

Environmental Commission

Thursday, May 13, 2021

Regular Meeting

Minutes

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

CALL TO ORDER

- 7:35pm

ATTENDANCE

Present

- Thomas Colwell- Chairman
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Miriam Lockhart- Full Member
- Scott Devlin- Full Member
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member
- Krishna Rege- Full Member
- Mordechai Feibish- Full Member
- Sophia Suarez- Associate Member

Absent

- VACANT- Alternate #1
- VACANT- Alternate #2

OPEN TO PUBLIC

- Presentation #1: Alex Dubro, recent graduate of Stevens Institute of Technology and Cornell University with degrees in sustainability management and interdisciplinary studies, presented pathway for Borough to create environmental master plan and protect itself from ramifications of future high-density development;
- Borough would benefit both economically and socially from implementing sustainability measures into its Zoning Code;
- Borough took initial steps towards realizing environmental master plan when it appended green sustainability initiative (entitled "Sustainable Closter Initiative") to Planning Board's 2008 Master Plan Reexamination, which discussed energy efficiency, transportation, building construction, brownfield inventory and redevelopment, purchasing, solid waste/recycling and water/natural resources but did not see its implementation to fruition;
- sustainability requirements written into environmental master plan must be material and enforceable from Borough's perspective as well as incentivized and affordable for developers, homeowners, etc.;
- Borough is blessed with leafy neighborhoods, pedestrian-friendly downtown, highly-regarded schools and nature center;
- planetary boundaries is framework of how humanity can safely operate (in terms of environmental impact and economic development) and revolves around climate change, biodiversity change (fauna and flora), ozone depletion, ocean acidification, biogeochemical flows (phosphorus and nitrogen/fertilizers), freshwater use, aerosol loading, novel entities (pesticides) and land system change, latter of which Borough should concentrate its efforts;
- Houston, Texas is example of city prone to flooding which benefits from enhanced stormwater

management, shortage of potable water in Las Vegas, Nevada necessitates preparation for access to safe drinking water and New York, New York demands more energy-efficient public transit system to handles its large population;

- federal laws, such as National Historical Preservation Act of 1966 and National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, have minimal benefit to Borough individually unlike New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law which greatly impacts Closter through zoning;
- New Jersey municipalities are required to re-examine their Master Plans every 6 years (Closter's last occurred in 2019) during which Commission makes recommendations to Planning Board which ultimately require adoption by Governing Body;
- Commission recently prepared administrative report for Zoning Board of Adjustment which is considering application for redevelopment of 231 and 239 Herbert Avenue from industrial buildings to high-density assisted/independent living facility (report responded to applicant's traffic impact study and stormwater management plan while highlighting concerns about tree canopy, drainage and parking;
- Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment should adhere to Master Plan and Zoning Code as much as is feasible and not frivolously grant variances and design waivers;
- Commission and land use boards are not enforcement agencies unlike Building Department and Police Department;
- Commission should determine whether holding events, publicity, etc. or conducting heavy research spurs greater public awareness/interest in its environmental goals;
- **ACTION**- Chairman Colwell and Mr. Isaacson will collect Commission questions and feedback in response to Mr. Dubro's presentation and assist him in assembling team of college students on crafting sustainability recommendations;
- Presentation #2: Elaine Lim (46 Ryerson Place), introduced 2 student officers (Jamie Chung and Irene Jo) affiliated with Pacific American Volunteer Association (PAVA) which concentrates on community clean-up, homelessness and youth education with emphasis on Korean culture;
- PAVA is based in Los Angeles, California and is expanding its operations to Northern New Jersey (most members in local district are based in Closter);
- PAVA hopes to perform regular community trash collection in Closter and expand upon Commission's annual Cleanup Day;
- collecting trash is important but should not replace educating public on impact of litter especially in open space;
- National Cleanup Day is September 18th;
- **ACTION**- Councilman Devlin will verify if PAVA would need approval from Borough's Risk Management Consultant to provide monthly community trash collection;
- **ACTION**- Ms. Heymann and Ms. Lim will discuss logistics of having PAVA members volunteer at Mac Bain Farm;

