

Environmental Commission

October 10, 2019 Meeting Minutes

**Prepared by:
Paul Demarest**

Opening Remarks

Chairman Colwell called to order, at 7:44pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, October 10, 2019 in the Council Chamber of Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present

Thomas Colwell- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Miriam Lockhart- Full Member
Grace Whitney- Full Member
Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison
Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
Nancy Pergament- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Absent

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1

Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to approve the minutes for the September 12, 2019 Meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Open to Public

Chairman Colwell opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Krishna Rege, 15 Colgate Street, Closter, New Jersey, introduced herself and expressed her interest in becoming a Commission member.

Councilwoman Victoria Amitai, 284 Piermont Road, Closter, New Jersey, introduced herself and inquired about easing the Borough's restrictions on beekeeping as well as encouraging homeowners to install bat houses at their residences given the important roles both species have in pollination. Ms. Heymann stated the Board of Health is autonomous from the Governing Body and has jurisdiction over both bees and bats, noting it would be worthwhile to revisit the issue with the Board. Councilman Devlin volunteered for said action item. Chairman Colwell

said regulations for beekeeping include having enough acreage as well as water and electric sources on-site; he pointed out the Board's stance is based, in part, on a concern that bees could swarm nearby residences, especially those having swimming pools. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that her proposed insect hotel being installed at the pollinator garden in Buzzoni Farm Park was never acted upon. Councilwoman Amitai said that when Mac Bain Farm was privately-owned, several beehives were kept on-site; Chairman Colwell noted that upon the Borough acquiring the Farm, the caretaker was permitted to have 2 hives only because it was no longer considered a working agricultural farm like other privately-owned farmland in Closter, noting Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane) has beehives on-site; Mr. Isaacson said there are also hives located on the Abram Demaree Farm (40 Old Hook Road).

Noting the Commission's wish to install fencing around Buzzoni Farm Park to better delineate the open space to the public, Councilwoman Amitai asked it to consider installing a stone fence; she also stated that volunteers at the Nature Center regularly maintain the plastic fencing on-site instead of having to hire a contractor to do so; the Commission noted the fencing at Mac Bain Farm is chain-link, thus, requires professional maintenance.

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 said given expenses related to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), both subscription and attendance to the recent ANJEC awards conference, the Meetings and Dues subaccount, budgeted for \$500.00 this year, is overspent by \$125.00;. He continued saying the Secretarial Support subaccount has sufficient funds for minutes preparation of the Commission's remaining 2019 meetings. He said the Mac Bain Farm subaccount, budgeted for \$1,000.00 this year, is overspent by \$95.42. He stated the Harvest Festival subaccount, budgeted for \$1,050.00 this year, is overspent by \$128.42. Chairman Colwell commented that the Northern Valley Earth Fair subaccount, budgeted for \$250.00 this year, has a zero balance. He said the Borough-wide Cleaning Effort subaccount, budgeted for \$300.00 this year, is overspent by \$56.88. He stressed that the noted deficiencies would be eliminated by transferring monies from the Miscellaneous subaccount which has its entire \$750.00 budget available. Chairman Colwell summarized that when including the proposed cost (\$289.16) for the building material to construct a picnic table at the Farm, the Commission's total operating budget balance would be \$535.12.

Mr. Isaacson inquired about the Commission having a \$10,000.00 operating budget in 2020 and the ramifications of not spending it all; Councilman Devlin said the balance would be placed into the Borough's General Account after 2 years. Ms. Heymann emphasized the Commission must provide specific requests in each subaccount, rather than a random amount, when preparing its budget proposal. Mr. Isaacson informed that he was told by the Borough that the gravel needed for rehabilitating the roadway on Mac Bain Farm, which cost roughly \$700.00, cannot be paid for with open space funds because it is not permanent in nature (erosion); Ms. Heymann disagreed, saying it improves the property. Councilman Devlin confirmed maintenance items pertain to open space monies. Chairman Colwell stated that the gravel already delivered to the Farm was paid for through the Commission's operating budget to avoid the requirement of the Governing Body adopting an ordinance to access the open space monies which are located in a trust account, a process which takes several months.

