

Environmental Commission

February 13, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Prepared by:
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Opening Remarks

Chairman Colwell called to order, at 7:59pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Thursday, February 13, 2020 in the Council Chamber of Borough Hall.

Attendance

Present

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

Grace Whitney- Full Member
Scott Devlin- Full Member/Council Liaison
Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Krishna Rege- Associate Member
Mordechai Feibish- Associate Member

Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Lockhart, to approve the minutes for the January 9, 2020 Meeting with noted corrections. The motion passed unanimously.

Open to Public

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

Treasurer's Report

Chairman Colwell provided a summary of the Commission's expenditures to date from its 2020 operating budget ([see appended account report](#)).

Chairman Colwell said he and Ms. Pergament recently met with the Borough Administrator, Edward Hines, Assistant Chief Financial Officer, Maria Passafaro, and the Finance and Technology Committee to discuss the Commission's 2020 operating budget and open space funding requests. While the permanent budget had yet to be officially adopted by the Governing Body (noting the Borough approved a temporary operating budget to cover the first 3 months of 2020 in the meantime), he said there was no opposition to the Commission's requested increase. Chairman Colwell said he was disappointed the Borough did not approve the rehiring of Kevin Riley, a Board member and Grounds Manager of the Borough of Demarest Nature Center, to performance trail maintenance this year as a part-time vendor despite having done so in recent years. He said upcoming contract renewal negotiations for the continuation of John Mc Caffrey as the caretaker and resident of Mac Bain Farm were touched upon, noting the Commission budget needs could be drastically impacted by the outcome; he stressed the new contract must better delineate the assignment of tasks/expenses between the Borough and caretaker.

Chairman Colwell said it was suggested that the Commission meet with Timothy Adriance, Chairman of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to discuss how to approach repairs and associated costs to the Mac Bain Farm residence given his carpentry skills. Ms. Heymann reiterated that the house on-site is now designated a Historic Landmark by the Borough and, as such, should be under the auspices of the HPC, not the Commission. Mr. Isaacson disagreed, saying the HPC only reviews construction projects involving the exterior of a Landmark which is visible from a thoroughfare and suggested the Building Department provide guidance on the house's structural stability. Ms. Heymann reminded that the Borough previously offered Mr. Mc Caffrey partial funding for house repairs contingent upon him providing a proper estimate which he failed to do resulting in further deterioration, mostly notably, to the house's side porch pillars. She noted the HPC specifically omitted the surrounding farmland when requesting the residence be designated. Chairman Colwell said there is concern the residence would be subject to strict preservation requirements which were followed during the recent rehabilitation of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), also a Landmark. Ms. Heymann concurred with Mr. Isaacson that the HPC's consideration is limited to the exterior of a Landmark when viewed from a public roadway, noting the HPC retained an architect to prepare a fairly stringent preservation plan for the Lustron House. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated the Farm's residence and the Lustron House also differ in that the latter is on the National Register of Historic Places. She suggested Jennifer Rothschild, a highly knowledgeable HPC member, be part of the meeting with Chairman Adriance. The Commission agreed Chairman Colwell and Ms. Pergament would attend the HPC's February 24th meeting to discuss the Farm's residence.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Lockhart, to have the following open space monies previously-allocated to the Commission returned to the Borough's trust account: 1.) \$4,000.00 for 3 new trail map sign installations and associated pedestals/stanchions at new locations (purchased by Department of Public Works <DPW>); 2.) \$4,000.00 for fence installation at Buzzoni Farm Park (opposed by DPW because it would hinder grounds maintenance). The motion passed unanimously.

With respect to the proposed irrigation system installation at Mac Bain Farm, Chairman Colwell reiterated the bidding process is being delayed due to Mr. Caffrey's failure to provide Mark Schwartz, operator of Precision Sprinklers & Outdoor Lighting, LLC, with proper specifications; he said the project would now be part of the Borough's contract renewal negotiations with Mr. Mc Caffrey. In response to Mr. Isaacson, Chairman Colwell said the Borough rejected the Commission's request to have Mr. Mc Caffrey's lease extended for 1 year to allow for the delay in contract talks, and he is awaiting a response from Mr. Hines and the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., on how to proceed in light of the decision. Mr. Isaacson questioned why the caretaker's contract is being used as a means of holding up a capital improvement such as

