

Environmental Commission

Thursday, February 11, 2021

Regular Meeting

Minutes

THIS MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

CALL TO ORDER

- 7:32pm

ATTENDANCE

Present

- Thomas Colwell- Chairman
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Miriam Lockhart- Full Member
- Scott Devlin- Full Member
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member
- Krishna Rege- Alternate #1
- Mordechai Feibish- Alternate #2

Absent

- Grace Whitney- Full Member
- VACANT- Full Member
- Ethel Abrams- Associate Member

OPEN TO PUBLIC

- Sophia Suarez (high school student wishing to join Commission);
- Mayor John Glidden spoke of recent decision by Governing Body to transfer oversight of Mac Bain Farm from Commission to committee under direction of Borough Administrator (Edward Hynes) given ongoing lease negotiations with Farm caretaker and resident (John Mc Caffrey) and to allow for Commission to exert efforts towards other initiatives it was created to address (Ms. Heymann will chair committee comprised of Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, Jean Stella, Paul Weissman and 2 youths);
- Mayor Glidden announced Borough and Mr. Mc Caffrey signed 1-year lease extension expiring December 31, 2021 contingent upon him removing bamboo from Farm as well as rectifying illegal barn installation on-site no later than April 1st;
- Mayor Glidden informed that Borough Attorney (Edward Rogan, Esq.) was recuperating from major surgery;
- Mayor Glidden said construction to convert abandoned Village Middle School (511 Durie Avenue) to 35 affordable housing units should begin in spring after delays due to financing issues caused by surge in cost of building materials relating to Pandemic causing budget to balloon to \$10,000,000.00 to \$12,000,000.00 before subsiding (tax credits obtained by Borough requires tight timetable to complete construction);
- Mayor Glidden said environmental cleanup of former Closter Swim Club site (Blanch Avenue) will cost approximately \$1,000,000.00 (Borough applied for grant from New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Agency which would pay for 75% of cleanup in return for site being utilized exclusively recreational or open space use);

MINUTES

- **VOTE** - motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Ms. Lockhart to approve minutes for December 10, 2020 Meeting with 3 noted amendments (motion passed unanimously);

TREASURER'S REPORT

- 2021 *TEMPORARY* Operating Budget Subaccount Balances: Subscriptions/Books (\$0.00); Meetings/Dues (\$0.00); Miscellaneous (\$2,000.00); Secretarial Support (\$0.00); Mac Bain Farm (\$0.00); Harvest/Fall Festival (\$0.00); Earth Day (\$0.00); Cleanup Day (\$0.00);
- Commission's 2021 Operating Budget proposal includes \$2,000.00 increase in Miscellaneous subaccount from last year to purchase material (lumber, etc.) for trail maintenance excluding labor costs;
- Department of Public Works (DPW) is willing to rehabilitate footbridges and clear brush throughout trail system but does not currently have skillset to repair boardwalks/platforms;
- additional options for trail maintenance labor include Boy Scout volunteers (similar to arrangement in Borough of Demarest) or request for proposal (RFP) awarding 100 hours of trail work to outside vendor with required insurance coverage;
- current threshold requiring public bid is approximately \$50,000.00 with lesser expensive purchases requiring Borough's Qualified Purchasing Agent (Erik Lenander) to obtain 3 quotes only;
- Nature Center trails are in worse condition than those throughout Borough given their age and deterioration from vast wetlands within Center's grounds;
- New York-New Jersey Trail Conference could be engaged to provide bid proposal assistance;
- Commission should prioritize specific trees needing attention throughout trail system with emphasis on Buzzoni Farm Park;
- 2021 Northern Valley Earth Fair is cancelled due to Pandemic (annual \$250.00 donation to event is not required);
- **VOTE** - motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Lockhart to have Chairman Colwell request reallocation of funds (totaling \$3,000.00 based on Operating Budget adopted in 2020) from Mac Bain Farm and Harvest/Fall Festival subaccounts to those reserved for passive park(s) and project(s) yet to be determined in light of recent decision by Governing Body to transfer oversight of Mac Bain Farm from Commission to committee under direction of Borough Administrator (motion passed with Mr. Feibish abstaining);
- **VOTE** - motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson to have Commission transmit its 2021 Operating Budget proposal totaling \$8,540.00 to Governing Body for approval (motion passed unanimously);
- **VOTE** - motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson to have Commission subscribe to annual Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) membership at cost of \$500.00 which includes both publications and in-person/webinar sessions (motion passed unanimously);

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive

(*Leader*- Colwell; w/ Devlin)

- Mr. Colwell will serve as Chairperson for remainder of 2021 in light of Nancy Pergament's resignation (Ms. Bouton-Goldberg also resigned as Associate Member);
- Commission should redirect its time and effort long dedicated towards Mac Bain Farm to initiatives involving public education (with emphasis on local school system) with respect to trees, recycling, sustainability, drainage, etc.;
- Committee leader positions, which Ms. Pergament held, are reserved for full Commission members only;
- **VOTE** - motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson to have Commission request that Mayor Glidden appoint Ms. Suarez as Associate Member;

Mac Bain Farm Operations

(*Leader*- Lockhart; w/ Heymann & Rege)

