeting about basic public purchasing protocol, minutes, etc. Mr. Isaacson suggested a webinar be setup instead so all members are informed.

In terms of correspondence, Chairman Colwell said that the Commission received a memo from the Bergen County Mosquito Control Division about periodic aerial spraying, which must be authorized by the Governing Body. Mr. Isaacson stated larvicide is usually the chemical sprayed, noting Closter contains portions of the Oradell Reservoir and a plethora of wetlands. Councilman Devlin revealed that the Governing Body already tentatively approved aerial spraying for 2019. Ms. Lockhart expressed uncertainty about the public's safety during the aerial spraying.

Ms. Pergament said the Commission was notified of additional remediation for leaking heating oil/fuel tanks at 677 Piermont Road (Exxon service station).

Mr. Isaacson mentioned that the Governing Body may convert Third Street, a paper street abutting Pollack Square, into a commuter parking lot; he noted there are monitoring wells to detect groundwater contamination in the vicinity.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Lockhart, to adjourn the meeting at 9:07pm. The motion passed unanimously.