

Environmental Commission

May 28, 2020 Meeting Minutes

**Prepared by:
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Opening Remarks

Chairman Colwell called to order, at 7:35pm, a virtual Special Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening via videotelephony service, due to governmental restrictions relating to the 2019-2020 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, on Thursday, May 28, 2020.

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
Krishna Rege- Associate Member

Absent

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
Mordechai Feibish- Associate Member

Minutes

Being the minutes for the May 14, 2020 Meeting had yet to be prepared, a vote on their approval was postponed to the June 11, 2020 Meeting.

Ms. Pergament mentioned that the Borough website does not have all of the Commission's approved minutes posted, noting the most recent set dates back to mid-2019; Councilman Devlin said he would notify the Borough's Information Technology (IT) Coordinator, Kevin Whitney, to update the website.

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

Councilman Devlin said despite a 2nd amendment to the Borough's proposed municipal budget last evening to counter anticipated revenue losses due to the Pandemic, the Commission's request to increase its operating budget from last year's approved \$5,290.00 to \$6,540.00 survived being cut.

Chairman Colwell said the Commission continues to operate on a temporary budget, of which \$935.00 remains taking into account a \$475.00 annual subscription to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) membership, noting it was initially \$375.00 but increased by \$100.00 to include recently-appointed Commission members to the ANJEC publication mail list. He said there was also \$49.63 in Mac Bain Farm supplies bought, reminding that the Commission authorized up to \$200.00 in purchases required for Farm volunteers to perform duties in the immediate future.

Committee Reports

Mac Bain Farm Operations

Ms. Lockhart said the Farm's crops are flourishing and with the impending warm weather, they will grow quite rapidly. She said new guidelines in response to the Pandemic are still being crafted and should only be made public when it is assured said rules will protect both Farm volunteers and visitors. She noted face masks will be required on-site and tools will no longer be provided, adding pickers will have to bring their own buckets. She continued saying all vehicles which previously parked in the Farm's parking lot would be rerouted to Hickory Lane. Ms. Lockhart revealed the Committee is contemplating an online scheduling platform being offered by 3 vendors; she said its purpose is to limit the number of visitors to the Farm at any given time by requiring appointments. She said the prototype(s) will be emailed to the Commission for evaluation. She explained the proof of residency protocol, which was implemented last year and has been quite successful, will now be tweaked due to the Pandemic. She said before, visitors would check-in at the front gate immediately before entering, whereas now they will all be required to provide their proof of residency in the form of an identification card, issued by the Commission, during a registration period spanning a few days prior to the Farm's 2020 opening. Chairman Colwell noted that Borough employees are permitted to pick at the Farm, regardless of whether they reside in Closter, noting Mayor Glidden and Mr. Hynes want to have such made clear to all involved; Ms. Lockhart agreed to email the Borough staff about such a privilege when appropriate. Councilman Devlin assured he would confirm that the Governing Body does not need to approve either the Farm's new Pandemic guidelines or the online scheduling platform, noting its approval was not required for last year's introduction of the Farm's proof of residency process. Ms. Lockhart said Mayor Glidden would be kept abreast of the Farm's new procedures regardless; Ms. Pergament concurred, saying Mayor Glidden is not only the head of the Governing Body but part of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Ms. Lockhart also stated that if Governing Body approval is needed for the new guidelines, etc., the Farm's 2020 opening would have to be postponed because the Mayor and Council's next meeting is June 10th, the 1st day of the Farm's proof of residency registration period. She felt it would not be safe for Farm volunteers to be posted at the front entry's kiosk checking in visitors in close proximity, sometimes having a waiting line of 10 people. Ms. Lockhart informed that unless there is a 500% increase in the number of visitors from last year, there will be plenty of time slots available for online appointments; Chairman Colwell cautioned that because families are restricted from traveling, there may be quite an influx of Farm visitors. Ms. Lockhart assured she would be on-site to ensure a smooth transition to the new guidelines during the initial days of the Farm opening. In

response to Mr. Isaacson, she said there would be a 7-day limit as to how far in advance an online appointment can be made. Both she and Chairman Colwell were not keen on regulating time slots for Borough employees.