Chairman Colwell and Ms. Heymann previously volunteered to draft the Commission's 2020 operating budget proposal, which he revealed to be \$6,540.00, a 23% increase from this year's

adopted \$5,290.00. Councilman Devlin agreed that \$10,000.00 would not likely be approved, but felt a \$7,000.00 request for next year would be attainable due to a substantial increase in activity at and public usage of Mac Bain Farm. Ms. Pergament asked if there would be an increase in money for farm supplies such as hoses, which are needed frequently throughout the season and can cost several hundreds of dollars; she noted the Commission tends to only purchase very small items such as scissors, tape and buckets. In response, Chairman Colwell said the draft calls for an increase in the Meeting and Dues subaccount from \$500.00 to \$700.00 while maintaining the Miscellaneous and Secretarial Support subaccounts at \$750.00 and \$1,440.00 respectively. He said the Mac Bain Farm subaccount would increase from \$1,000.00 to \$1,500.00. Ms. Lockhart responded that the potential hiring of labor as well as educational functions on-site warrants more than \$1,500.00. Ms. Heymann concurred, pointing out that if the Commission considers sustainability initiatives unrelated to the Farm such as planting native species and eradicating the Borough of invasive plants, both could be implemented at the Farm to highlight the cause and have the effort spread throughout Closter with assistance from ANJEC; because of such, she suggested \$5,000.00. Ms. Lockhart suggested the Commission brainstorm on what its top 3 areas of concern for the upcoming year should be. Ms. Whitney believed the Commission could envision its wish list at a high level with the Farm Committee analyzing costs at a granular level later on in the budgetary process. Mr. Isaacson said the introduction of goats to the Farm would greatly reduce non-native plants by way of their eating habits. Chairman Colwell continued saying the Harvest Festival subaccount is proposed to increase from \$1,050.00 to \$1,500.00 with the Northern Valley Earth Fair subaccount remaining at \$250.00. Lastly, he said the Borough-wide Cleaning Effort subaccount would increase from \$300.00 to \$400.00, noting the Borough receives a \$300.00 grant from Bergen County each year for holding the event. Ms. Pergament agreed to discuss the Farm's 2020 budget proposal with its caretaker and resident, John Mc Caffrey.

Regarding the Commission's 2020 open space funding request, Chairman Colwell reiterated the desire to have a full-fledged irrigation system at Mac Bain Farm as well as an electric source at its front gate. He reminded that Mr. Mc Caffrey previously obtained an estimate of \$21,400.00 from Precision Sprinklers & Outdoor Lighting, LLC for installing a basic system which entails lines in the fields without water and electrical components. He informed that he and Ms. Heymann recently met with the Borough Administrator, Edward Hynes, the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), William Dahle and Mr. Mc Caffrey, which resulted in a consensus to request a sufficient amount of open space monies to pay for an optimal system and negate having it installed in stages over several years. He pointed out there was a discussion about taking advantage of having well water on-site, thereby, supplementing the public water utility usage and lowering costs; however, he said Mr. Dahle stressed such would not be permitted by Suez North America because in the event there is blockage, the well water would contaminate the utility line. Ms. Heymann was surprised that the cost of operating the pump associated with the water well would surpass that of the public water utility bill. Chairman Colwell mentioned the well is roughly 130 years old and questioned the ramifications if it were to dry up. He informed that the current water pressure of the well could supply only 2 irrigation heads in the fields, thus, a pump would be running constantly. He said there would be a meeting with the irrigation vendor in a few weeks to expand upon its original quote. Chairman Colwell stated the likely irrigation system would involve the water utility installing a seasonal meter similar to that of the Recreation Commission which uses such a setup to water its ballfields. Mr. Isaacson suggested the line to be installed for a spigot at the front gate, intended for direct use by both Farm volunteers and visitors, should be connected to the well while the irrigation system should be tied into the public water utility system. Chairman Colwell clarified that the proposed electrical work is related solely to an outlet installation in the front kiosk, not to the irrigation system or lighting elsewhere. He said the Borough would be responsible for all utility costs, noting Mr. Mc Caffrey currently pays for the electric associated with well pump, though Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said he likely include those payments as part of his \$25,000.00 in

annual farm labor required as per his contract with the Borough in exchange for residing on-site free of charge. In response to Ms. Pergament's concern about a possible public outcry over the cost for the irrigation system, Councilman Devlin stated the Nature Center recently asked for \$50,000 in open space funding to install temporary fencing but was ultimately approved for \$20,000.00, not including acquired grant money; Mr. Isaacson noted that if non-permanent fencing qualified for open space monies, then gravel for the Farm's roadway should as well.