- 390 households are registered with Farm;
- major strides in Farm's functioning and public use have been accomplished in past 2 years making it education/recreational destination as well as being buying/selling point for real estate transactions;
- Committee is handing over very streamlined operation to committee to be under direction of Mr. Hynes;

Mac Bain Farm Property

(*Leader*- VACANT; w/ Colwell & Feibish)

- report was not given;

Events & Publicity

(*Leader*- Whitney; w/ Isaacson & Lockhart)

- **ACTION-** Chairman Colwell will inquire about status of Borough's Cleanup Day in light of Pandemic and possible collaboration with Improvement Commission on cleaning downtown area;

Trails & Passive Parks

(*Leader*- Isaacson; w/ Heymann & Rege)

- Borough should opt for annual public bid to perform trail maintenance instead of budgeting for individual projects;
- Committee is preparing 5-year plan to enhance underutilized passive parks, such as Buzzoni Farm Park and its trails, to attract public use by way of birdhouses, pollinator gardens, beehives, etc.;
- Commission should collaborate with Improvement Commission to enhance Lone Horseman Park, Pollack Square and Pfeiffer Park, which converge at intersection of Closter Dock Road and Piermont Road, by installing dog park and providing food truck in nearby commuter parking lot on weekends for bicyclists, etc.;
- college student (unnamed) who previously built garden located behind Hillside Elementary School offered to design enhancements for Buzzoni Farm Park;
- Mr. Mc Caffrey offered to oversee Boys Scout volunteers willing to construct benches, tables, etc. by way of mill located at his farm/contractor's yard in Borough of Alpine;
- Buzzoni Farm Park consists of mostly grassy stretches with several ponds from Blanch Avenue eastward and historic property to west followed by rows of pine trees ending with hiking paths at Ruckman Park;
- bridge washed away several years ago located on east side of Dwars Kill at Blanch Avenue should be restored which would delineate Closter's eastern and western trails (partial funding by Borough of Norwood would be required);
- area around Borough's compost pile nearby Buzzoni Farm Park, which dates back to 1790's, should be enhanced to complete trail loop;
- **ACTION-** Chairman Colwell will follow-up on inquiry by Eagle Scout candidate (James Song) who wishes to spearhead project involving enhancements to Buzzoni Farm Park near which he resides;

Education & Advocacy

(*Leader*- Heymann; w/ Lockhart, Whitney & Abrams)

- Girl Scout volunteer (unnamed) should be commended for efforts in collaborating with DPW and Borough's recycling vendor (Interstate Waste Services Co.) to educate public on recycling practices via Borough calendar;
- New Jersey Legislature approved bill mandating that municipalities prepare for sustainability at various modes to be initiated by environmental commissions but primarily implemented by planning boards through ordinance and master plan recommendations;
- updated New Jersey storm water management regulations take effect March 2nd;
- **ACTION-** Ms. Heymann and available Commission members will brainstorm ideas at Planning Board's subcommittee level on green building and sustainability practices and engage ANJEC on implementation (use of water and utilities, electric recharging stations, etc.);

Plan Review, Environmental Notification & Contaminated Sites

(*Leader*- Colwell; w/ Isaacson & Feibish)

- revised plans for redevelopment of 231 & 239 Herbert Avenue from several existing residential and

non-residential buildings to congregate care facility does not warrant Commission comments beyond original response;

NEW BUSINESS

- New Jersey Tree Recovery campaign (partnership between Arbor Day Foundation and New Jersey Forestry Service) is offering municipalities 1,000 free tree seedlings each in response to recent storms (application deadline is February 25th);
- **ACTION**- Chairman Colwell will complete said application and inquire about receiving lesser amount of seedlings given prior difficulty giving them away;

LIAISON REPORTS

Governing Body

(*Liaison*- Devlin)

- committee under direction of Mr. Hynes, which will now oversee Mac Bain Farm operations, will consider approval of irrigation and electrical power source proposals long sought-after by Commission;
- compromised/dangerously-leaning ash trees located in Farrell Woods were recently removed;
- **ACTION**- Councilman Devlin will inquire with Borough's Certified Tree Expert (William Fuchs) about feasibility of replanting in Farrell Woods as well as survivability of tree seedlings being sought from New Jersey Tree Recovery campaign;

Planning Board

(*Liaison*- Heymann)

- report was not given;

Shade Tree Commission

(*Liaison*- VACANT)

- 40 shade trees (consisting of 6 varieties) were planted in Borough's right-of-way along thoroughfares this past autumn taking into account utility power lines;
- hang tags with Quick Response (QR) codes containing directions on tree care will be placed on all shade trees planted within previous 3 years to assist property owners;
- Borough residents should be vigilant in contacting Borough if they witness illegal tree removal or improper tree care at construction sites such as discovered recently at 198 Hickory Lane where sidewalk installation compromised nearby tree;

Historic Preservation Commission

(*Liaison*- VACANT)

- signage commemorating Historic Landmark designation of Blanch Avenue, which includes mention of late former Environmental Commission member Arthur Goldberg's contribution to trails in nearby Buzzoni Farm Park, is being finalized;

ADJOURNMENT

- 8:49pm