

# ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

## **April 14, 2022**

### Meeting Minutes

---

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

---

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

- 7:30pm;

#### **ATTENDANCE**

##### **Present**

- Miriam Lockhart- Chairwoman;
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member;
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member;
- Krishna Rege- Full Member;
- Cynthia Cole- Full Member;
- Councilman Scott Devlin- Full Member;

##### **Absent**

- Mordechai Feibish- Full Member;
- VACANT- Alternate #1;
- VACANT- Alternate #2;

#### **OPEN TO PUBLIC**

- public questions and/or comments were not presented;

#### **MINUTES**

- **VOTE**- motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Cole to approve minutes for March 10, 2022 Meeting with 2 noted amendments (motion passed unanimously);

#### **EXECUTIVE**

- Commission will revert to voting protocol requiring motions and seconds moving forward rather than Chairperson assuming motions and obtaining unanimous consent;
- Mayor John Glidden is hosting virtual meeting on improving interaction between board/commission volunteers and Borough employees to be held on May 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:00am;
- Commission must be realistic about its goals for 2022 given it had no Chairperson for 8 months;
- Closter Public Library, in conjunction with its counterparts in Boroughs of Demarest and Haworth, are undertaking ambitious 6-week pollinator education program targeting children up to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (Mac Bain Farm will factor in said program but Commission will have no role other than endorsing cause);
- improvement of Commission's presence on Borough website by way of adding new content and eliminating outdated material is ongoing;
- land use meeting convened on April 9<sup>th</sup> and was officiated by members of Governing Body, Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment to discuss means by which to hasten ongoing and future development involving high-density housing and commercial projects (Commission and other bodies were not asked to partake unlike years past);
- land use boards are concerned about loss of Borough's tree canopy which assists in cooling

- thoroughfares and storm water relief;
- public interest in solar panel installation is high with Closter Plaza shopping center being considered for such given its size;
- community solar programs for other large-scale sites such as government and school buildings would cover installation-related expenses assuming mechanical equipment does not prevent sufficient flat roof surface area;
- tree mitigation requirements should be revisited to address legal removal of large/mature trees without sufficient replacement (tree removal applications are approved without mitigation being required for up to 2 removals within 2-year period without exception other than if tree has landmark status and there is no guidance in ordinance for Borough's Tree Expert to require certain species);
- recent ANJEC seminar provided insight on how Commission members can enhance plan review skills by using checklist;
- ACTION**- Commission members will inform Chairwoman Lockhart of potential volunteers equipped with graphic design skills, particularly high school students, to assist in furthering Commission's public outreach on initiatives, education, etc. via Borough website and social media;
- ACTION**- Ms. Cole will, with Commission members' input, assist in improving Commission's presence on Borough website given her website development and management skills;
- ACTION**- Chairwoman Lockhart will continue to coordinate feasibility of improving Commission's presence on Borough website with Information Technology Coordinator (Kevin Whitney);
- ACTION**- Ms. Rege will forward sample of ANJEC's plan review checklist to Chairwoman Lockhart to model in crafting Commission's own;

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

- 2022 \*TEMPORARY\* Operating Budget Subaccount Balances: Meeting/Dues (\$0.00) Miscellaneous (\$1,285.00); Secretarial Support (\$0.00); Fall Festival (\$0.00); Earth Day (\$0.00); Cleanup Day (\$0.00); Passive Parks (\$0.00);
- expenditures and encumbrances for 2022 thus far are \$375.00 for annual subscription to Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) membership, \$240.00 for minutes preparation for January 13, 2022 and February 10, 2022 Meetings and \$100.00 for advertisements relating to 2022 Cleanup Day;
- Finance Committee recently completed interviews with Borough's departments, boards and commissions regarding budget requests and Governing Body must now ensure year-over-year increase in municipal budget does not exceed 2% as required by statute to prevent massive real estate tax increases;
- proposed municipal budget would likely be introduced by Governing Body at its April 27<sup>th</sup> meeting to be followed by its text being published and public comment before vote on adoption;
- municipalities have option to self-certify their budgets rather than having State of New Jersey do so before they may become effective unlike in years past;
- amendments to proposed municipal budget after being introduced are usually both minor in nature and tend not to impact boards and commissions;