MINUTES

- **VOTE**- motion was made by Ms. Lockhart and seconded by Councilman Devlin to approve minutes for April 8, 2021 Meeting (motion passed unanimously);

TREASURER'S REPORT

- 2021 *TEMPORARY* Operating Budget Subaccount Balances: Subscriptions/Books (\$0.00); Meetings/Dues (\$0.00); Miscellaneous (\$1,020.00); Secretarial Support (\$0.00); Mac Bain Farm (\$0.00); Harvest/Fall Festival (\$0.00); Earth Day (\$0.00); Cleanup Day (\$0.00);
- approval of municipal budget has been delayed due to Pandemic but federal funds will be provided to Borough via American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 once federal government determines how municipalities must utilize funds (State of New Jersey has granted reprieve to municipalities for late budget submissions);
- **ACTION**- Councilman Devlin will discuss potential increase in Commission's temporary operating budget with Finance Department if unforeseen events/purchases become apparent;

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive

(*Leader*- Colwell; w/ Devlin)

- Governing Body is slated to act on Commission's request to amend Chapter 16 of Borough Code so that Commission members' terms are staggered every 2 years to limit number of reappointments and/or vacancies in given year (5 Commission members saw their terms expire in 2020);
- Commission should reduce quantity of open space it oversees as well as projects, initiatives and issues it takes on which would increase quality and impact of its efforts given it consists solely of volunteers unlike Recreation Commission which also has paid staff;
- daily operations of Mac Bain Farm requires much of Commission's attention and is very labor-intensive for several months annually in spite of its oversight recently being transferred to Governing Body-appointed committee;
- Buzzoni Farm Park and Pollack Square would initially require substantial time and effort by Commission to upgrade and entice public usage but cost and upkeep would be minimal;
- Commission should consider finalizing approval/purchasing obligations to ensure spigot is installed at front kiosk of Mac Bain Farm to accommodate people wishing to clean themselves and wash produce in light of Borough Administrator (Edward Hynes) likely securing seasonal water utility meter;
- **ACTION**- Councilman Devlin will confirm which Borough-owned parcels are classified as active or passive parks to revisit which would be best overseen by Environmental Commission, Recreation Commission or Improvement Commission;
- **ACTION**- Committee leaders will ensure that parties providing volunteer work, which involves even remotely potential harm, will be approved beforehand by Borough's Risk Management Consultant;

Events

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

- Borough's 2021 Cleanup Day was quite successful having large public turnout;
- **ACTION**- Commission will provide suggestions to Ms. Rege on activities which could occur during potential upcoming events revolving around dedication of Arthur Goldberg Trail in Buzzoni Farm Park and National Cleanup Day;

Trails & Passive Parks

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

- monument sign located at intersection of Closter Dock Road and Piermont Road was recently power washed by local resident (William Barbieri) free of charge in effort to enhance appeal of Lone Horseman Park as well as Pollack Square and Pfeiffer Park (illumination of sign is under consideration);
- Borough of Demarest restored area near Scholz Bridge which it disturbed when removing debris from waterway located at municipal boundary line;
- speaking engagement by former Director/Naturalist of Greenbrook Sanctuary (Nancy Slowik) located in Boroughs of Alpine and Tenafly on birds is on hold due to scheduling conflicts;
- linkage of various eastern trails by replacing dilapidated/washed up bridge spanning Dwars Kill requires cooperation and co-funding from Borough of Norwood which is not forthcoming (alternative would be to reconstitute trail along Dwars Kill which existed for 150 years until fencing was installed by prior property owner of 102 Blanch Avenue (David Watkins) to protect sheep from coyotes when parcel was utilized as farmland);
- Mr. Hynes and Borough Attorney (Edward Rogan, Esq.) are negotiating to procure approximately 100' long right of way (easement) parallel to Dwars Kill from current property owner of 102 Blanch Avenue (Seth Unger) which would entail installation of pedestrian bridge over Anderson Brook but negate both major expense of replacing bridge over Dwars Kill and associated change in course of trail;
- Nature Center is requesting funds to replace pedestrian bridge at Irving Avenue;
- open space funding is warranted for installation of benches, tables and other dressing at Buzzoni Farm Park to entice public to visit and enjoy natural beauty on-site (alleyway of pines, hydrangea bushes, etc.) as well as make Pollack Square destination for bicyclists;
- **ACTION**- Ms. Rege will consult with former Commission member, Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg, on installing butterfly garden near small pond at Buzzoni Farm Park;
- **VOTE**- motion was made by Chairman Colwell and seconded by Councilman Devlin to have

