

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

June 9, 2022

Meeting Minutes

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

CALL TO ORDER

- 7:32pm;

ATTENDANCE

Present

- Miriam Lockhart- Chairwoman;
- Mordechai Feibish- Full Member;
- Cynthia Cole- Full Member;
- Councilman Scott Devlin- Full Member;
- Paul Yarin- Alternate #1;

Absent

- Steven Isaacson- Full Member;
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member;
- Krishna Rege- Full Member;
- VACANT- Alternate #2;

MINUTES

- **VOTE**- motion was made by Ms. Cole and seconded by Mr. Yarin to approve minutes for May 12, 2022 Meeting without amendments (motion passed unanimously);

OPEN TO PUBLIC

- public questions and/or comments were not presented;

EXECUTIVE

- Commission's result-oriented teamwork is becoming evident to both Borough staff and residents;
- Commission's presence on Borough website has undergone revamping with new links, etc., some of which (tree planting recommendations and Mac Bain Farm walking tour) need tweaking;
- Derek Lee, local high school student, introduced himself and informed that he, along with fellow students (Elaine Kim and Yuna Shin) would assist Commission with graphic design (Mr. Lee recently provided designs for advertising relating to No Mow May campaign);
- **ACTION**- Ms. Cole will email Commission members reminder to provide details on past Commission events to post on its webpage noting up much of them were centered around Mac Bain Farm until February 2021 when its jurisdiction was transferred to Mayor-appointed committee;

TREASURER'S REPORT

- 2022 *TEMPORARY* Operating Budget Subaccount Balances: Meeting/Dues (\$0.00) Miscellaneous (\$1,045.00); 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, \$480.00 for minutes preparation for January 13, 2022, February 10, 2022, March 10, 2022 and April 14, 2022 Meetings and \$100.00 for advertisements relating to 2022 Cleanup Day;

- Governing Body is slated to adopt 2022 municipal budget at its June 22nd meeting (Commission's operating budget is anticipated to be \$6,500.00 this year as opposed to \$6,540.00 in 2021);
- **ACTION**- Commission members will brainstorm how best to utilize 2022 operating budget which would amount to \$3,000.00 to \$4,000.00 after setting aside anticipated/yearly costs and inform Chairwoman Lockhart no later than June 30th;

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Healthy Yards Working Group Report

- Group is utilizing citizen science which entails environmental actions that commutatively promote positive change in landscape (Group seeks to enlighten residents on improving their private properties to assist plants and insects without being heavy-handed in its persuasion);
- Cornell University and National Audubon Society collect data on residential backyard bird counts;
- Group is actively pursuing establishment of low-impact demonstration garden having various examples of native grasses and groundcover to replace manicured/golf course-like landscaping on private parcels to support native insects and increase soil health;
- traditional lawns require significant irrigation and they have short root depth resulting in hardening soil below and increased storm water runoff due to lack of absorption whereas native grasses have deep root systems allowing for soil breakdown and optimal water retention and less erosion;
- traditional lawns rely heavily on herbicides and pesticides to kill native insects solely for aesthetics and corresponding storm water runoff allows for said chemicals to be transferred elsewhere and into potable water sources;
- 6, 3'x3' plots will be utilized to showcase alternatives to traditional lawns along with on-site information on planting requirements and insect support;
- Group is consulting with owner of Toadshade Wildflower Farm (Randi Eckel), based in Borough of Frenchtown, on native plant selections for garden taking into account Bergen County's heavy foot traffic;
- Group completed its participation in this year's No Mow May campaign whereby property owners forgo lawn mowing for 1 month, resulting in dandelions, etc., to assist hibernating bees and other insects with pollination;
- approximately 10 residences partook in this year's No Mow May with intention of expanding next year to include Borough-owned parcels subject to further discussion with Department of Public Works (DPW);
- measured expectations are warranted being some feel growing portion of properties which do not contain native grasses/groundcover does not go far enough while others want adherence to Borough Code which requires private lawns to be maintained at 8" maximum height and green buffers along thoroughfares to be low to prevent sight triangle issues;
- **ACTION**- Group will formulate budget proposal specifically for implementing demonstration garden and submit to Commission for its approval on July 14th;
- **ACTION**- Ms. Cole will forward to Commission data on prior experiments collected and quantified by large entities with respect to better land stewardship noting that emphasis has been on western United States being it experiences constant drought, wildfires, erosion, etc. (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);

Sustainable Jersey

- most New Jersey municipalities participate in Sustainable Jersey certification program whereby tangible results and measureable deliverables involving sustainability are rewarded via point system;
- Commission voted to obtain certification at its April 14, 2022 Meeting after initial pursuit 1+ decade

ago was not seen to fruition;