Old Business

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

Chairman Colwell said he had yet to provide feedback to Ms. Pergament before issuing a written response to neighbors' complaints about tree maintenance and illegal use of the grounds as bicycle/motorcycle obstacle course(s) based on the Commission's recent tour of Schauble Park; Councilman Devlin said the Police Department ordered 12 signs, 6 of which would indicate dumping is prohibited and 6 would reflect that motorcycles and vehicles are illegal in Schauble Park. In response to Mr. Isaacson's request to have similar signage posted at all of the Borough's passive parks, the Commission agreed to table the issue until it could evaluate where signs are warranted during the latter part of the autumn season when most of the trees' leaves have fallen.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Lockhart said Dimick Fence Co. recently addressed all prior fence repairs requested of it at the Farm, but now the western section needs repair. She said the contractor agreed to repair the section at no charge, which has been damaged by the growth of a nearby tree, so long as the subject tree is been pruned or removed beforehand. Ms. Pergament reminded there remains \$2,000.00 in open space monies allocated for fence repair at the Farm (less approximately \$450.00 worth of pending repair charges). Chairman Colwell said he would ask the DPW to address the tree in question. Ms. Lockhart said Farm volunteers have been attempting to cutback mile-a-minute and chinaberry vines which are overrunning and pulling apart the western section of fencing, noting the vines do web and form a barrier of sorts.

Ms. Heymann reminded there is also \$4,000.00 in unused open space funds set aside for the installation of fencing at Buzzoni Farm Park. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the original intent was for the fence to be installed around the pollinator garden on-site, not along Blanch Avenue. Ms. Heymann stated the proposed ornamental fence design was to be split-rail which would also allow for easier grounds maintenance. Chairman Colwell promised to discuss the proposed fencing at the Park with the DPW; Ms. Lockhart agreed to talk to Dimick Fence Co. about installing that fencing as well. In response to Councilman Devlin questioning if having a fence to indicate the existence of open space along Blanch Avenue is necessary if there is already a sign identifying the Park, Ms. Heymann replied in the affirmative. The Commission tabled a discussion on having Boy Scout volunteers construct the fence at the Park being open space monies have already been allocated.

Traditionally, Ms. Lockhart said the Farm officially shuts down for the year, with the front gate remaining open and unmanned, immediately after the Harvest Festival in October. Ms. Heymann felt the Commission should continue such practice, noting that late in the season, very little produce remains such as herbs and green tomatoes depending on the weather. However, she said Mr. Mc Caffrey sometimes plants late season crops that can be picked during autumn and winter such as beans, bok choy and lettuce to which Ms. Lockhart said the beans are usually decimated by the Colorado potato beetle. Ms. Heymann reiterated that there are always a few Farm visitors who will take advantage of the fence remaining open. As an alternative, she suggested the fence stay open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and

locked the remaining days to give time for the produce to grow. In response to Mr. Isaacson, Ms. Heymann said the fence being closed would not impact trail usage being there are none located on the Farm's grounds. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted there is a rear gate in the northeastern corner which can be used to access the nearby trails from inside the Farm. The Commission decided to follow Ms. Heymann's suggestion with respect when the front gate would be open following the Farm's official shutdown after the Festival, and it would revisit the protocol if over-picking is experienced.

2019 Harvest Festival

Ms. Pergament said Mr. Mc Caffrey agreed to relocate the deposited gravel intended for the roadway at Mac Bain Farm so to not interfere with the Festival occurring on October 19th; also, she said he would decorate the Farm with autumn decorations such as bales of hay. Chairman Colwell said there are posters advertising the Festival available for posting throughout the Borough. He said he would email an invitation to the Governing Body and Police Department; he also noted the Recreation Commission would be told to invite strictly participants of its Challenger disability program to enjoy the handicap-accessible area(s) of the Farm. He said Lupardi's Nursery, Inc. (75 Blanch Avenue) would be delivering pumpkins on October 18th and volunteers would help distribute them throughout the fields. Ms. Heymann informed that she has collected roughly 40 pumpkins which she will donate to the Festival. Ms. Pergament said Mr. Mc Caffrey wanted pumpkins to be placed along both sides of the roadway on-site where sunflowers previously grew; Chairman Colwell agreed, saying the bottom field where pumpkins were placed during prior Festivals is now home to eggplant which would be trampled on otherwise; he further stated pumpkins would be situated in the handicap accessible area(s). In response to Ms. Heymann's suggestion to put pumpkins in the empty field located in the Farm's southwestern corner, Ms. Pergament said that field facilitates drainage and is unsuitable for planting; Chairman Colwell agreed, noting Mr. Mc Caffrey would have to remove his stored equipment from said field. He said the food and art supplies have been ordered, pointing out tables are needed for painting and making s'mores; the Commission agreed 6 tables would be adequate. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that the Commission usually borrows the tables from the Nature Center rather than having to buy and stores its own; Ms. Heymann concurred, noting it would be wasteful to purchase tables that are needed only a few times yearly. Mr. Isaacson agreed to pick up the food and refreshments from the Stop & Shop supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue).