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **Cleanup Day**

- event was quite successful with volunteer turnout of approximately 125, of which 31 were affiliated with Pacific American Volunteer Association (PAVA), and weather being clement;
- remaining \$300.00 in budget dedicated to event should be utilized to purchase sign specifically to put on display during future Cleanup Days;
- better coordination between volunteers is needed to prevent overlap and ensure broader ground is covered during event in future (organizers and volunteers gathering at parking lots of Nature Center and Senior Citizens Center were both sent to clean along Ruckman Road);
- Ruckman Road was again littered with single-use plastic containers, cigarette butts, etc. only 2 days after event (better public education to youth is necessary along with posting of street signage clearly indicating repercussions for littering);

### **Plastic Bag Ban**

- New Jersey's ban on food retailers utilizing plastic bags takes effect May 4th;
- Commission is utilizing social media and links to inform business owners and patrons alike as to what ban entails;
- ban will be enforced at state and county health department levels (local enforcement options are unknown but Governing Body and Improvement Commission, which oversees downtown area, should be involved);
- Borough should engage local businesses to become sponsors funding purchase of reusable bags for public distribution in exchange for having bags contain their advertisements;
- State of New York is quite progressive in that several stores offer free reusable bags to its patrons;
- **ACTION**- Commission members will make use of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's "Bag Up NJ" public campaign link to provide guidance on plastic bag ban to both business owners and patrons;

### Grants

- New Jersey Audubon Society is currently receiving grant applications;
- application deadline for ANJEC grant, which Commission hopes will fund proposed pollinator garden in Buzzoni Farm Park, is May 2<sup>nd</sup>;
- **ACTION**- Mr. Isaacson will finalize draft of ANJEC grant application and forward it to Chairwoman Lockhart upon receipt of estimate from Department of Public Works for installation of paver stone walkway throughout proposed pollinator garden;

### Healthy Yards Working Group Report

- Group has gathered twice monthly with intention of meeting more frequently for time being to focus on items to implement next year such as weening landscaping contractors and residents off gas-fired leaf blowers and incorporating native species into property owners' parcels;

### Tree Summit Part II

- 2<sup>nd</sup> summit on tree preservation, held on March 25<sup>th</sup>, centered on improvement of Building Department's permitting, mitigation and enforcement protocols as well as clarifying terminology such as street/ornamental trees and tree canopy;
- Tree Removal Permit application is being revised to improve public's compliance with regulations;
- appeals of notices of violation issued by Borough's Tree Expert, which are currently handled by committee affiliated with Governing Body, may be forwarded to Municipal Court for adjudication (issue may arise in that Court can only penalize up to \$2,500.00 per tree violation while replacement value portion of violation often totals substantially more);
- Borough Attorney (William Bailey, Esq.) is reviewing alternative whereby penalty and replacement value portions of violations being appealed would be handled by separate entities;

### Tree Mitigation

- Borough wants to refine its mitigation requirements to include specific species based upon certain field conditions (ordinance currently does not dictate what species are to be required by Borough's Tree Expert for private tree planting);
- **VOTE**- motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson to support increase in monetary contribution from \$650.00 to \$800.00 per tree in lieu of planting when mitigation is required for authorized tree removal currently under review by Ordinance Committee (motion passed unanimously);

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### Sustainable Jersey Presentation

- Paul Yarin, 58 Cedar Court, Closter, New Jersey, having professional background in electrical/mechanical engineering, offered insight into municipal certification program developed by

academics whereby tangible results and measureable deliverables involving sustainability are rewarded via point system (program also offers grants and schooling);