A motion was made by Chairman Colwell and seconded by Ms. Lockhart, for the Commission to transmit its proposed guidelines for Mac Bain Farm in the wake of the Pandemic to Mayor Glidden. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Isaacson confirmed that Mr. Mc Caffrey purchased a plastic mulch layer which would decrease the amount of weeding required between crop rows.

Mac Bain Farm Property

Ms. Pergament said a proposal in which an Eagle Scout candidate in a troop from the Borough of New Milford, who resides on Hickory Lane, would be collaborating with Mr. Mc Caffrey on refurbishing and possibly installing a new foundation for the dollhouse on-site in the same location, was given tentative approval by the Scout's leaders. Ms. Lockhart asked that since the dollhouse is used by the Farm volunteers to store their everyday tools, would it be possible for the construction schedule to work around when they are volunteering. Ms. Pergament said Mr. Mc Caffrey was supposed to provide a chest for the tools' temporary storage while the dollhouse is out of commission. Ms. Lockhart said it typically takes her 15 minutes to set up before a volunteer shift at the Farm, so it is optimal to have the temporary location of the tools easily accessible. The Commission agreed that the dilapidated shed behind a pine tree further down the Farm's driveway would not be ideal for the tools to be stored. Chairman Colwell promised to obtain the candidate's schedule, and Ms. Pergament said she would discuss storage options with Mr. Mc Caffrey.

Chairman Colwell said he is still working on freeing up monies within the temporary budget so that fence repairs at the Farm can be addressed by Dimick Fence Co. He also mentioned he hoped to apply sealant to the outside of the recently-installed shed soon.

Chairman Colwell said he took measurements for some sort of tarp to lie over the pergola at the Farm to provide shade for volunteers; Ms. Lockhart said the existing canopy provides minimal relief from the sun.

A motion was made by Chairman Colwell and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to authorize the purchase of a tarp, shelter, canopy or similar covering, possibly with water-resistant material, to provide shade under the pergola at Mac Bain Farm for a cost not exceeding \$350.00. The motion passed unanimously.

Events & Publicity

Ms. Whitney said that alternate dates are being considered for the postponed 2020 Borough-wide Cleaning Effort due to the Pandemic. Ms. Lockhart said there was no reason the event could not take place more than once a year, referencing Bedford, New York's method. If the Effort is held during the summer, Mr. Isaacson said the volunteers should avoid wooded areas and deer ticks, and instead concentrate on the Borough's right-of-ways along thoroughfares. Chairman Colwell noted Bergen County would provide an additional \$300.00, totally \$600.00, if the Borough opted to have 2 cleanups in a year.

Trails & Passive Parks

Mr. Isaacson said the trailhead and associated links behind the Stop & Shop supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue) was in good condition. He reminded that there had yet to be a follow-up inspection by the Commission regarding complaints about illegal bike activity throughout the trails of Schauble Park.

Education & Advocacy

In light of Ms. Heymann's early dismissal, a report was not given.

Plan Review, Environmental Notification & Contaminated Sites

The Commission did not receive any land use board applications for its consideration.

Mr. Isaacson said a committee has been organized to determine the possible reuses of the defunct Closter Swim Club site on Blanch Avenue, which will have heavy input from the Recreation Commission; he said the Environmental Commission needs to be represented as well. Chairman Colwell said he thought the committee was being tasked to merely assist on the remediating of the parcel's contamination; Mr. Isaacson said that was being spearheaded by the Borough Engineer's firm, Boswell Engineering, Inc. Councilman Devlin thought the committee would evaluate aspects of both the cleanup and future concepts for the site. Mr. Isaacson believed it would be relevant to have it consider how nearby Buzzoni Farm Park could be better utilized. Chairman Colwell promised a memo would be sent to the Mayor and Council requesting the Commission be involved and laying out its suggestions.

Mr. Isaacson said the Department of Public Works (DPW) is proposing to install 2 pre-engineered steel buildings, each with 100'x120' dimensions at its facility on Ruckman Road to house vehicles and equipment. He said 1 would be located away from the thoroughfare, but the other is slated to be very close to a protected waterway, thus requiring approval from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). He argued that building could lead to the polluting of the Borough's water supply if motor oil, garbage, etc., makes its way into the nearby waterway, not to mention its placement would be quite unaesthetic being so close to the Nature Center. Councilman Devlin said money for the project has been appropriated for 2 years, and both buildings will be adjacent to existing DPW facilities, providing vehicles and equipment protection from the elements, which will ultimately lead to far fewer repairs being necessary.