- upcoming summit hosted by program will include sessions on electric vehicles, food and gardens;
- there are 13 wide-ranging priority actions ranging from energy to waste management and some require professionals, specialized software, adopting ordinances, public relation campaigns, investment, construction and land use board input while others are much less involved;
- sole mandatory action required by program is establishing Green Team which would require Borough to revisit ordinance proposed in 2008;
- reducing Borough's carbon footprint, which entails measuring its current level of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions by collecting and evaluating utility bills, waste generation (hauling), etc., could be possible initial action tackled by Green Team (inventory would relate solely to municipal/public buildings, vehicles, parks, street lights, etc. and not private properties);
- Scope 1, 2 and 3 are terms of art for greenhouse gas accounting and defined as gases directly emitted on public land and by municipality, gases consumed by municipality but not emitted directly on public land and supply chain/assembly of gases into final product (least direct emission by municipality) respectively;
- Township of Maplewood conducted accounting of its greenhouse gas emissions which measured 3,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (implied emissions) annually and subsequently reduced its yearly electricity use by 9% over 4 years;
- Borough could reduce its carbon footprint by improving efficiency of public buildings, replacing public vehicles with cleaner burning versions and using renewable energy;
- Green Team would have easy access to Borough's utility bills, however, mileage records could be difficult to obtain if Borough does not track such information for insurance purposes (optimal approach may be to assign Borough employee to acquire such data);
- collection of data will prove easy compared to responding to findings because reducing emissions will be quite expensive (most municipalities operate within calendar, not fiscal, year);
- **ACTION**- Mr. Yarin will attend Governing Body's meeting on June 22nd to solicit it to approve establishment of Green Team;

Eagle Scout Project at Buzzoni Farm Park

- Commission, followed by Governing Body, recently approved proposal by local high school student and Eagle Scout candidate (James Song) following receipt of his revised scope of work reflecting Borough's wish to have vernal pond located in Park revitalized without harming its ecosystem;
- **ACTION**- Mr. Isaacson will keep Chairwoman Lockhart abreast of pond project's progress;

Grants

- Commission was recently awarded \$1,500.00 grant from ANJEC which will be utilized for refurbishment and expansion of existing pollinator garden located in Buzzoni Farm Park to proposed 60'x30' dimensions, planting of native plants within garden, creating 4'-wide pathways throughout garden with signage as well as simple open-air presentation space for informal outdoor events within garden (all improvements are to be performed by DPW);
- garden has been subject to recent deer infiltration and accidental mowing;
- proposed pathways will likely be comprised of pea stone/decorative stones in lieu of much more costly permeable paver stones;
- Mr. Isaacson, who is supervising garden project, is collaborating with local landscaper (Susan Boudet) on plant selections which will be grouped into 4 quadrants within garden to represent those species that thrive in winter, spring, summer and autumn;
- any cost above \$1,500.00 relating to garden would be paid through Commission's operating budget;
- existing 8'-long bench located near garden is partially blocked by overgrown vegetation;
- **ACTION**- Ms. Cole will email Chairwoman Lockhart link to specific model of bench, costing approximately \$900.00, which could be installed as part of improvement made to garden;

Tree Preservation

- tree preservation is ongoing agenda item for Commission because there are various Borough actions underway to curtail loss of tree canopy;
- bacterial leaf scorch is harming both American and copper beech trees throughout region (existing Landmark Tree located in Buzzoni Farm Park is recommended for removal because of such following positive test results performed by Rutgers University);

NEW BUSINESS

Open Space Trust Fund Requests

- submission deadline for requests is June 10th;
- Commission obtained 3 quotes (lowest being \$10,000.00) for fence installation, including 2 gates, to surround pollinator garden at Buzzoni Farm Park to prevent deer and other wildlife infiltration;
- **ACTION**- Chairwoman Lockhart will follow-up on inquiry as to whether proposed garden improvements, including pathways, fence and bench, are subject to federal regulations on handicap accessibility taking into account subject area has rough terrain and said improvements are not permanent in nature;
- **VOTE**- motion was made by Councilman Devlin and seconded by Ms. Cole to have Commission submit 2022 open space trust fund request of \$11,200.00 to be utilized for purchase and installation of fence and bench in and around pollinator garden located in Buzzoni Farm Park (motion passed unanimously);

Cleaning Trail Signs

- **ACTION**- Commission members, less Chairwoman Lockhart, will coordinate cleaning of all pedestal map signs situated throughout Borough's trail system;

Public Messaging

- Commission's default topic in Mayor John Glidden's monthly newsletter is "Get Outdoors in Closter" campaign featuring 1 passive park in each publication (last month's showcased Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park and this month will feature Mollicone Park along with No Mow May);

PLAN REVIEW & COMMENT

- *411 Piermont Road*: administrative report was submitted to Zoning Board of Adjustment for proposed patio (on-grade with pergola to accommodate outdoor dining separate from existing rooftop dining) and parking lot modifications to supplement restaurant requiring Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals;
- *15 Wainwright Court*: administrative report is being drafted for Planning Board which is considering new 1-family house under construction requiring Major Soil Movement Approval (deadline is June 30th);
- *515 Piermont Road*: administrative report is being drafted for Planning Board which is considering proposed tenancy by plant nursery and parking lot modifications requiring Site Plan Approval (deadline is June 30th);

LIAISON REPORTS

Governing Body

(*Liaison*- Devlin)

- no report was given;

Shade Tree Commission

(*Liaison*- Lockhart)

- Commission was awarded \$30,000.00 grant for inventory of all Borough street trees which will be conducted via imaging by Colorado-based vendor (PlanIT Geo) and completed by September 15th;
- Commission updated its recommended shade tree planting list, both large and ornamental varieties consisting of mostly native species, which was forwarded to Building Department to utilize as

guidance for private tree mitigation as well;

- oak and black tupelo/gum trees have better survival rate when planted in spring as opposed to autumn when most species are planted and thrive;
- Commission reviewed Ms. Rege's inquiry about vine growth's impact on health of trees and responded that it does not necessarily do harm unless it grows over leaves;

Planning Board

(*Liaison* - Heymann)

- no report was given in light of Ms. Heymann's absence;

ADJOURNMENT

- 8:50pm;