- climate change is impacting New Jersey especially by way of faster warming and sea level rise estimated to increase 5 degrees and 1.70' respectively by year 2050;
- more droughts are predicted, in spite of more rainfall, due to rain distribution along with more intense and frequent storms, wild fires, agricultural damage, seafood/shell loss and overall loss of carbon sink into atmosphere;
- Borough registered with Sustainable Jersey in 2009 but never attained certification;
- 10 municipalities in Bergen County are silver-certified (350 points required), nearby localities such as Boroughs of Harrington Park and Westwood along with Township of Teaneck are bronze-certified (150 points required);
- only 2 municipalities have achieved gold star certification which deals solely with energy, health and water categories with example being municipality's operations reducing its energy consumption/greenhouse gas by 11% in 3 years (means by which to achieve such involve installing electrical vehicle charging stations, community solar program participation such as solar farms, installing ENERGY STAR-certified appliances, replacing gas heaters with heat pumps, upgrading insulation and weatherization);
- 1<sup>st</sup> mandatory action is for municipality to create Green Team which may consist of any member of community including Commission members (Team has no formal financial or legal structure though official announcement of its creation is required);
- Green Team files and communicates with Sustainable Jersey directly on behalf of municipality;
- actions taken to earn points may be existing or new in nature (Borough's reusable bag program would constitute existing item eligible for points);
- rigorous documentation of actions is required, including ordinance adoption, for goals involving energy, waste management, land use, public outreach and climate planning;
- flood risk is particularly crucial aspect to program and requires forming of its own team separate from Green Team because municipality's Flood Plain Manager, Zoning Officer and/or Planner are required to join ([www.njfloodmapper.org](http://www.njfloodmapper.org) is tool to access information on expected risk of flooding in areas along additional information on sensitive sites);
- Borough has already upgraded insulation, mechanical equipment and lighting to its sanitation facilities, fire station and borough hall all of which would qualify for points if it opts to reconstitute its Green Team after it became frustrated several years ago with program's ever-changing standards;
- program is holding live all-day event in Township of Holmdel in coming months (registration fee is \$38.00);
- additional actions already taken by Borough include adopting tree mitigation ordinance, establishing community garden (Mac Bain Farm) and forming medication takeback program via Police Department which, if documented, could lead to it attaining bronze certification within 1 year;
- **ACTION**- Chairwoman Lockhart will share Mr. Yarin's forwarded digital presentation with Commission;
- **ACTION**- Councilman Devlin will add Chairwoman Lockhart as user to Borough's existing Sustainable Jersey account which currently is in name of former Commission member (Brenda Cummings);
- **VOTE**- motion was made by Councilman Devlin and seconded by Ms. Cole to pursue certification with Sustainable Jersey program (motion passed unanimously);

## **PLAN REVIEW & COMMENT**

- no new applications were received from land use boards;

## **LIAISON REPORTS**

### **Governing Body**

(\*Liaison\*- Devlin)

- Governing Body recently heard presentation by Boy Scout volunteering to upgrade pond in Buzzoni Farm Park (concern is that such would disrupt pond's rare ecosystem which includes red-spotted

- newt for which pond is rare mating stock area);
- Boy Scout proposal to upgrade vernal pond should be approved by Nature Center's Director/Naturalist (Marc Gussen) who emphasized downed trees and fallen branches around pond help courting frogs and while washed up boardwalk planks should be removed and proposed trail in vicinity is warranted, other natural occurrences should not be touched (area around pond colonized by invasive species such as multiflora rose should be removed and replaced with native species);
- Nature Center's pond, which has been dredged several times over years, is not comparable to untouched vernal pond in Buzzoni Farm Park;
- **ACTION**- Commission will require its approval of Boy Scout proposal to upgrade pond in Buzzoni Farm Park along with Mr. Gussen's;
- **ACTION**- Commission will contact former Commission member (Bobbi Bouton-Goldberg) who oversaw pond in Buzzoni Farm Park during tenure for thoughts on Boy Scout proposal;

### **Shade Tree Commission**

(\*Liaison\*- Lockhart)

- shade trees aligning Closter Dock Road in downtown area have reached end of their lifespan and will be replaced gradually;

### **Planning Board**

(\*Liaison\*- Heymann)

- report was not given;

### **ADJOURNMENT**

- 8:57pm;