the irrigation system, which was first requested 1+ ago; Chairman Colwell reiterated that once the Borough had proper documentation, it would go out to public bid. In response to Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, Chairman Colwell said involving the Borough Engineer in the system's design would prove way too costly. Ms. Heymann stressed the project would not be realized this year given open space funding requests must be approved by the Governing Body via adoption of an ordinance, a process which takes several months. Chairman Colwell reiterated that the Borough would not waste \$75,000.00 on a property that still has not been put into memoriam by way of a mission statement. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg countered, saying the Borough recently placed Mac Bain Farm on its Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI), which protects the parcel from being developed in the future. The Commission agreed the Mac Bain Farm Property Committee would handle the logistics of seeing the irrigation system to fruition.

Chairman Colwell said Mr. Mc Caffrey recently submitted invoices for the 2nd quarter of the fiscal year as part of his \$25,000.00 minimum in farm-related labor/purchase requirement with the Borough in exchange for residing at Mac Bain Farm rent-free. He said they included a charge for 84 man hours to pull and store tomato stakes totaling \$2,280.00; Ms. Lockhart interjected, saying Mr. Mc Caffrey is mistaken because 13 Farm volunteers performed those tasks and did so in less than 2 hours. Chairman Colwell assured that the expense would be deleted. He said there were additional charges relating to the pruning of the apple orchard and turning of the compost pile on-site. The Commission agreed that Mr. Mc Caffrey's charges must be scrutinized with Ms. Heymann and Ms. Lockhart recommending he be spoken to.

Chairman Colwell said the only charges to its 2020 temporary operating budget have been for its Association of New Jersey Environmental Commission (ANJEC) yearly subscription totaling \$475.00 and its customary \$250.00 donation to the annual Northern Valley Earth Fair; Mr. Isaacson noted that this year's Fair will be hosted by the Borough of Norwood on April 25th.

Ms. Pergament reminded that the Commission's newly formed Committees have been added to its Google Docs and Google Sheets, web-based programs designed to enhance preparation and organization of events, tasks, etc.

Old Business

The Commission did not discuss old matters.

Committee Reports

Mac Bain Farm Operations

Despite it being the off-season, Ms. Lockhart said the Committee has been brainstorming the details for the formation of a 9-week children's farm program at Mac Bain Farm, which has tentative start and end dates of April 22nd and June 17th respectively. She said the curriculum is finalized, noting children would be assigned roles such as insect and bee advocates; Ms. Heymann said the children would experience how things grow. Chairman Colwell emphasized that the Borough requires a 10-week lead time in advance of such an activity commencing to allow for Mayor and Council authorization. Ms. Heymann said small purchases, such as soil and seed kits, would be required to operate the program. Ms. Lockhart said it would be better to submit such expenditures to the Borough directly rather than having to reimburse Mr. Mc Caffrey since it can also acquire low prices with local vendors; Ms. Pergament concurred, saying such would be outside the scope of Mr. Mc Caffrey's contract obligations. Ms. Lockhart said the local school system should not be engaged to participate in the program because while it is intended for the youth residing in Closter, not all of them attend the public schools.

Mac Bain Farm Property

Aside from the irrigation system and house repair projects, Chairman Colwell said the Committee would obtain estimates for fence repairs from Dimick Fence Co. and 2 additional vendors being open space monies are involved. Highlighting the urgency, Ms. Lockhart said deer are born in March, are ambulatory soon thereafter and could potentially get onto the Farm via underneath the fence. Chairman Colwell said it was a Borough oversight that allowed for prior fence repairs to move forward with only 1 quote being secured.

Chairman Colwell said the DPW recently removed both fallen apple tree branches from the rear fencing on-site and a log blocking a path in Ruckman Park. Ms. Heymann said all of the waterways located in Closter's passive parks are littered with debris, which she hoped the DPW would address. Mr. Isaacson said the Superintendent of the DPW, William Dahle, explained that the pine trees and other vegetation recently removed in Pollack Square, which abuts a newly-installed commuter parking lot on Third Street (unimproved thoroughfare), would be mitigated with numerous plantings. He said Rockland Electric Co. removed several pines in order to accommodate new light pole installations, noting the Governing Body consented to such beforehand.