Executive

Chairman Colwell said Mayor John Glidden has asked both he and Ms. Pergament to serve on the committee drafting the new lease for the caretaker of Mac Bain Farm, a body which includes Mayor Glidden, Councilman Devlin, the Borough Administrator, Edward Hynes, the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., and Lowell Mandelblatt, who resides at 42 Mc Cain Court located near the Farm; he said the 1st meeting is tomorrow. Mr. Isaacson said there is a contingency of residents who want the caretaker position to be advertised via public bidding, however, his impression is that the Borough has already decided to renew with Mr. Mc Caffrey and it is simply a matter of renegotiating a new lease. He revealed he is in favor of Mr. Mc Caffrey remaining in the position, but apparently the Borough would consider continuing with him on a month-to-month basis if lease negotiations are not finalized by July 31st, when the existing lease expires. Councilman Devlin opined that there is a lot more nuance with public bidding versus renegotiating, which he hoped would be flushed out during the committee meetings. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated she was in favor of re-signing Mr. Mc Caffrey. Ms. Heymann said having Mr. Mandelblatt serve on the committee which is otherwise comprised of Borough officials is not appropriate and would not follow the process of 20 and 10 years ago when leases were previously written. Furthermore, she said he is not in favor of the Farm in general, never visits the site and has battled with the Borough on various Farm-related matters over the years; she conceded Mr. Mandelblatt has reason to be upset with Mr. Mc Caffrey's behavior on-site but felt there is a plethora of other residents who could provide wiser input. Mr. Isaacson said Mr. Mc Caffrey recently attempted to rectify the complaints about the bamboo he planted at the Farm, which has spread uncontrollably elsewhere, noting Mr. Mandelblatt gave permission to him to enter his property but because others did not, he was cited for trespassing by the Police Department. He agreed that residents should not serve on such a committee.

Ms. Pergament said Mr. Mc Caffrey's response to his neighbors' letter(s) complaining about on-site conditions was that none of them have ever personally approached him to discuss their grievances and noted he has invested 2 decades into transforming the site into a working farm; she said he was also perplexed that Mr. Mandelblatt could serve on the committee given his prior history of lobbying the Board of Health to restrict the reintroduction of beehives at the Farm. Ms. Rege said that as long as the neighbors' complaints are abated, she was in favor of having Mr. Mc Caffrey remain as caretaker, but maybe have a lease that is for less than 10 years this time around. Ms. Heymann said the new lease must be written without loopholes so vehicle idling, misuse of appurtenances, etc. can be enforced; she noted that Mr. Mandelblatt and Gil Shaked (32 Mc Cain Court) were dead set on having Mr. Mc Caffrey replaced, and she felt that was not firm ground on which to start a negotiation. Chairman Colwell countered that his conversations with Mr. Shaked made him confident all parties could come to a resolution with Mr. Mc Caffrey remaining. He opined residents, especially those directly impacted, should be able to sit on the committee. He promised to provide all of the Commission's comments to the lease-drafting committee.

New Business

Chairman Colwell and Ms. Rege pondered if the documentary, "The Story of Plastic", would be appropriate for viewing by grammar school students.

Chairman Colwell informed that a 10th grade student, Sophia Suarez, wished to volunteer for the Commission; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that there previously was an 18 year-old high school student appointed to the Commission and served until he went away to college.

Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Devlin said both polystyrene foam and plastic bag bans are on hold by the Ordinance Committee, revealing it is far more ahead in the process with foam than with plastic. He said the Governing Body is only concerning itself with necessities for the continuity of government in wake of the Pandemic. Ms. Pergament asked if there was a plan for how the Borough would gradually ease into conducting regular business in spite of the Pandemic; Councilman Devlin replied that Governor Phil Murphy must ease restrictions considerably to allow for the public to again assemble.

Planning Board

In light of Ms. Heymann's early dismissal, a report was not given.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

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

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the caretaker of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), Michael Pisano, continues to enhance the site's landscaping.

Adjournment

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Ms. Pergament, to adjourn the meeting at 8:56pm. The motion passed unanimously.