Chairman Colwell mentioned the following Festival items have been or need addressing: 1.) coffee cans for paint brushes; 2.) plastic tablecloths; 3.) masking tape; 4.) hose for extinguishing s'mores fires; 5.) extension cords; 6.) water buckets; 7.) milk crates, chair, quilts and rugs for storytelling; 8.) traffic cones for driveway; 9.) amplifier and microphone for music; 10.) skewers for s'mores; 11.) garbage/recycling containers and bags. Mr. Isaacson said he had secured 4 musicians. Chairman Colwell stated the musicians will be staged more visibly this year where attendees' vehicles would have been parked on-site, noting Mr. Mc Caffrey would not be milling wood during the Festival. The Commission agreed to arrive the day of the Festival at 2:00pm ahead of the 3:00pm start time to build a fire, etc. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Police Department should be asked to post signs for no parking; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested surrounding neighbors should be notified about the Festival beforehand to quell any inconvenience, suggesting a memo could be placed in mailboxes. At the behest of the Borough, Chairman Colwell said the Commission should commence its planning for the Festival in August to allow for sufficient time to fulfill purchases in the future.

Potential Ban on Foam Food/Beverage Container Usage by Borough Merchants

Councilman Devlin said the Ordinance Committee would hopefully reconsider the proposed ban in early 2020. Ms. Pergament agreed to assist in crafting an updated draft proposal using her knowledge gained from recent ANJEC seminars about enacting such ordinances. Mr. Isaacson

noted that the Borough of Haworth's recent attempt at a similar ban was defeated due to merchant opposition; he reiterated local businesses should be solicited to pay for reusable bags in exchange for having their establishments advertised on them. Chairman Colwell handed over literature on plastic and paper bag recycling concerns to Ms. Pergament to help in her drafting.

New Business

No new matters were discussed.

Liaison Reports

No reports were given.

Plan Review

Planning Board

156 HICKORY LANE: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) provide robust tree mitigation proposal to replace large full tree canopy.

110 PINE STREET: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) retain trees proposed for removal which do not infringe upon proposed house and driveway.

Adjournment

Chairman Colwell thanked Ms. Heymann for her effort in helping Mac Bain Farm win a 2019 ANJEC-sponsored Environmental Achievement Award. The Commission contemplated taking photographs and preparing plaques to commemorate the Award. Ms. Pergament informed that the Northern Valley Press is writing an article on the Farm's achievement; Ms. Lockhart countered, saying the article's subject matter would be the Farm itself. Mr. Isaacson said he informed the Press not to mention the Harvest Festival in its article so not to publicize the Closter-only event to the masses; he suggested it write such a story after the Festival is held and that a photograph be provided by the Press to celebrate the Farm's Award.

Councilman Devlin said when the Borough Clerk's request for the Commission's 2020 meeting schedule is received, it should indicate that it would convene 3 special meetings during the summer months (which it started to do this year) in addition to its 12 regular monthly meetings; he said such would prevent the Commission having to notice the public later in the year at an additional cost.

During a recent walk behind the Stop & Shop supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue), Mr. Isaacson noticed that there are 2 large piles of dirt/rock in its parking lot. Also, he said the garbage containers previously located at the nearby trailhead are no longer there and a few fallen trees in its vicinity need to be discarded. Ms. Pergament responded that maybe each Commission member should be assigned a particular passive park/open space to regularly visit and report on any urgent matters on-site that need addressing; she said such a practice would negate having to learn about longstanding site conditions from the public such as in the case with Schauble Park. The Commission tabled the issue until its November 14, 2019 meeting.

Ms. Whitney informed she would not be able to attend an October 26th ANJEC workshop on the fundamentals for effective Commissions; she noted that it does offer webinars in case a Commission member could not go in her place.

Ms. Whitney said there was no update on the Borough attaining Sustainable New Jersey certification.

Ms. Heymann said the Planning Board is conducting a Master Plan Reexamination which would soon be submitted to the Governing Body for adoption. She stressed the Commission's input is valuable. She said in 1998 the Commission ordered an environmental resource inventory which pertained to land and waterways which tend not to change drastically over time. She said the Borough's most recent Master Plan, created in 1981, would likely be replaced by 2025 after the impact of both the Closter Plaza redevelopment and affordable housing construction has been realized.

The Commission went into closed session at 9:19pm.

Chairman Colwell reopened the meeting to the public at 9:44pm; the topic(s) of discussion were not divulged.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to adjourn the meeting at 9:55pm. The motion passed unanimously.