Events & Publicity

Ms. Pergament said planning began, with Ms. Whitney's leadership, for this year's Borough-wide Cleaning Effort to be held on April 4th. Mr. Isaacson said planning for the Northern Valley Earth Fair is so far ahead of schedule that its organizing committee now regularly cancels its meetings. He said he was collaborating with Mr. Dahle about what should be displayed on Closter's table/kiosk during the event, including literature from various Bergen County utility-related commissions.

Trails & Passive Parks

Mr. Isaacson said the DPW recently removed a long-fallen tree from Buzzoni Farm Park and questioned if the DPW could take on additional trail maintenance in light of Mr. Riley no longer being available. Ms. Heymann said constructing and maintaining trails is a science in and of itself, and therefore, requires a skillset different from what the DPW is akin to. Chairman Colwell said the DPW would handle the trails if its paths were wide enough to allow for its all-terrain vehicles to access areas in question; Ms. Heymann replied that if they were made wider, they would not be forest trails. She said while the Boroughs of Demarest and Harrington Park may have more manicured trails, Closter's are wilderness trails as intended. Ms. Pergament said the optimal method of stewardship would be for the Committee to conduct inspections of the passive parks on a rotating basis to stay abreast of on-site conditions.

Mr. Isaacson said 60 boy scouts, both affiliated with an Israeli-based organization and students of the local school system, wish to volunteer 1 day (March 22nd) for the Commission. He suggested they assist in basic park clean-up or work at Mac Bain Farm being its trails link up to the Alpine Scout Camp; he reminded that the trail system is for the benefit of the general public, not only Closter residents. Ms. Heymann noted said trail connection is already meticulous. In response to Ms. Lockhart, Ms. Heymann said the Commission should not be too strict on whether to include those living outside the Borough in Farm activities. Given how young the scouts are, Mr. Isaacson said the day would be more of an experience rather than intense labor. He expressed frustration that the Borough is again requiring insurance documentation in order for the scouts to be on Borough grounds, another example of how too much bureaucracy is stifling volunteerism. Chairman Colwell and Ms. Pergament agreed the scouts were right to have approached the Commission directly, and now the Commission should request approval directly from the Governing Body rather than the Borough serving as an intermediary and contacting the scouts with administrative requests.

Mr. Isaacson said the Borough of Tenafly recently converted a defunct private swim club site into a dog park; he questioned if Closter could temporarily do the same with either the abandoned Closter Swim Club parcel and/or a portion of underused Buzzoni Farm Park, which could generate public interest in the latter; he stressed very little cost would be required other than feces removal. Ms. Heymann said it is common practice for owners to allow their dogs to roam off leash in both Memorial and Ruckman Parks. Mr. Isaacson noted the Borough is slated to spend \$1,000,000.00 to do environmental remediation at the Closter Swim Club parcel with no future use defined as of yet. Ms. Pergament liked the idea of a dog park to lessen the chance of their being sanitary issues from dogs congregating at active parks.

Education & Advocacy

Ms. Heymann said she reconsidered and now was in favor of the Commission pursuing a \$1,500.00 grant available from ANJEC to be awarded in April; she said the monies could be utilized to provide a pamphlet/publication detailing garbage collection and recycling protocol for Closter residents; she said the literature could be based on input from the Borough's recycling vendor, Interstate Waste Services Co. and distributed by the DPW rather than the public having seek out such knowledge; she noted that the Borough of Fair Lawn provides something similar to its residents.

Ms. Pergament said Ms. Whitney continues to spearhead the effort of Closter attaining Sustainable New Jersey certification. Ms. Heymann hoped there would be movement toward a polystyrene foam ban in Closter given a ban on plastic bags at the state level was not likely in the foreseeable future due to the expected cost burden placed on consumers and merchants. She said a local polystyrene foam ban was now probable because the material is much less prevalent in the marketplace than plastic bags, and a plethora of businesses have already discontinued its use; she noted Councilman Devlin was in agreement.

Executive

Ms. Pergament said the Committee is seeking an amendment to Chapter 16 of the Borough Code, which would create the position(s) of either Vice Chairperson or (2) Co-Chairpersons, roles which she and Chairman Colwell would fill and share officer duties. Also, she said aside from anticipated contract renewal talks with Mr. Mc Caffrey, mission statements for both the Commission and Mac Bain Farm are being drafted.