Committee seek authorization from Governing Body to host event dedicating trail located in Buzzoni Farm Park to former Commission member, Arthur Goldberg, on July 10, 2021 which would include birdhouse contest and other activities to be determined as well as Chairman Colwell determining funding estimates (motion passed unanimously);

Education/Advocacy & Publicity

(*Leader*- Heymann; w/ Lockhart)

- Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) hosted recent webinar on social media platforms which highlighted municipal government trend opting not to utilize Facebook, Twitter, etc.;

Plan Review, Environmental Notification & Contaminated Sites

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

- committee tasked with revamping Borough's sound/noise pollution ordinance(s) is comprised of Mr. Feibish, Councilwomen Victoria Amitai and Dolores Witko, local contractor (Mark Lupardi) and resident (Stanley Yellin);
- committee is at standstill about restricting hours of when landscape contractors can perform lawn care for customers, whether residents performing their own work should be included in tighter restrictions and limiting types of fertilizers as well as equipment to electric-powered rather than gas-fired (existing Borough ordinance prohibits sound producing greater than 90 decibels but it has not been enforced by Police Department);
- surrounding municipalities have stricter noise regulations in terms of permitted days and hours which results in landscape contractors handling Closter accounts during less desirable times;
- Governing Body adopting contemplated restrictions will prove more difficult being there is consistent public demand for manicured properties;

Mac Bain Farm

(*Leader*- Heymann; w/ non-Commission members only)

- fencing along Hickory Lane will be enhanced with wire by Mr. Feibish;
- plowing of crops continues in preparation of upcoming season opening to public;

NEW BUSINESS

- Borough is updating its stormwater management ordinances to reflect recent updates made to regulations enforced by New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP);
 - Mayor John Glidden established committee to address concerns by residents about upkeep and illegal motocross activity at Schauble Park;
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LIAISON REPORTS

Governing Body

(*Liaison*- Devlin)

- Governing Body approved installation of security cameras in various active parks which will include free public access to wireless network;
- Governing Body submitted Bergen County grant application to fund installation of dog park in Lone Horseman Park and upgrade existing fitness equipment on-site;
- Borough's Qualified Purchasing Agent (Erik Lenander) will soon host virtual meeting on public purchasing to clear confusion about bids, quotes, etc.;
- Borough would benefit from available 2021 NJDEP grants pertaining to stewardship only given its small population density;

Planning Board

(*Liaison*- Heymann)

- Board continues to craft potential sustainability regulations at committee level to be incorporated in Master Plan;

Shade Tree Commission

(*Liaison*- Lockhart)

- artwork of 5 participants who won 2nd annual Arbor Day poster contest is displayed in Closter Public Library (winners will each have shade tree planted along thoroughfare where they reside);
- tree plantings were held on Arbor Day at both Tenakill Middle School and Hillside Elementary School during which local resident (Anthony Lupardi) was acknowledged for 40 years of service to Commission;

Historic Preservation Commission

(*Liaison*- VACANT)

- photovoltaic system (solar panels) was recently approved by Commission to be installed on Historic Landmark (1-family house located at 20 Piermont Road);

ADJOURNMENT

- 9:52 pm