Plan Review, Environmental Notification & Contaminated Sites

5 REUTEN DRIVE: This is a Planning Board application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving parking lot modifications. The Commission had the following comment: 1.) provide correspondence/report from Board Engineer to assist Commission evaluating proposal.

New Business

The Commission did not discuss new matters.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Speaking for the absent Councilman Devlin, Ms. Pergament said it was hopeful that Ms. Abrams and Ms. Bouton-Goldberg would be permitted to relinquish their Alternate Member positions, which afford them voting privileges, to Ms. Rege and Mr. Feibish and, in turn, assume appointments as Associate Members, who are not permitted to vote; she said the logistics for such were being worked on. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stressed she wanted to keep her position as

HPC Liaison regardless. Ms. Pergament informed that Mr. Hines, Mr. Dahle and the Police Department would be discussing what the corrected signage at Schauble Park should read in terms of rules enforced on-site; Mr. Isaacson noted that the wording of signage in all passive parks should ultimately mirror each other.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann, in response to Mr. Isaacson, said while the Board is contemplating amendments to building height allowance for certain portions of certain zoning districts, she could not fathom the Borough allowing 3 stories.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Ms. Pergament said the STC had concern about the preservation and health of trees at construction sites in spite of recent amendments beefing up enforcement in Chapter 181 of the Borough Code; she said there is also interest in having deer protection fencing required around private tree plantings for 5 years as is already done with street trees (see Chapter 59). Ms. Lockhart said the Building Department should be enforcing such. The Commission agreed the STC should forward its concerns to the Planning Board given the Master Plan speaks on the matter. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Nature Center recently had to purchase deer fencing for its grounds due to the disappearance of the understory. Chairman Colwell noted trees die from deer bark scraping their antlers during mating season. Speaking from personal experience with 2 sycamores located in his front yard, Chairman Colwell said the gas and water utilities regularly dig up tree roots to perform work on their underground lines as does the electric utility does with the tops of trees impacting their overhead lines, both of which compromise tree health.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said a boy scout would be researching the history of Naugle/Auryansen Cemetery as well as installing signage on-site. Also, she said on March 14th, hat/bonnet collections would be on display at the Harold Hess Lustron House to celebrate Easter.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Chairman Colwell, to have the Commission collaborate with the HPC on hosting a "Billy Dahle Day" to show appreciation of the DPW Superintendent and his laborers' contributions to the Borough. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Chairman Colwell said the Commission and DPW received a letter from Martin Schiffman (94 Pine Street) and Christine Hofmann (134 Bergenline Avenue) commended their efforts in expediting tree maintenance at Schauble Park in response to their complaints lodged a year ago. The Commission agreed to forward the letter to the STC being the contractor hired to performance the work (De Carlo Tree Masters Co.) has also been retained this year by the STC to prune street trees located in Election District 5, which includes the Park, Haring Street, etc.

Regarding her prior inquiry on the presence of Phragmites, an invasive grass with feathery spikes that thrives near water, along Ruckman Road, Ms. Heymann said Mr. Dahle was incorrect in stating the growth has been present for years; on the contrary, she said they overtook the Japanese knotweed that once existed there. Chairman Colwell reiterated that there is a culvert in the vicinity that drains into a waterway designated as Category One (C-1) by the New Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), which means activities in and around it are highly regulated. Ms. Heymann said the Phragmites are more prevalent this year due to the mild winter and high volume of rainfall. She reiterated that the Palisades Interstate

Park Commission, of which she is a member, recently had to vacate an entire section of plantings in Bear Mountain State Park because of the Japanese barberry.

Mr. Isaacson said a 3rd grade teacher at Hillside Elementary School, Nicholas Shapiro, initiated contact with him about involving students in the upcoming Northern Valley Earth Fair as well as regularly participating in Mac Bain Farm activities; he said the Fair traditionally solicited Closter to provide artwork for a competition held during the event, for which the response from the Board of Education has always been lackluster.

Chairman Colwell said Ms. Heymann wished for a future Eagle Scout project to entail replacing a small white dollhouse located at Mac Bain Farm; the Commission agreed that the dollhouse is quite popular with visitors and should not be replaced with another tool shed. It agreed that the Mac Bain Farm Property Committee would follow through on the matter.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Councilman Devlin and seconded by Ms. Heymann, to adjourn the meeting at 9:29pm. The motion passed unanimously.

