



Environmental Commission

April 19, 2011

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

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Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:04pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, April 19, 2011 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
Steven Isaacson
Mary Mayer
Adam Nock- Alternate #2
John Kashwick- Council Liaison
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member
Keith Scholz- Associate Member

Absent

Brenda Cummings
Arthur Goldberg, MD
Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member



New Business

Chairwoman Ravit informed that Raymond Cywinski, the Borough's Certified Tree Expert, had determined that at least 2 trees on his list for review should be nominated for landmark status while further research would be needed before giving his opinion on 2 others; she said he noted he could not locate an ancient orchard supposedly located at 199 Ruckman Road, a street address that does not exist and asked that he be given a correct location so he can inspect it. Ms. Mayer asked where the orchard is situated; Councilman Kashwick stated, according to Timothy Adriance, a member of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), it is behind 1 of the split-level homes that is along Ruckman Road between the Nature Center and Piermont Road. Ms. Mayer asked if it backs up to Willow Park; Mr. Isaacson confirmed it does. Chairwoman Ravit said that William Dahle, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), is researching inexpensive approaches to having signs built advertising the landmark trees; she felt that while the Commission has several nominations to present to the Governing Body, the process is still not complete. Mr. Isaacson suggested the row of trees running north and south behind Buzzoni Farm Park be nominated for landmark designation, though he acknowledged some maintenance was needed in the area. Ms. Mayer asked about the criteria for deeming a tree as a landmark; Councilman Kashwick said it must be unique in species or size. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if its age/history is a factor; Councilman Kashwick said, technically, such a standard is not mentioned in the Borough's ordinance. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the HPC giving input; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg replied that several trees suggested for nominations originated from the HPC. Chairwoman Ravit said Mr. Adriance will be asked his opinion of the row of trees mentioned; Mr. Isaacson added that a beech tree at Buzzoni Farm Park already has

landmark status. Chairwoman Ravit concluded she hoped to have the Commission's final suggestions ready in time for the Governing Body's consideration at 1 of its meetings in May.

Speaking of this past winter's fish kill at the Nature Center's pond, Ms. Mayer said there was a general consensus, by both Bergen County agencies and other municipal nature centers, that the cause was oxygen deprivation; she stated the following factors, other than the pond's depth, lead to the fish kill: 1.) perpetual ice cover for 2+ months (preventing oxygen exchange between air and water); 2.) snow on top of ice cover (preventing sun penetration for photosynthesis in plants); 3.) pond is not stream-fed (preventing introduction of oxygen on regular basis); 4.) abundance of decomposing plant life; 5.) excessive fish population (1,700 was double intended amount). Ms. Mayer added that as the days became longer, the 1,700 fish became aware of the pond's oxygen shortage and began to move, which resulted in the oxygen demand increasing dramatically in a short period of time. She concluded that the Nature Center, in terms of stewardship, was lacking in its awareness of both the fish count and the ice/snow covers' impact; with regards to the latter, she noted that, in prior winters, the pond has always experienced minor melt-offs each winter month (lasting approximately 1 week), creating open sections and allowance for oxygen exchange. She informed that several ponds in New York experienced similar occurrences last year, with most of those affected being shallow. Ms. Mayer said the Nature Center waited too long to have pond water samples tested to allow for any action to be taken; she noted that the samples revealed the fish to be healthy, not diseased. She said the Nature Center's board has decided, after considerable reluctance, to drain and dredge the pond followed by letting it restock. She said the board looked at dredging without draining, which is less expensive and comes with much less harm to macroinvertebrates; upon consultation with the Borough Engineer, Mr. Dahle and others, it was decided against due to the approach's inefficiency since sediment disturbance would cloud the pond water and hinder the dredging, eventually costing more in the long term. Ms. Mayer stated the Bergen County Mosquito Control Program, a part of the County's DPW, could provide the equipment and operator at no cost, but the removal of material would not be covered. She further added that draining the pond before dredging would be optimal because the pond has been naturally "growing" inward for 50 years; she stated that it is a free-standing, artificially made appurtenance, yet surrounded by swampland that makes its own natural transitions and, thus, draining it first is in the community's best interest. Councilman Kashwick asked what species, other than fish, will be lost from the pond's draining; Ms. Mayer answered it would primarily consist of insects, larva, etc. She added that turtles would probably make their way out of the pond and the rescue of crayfish, frogs, etc. is likely being the draining process leads to a compressed body of water. She reported the Nature Center has set up a committee, comprised of board members, to represent its interests during the process. She informed that the DPW has indicated it could provide labor during the summer prior to its leaf pick-up schedule starting; she noted the cost of material removal could range from \$35,000.00 to \$65,000.00. Ms. Mayer explained that if the material removed is acceptable for local deposit, the lower end of the price range is likely since both less truck travel and labor would be required; she warned that if the material is tested and found to not be acceptable, the project could prove to be unaffordable. She said another factor of cost would be that the original depth of the pond (when the last dredging was done 5 decades ago) is estimated to have ranged from 2' to 6' and today its runs from 1' to 4.5'. She continued saying that being the Nature Center's budget does not allow for such a project, financial support could come from open space funding and long-term grants. She informed that the feasibility of doing the project this year or next will become more defined after an initial engineering report, costing approximately \$6,000.00 including soil sampling and permits, is prepared; she noted the dredging start date could be determined by the fact the

Nature Center's trail project is scheduled to begin later this year. Councilman Kashwick asked how plant life in the vicinity would be affected; she replied it should be minimal because the equipment would have pond access via Irving Avenue. Mr. Scholz believed there not to be enough room for trucks to maneuver between the trees and Boy Scouts campground; Ms. Mayer disagreed. She stated that being the pond is spring-fed, it will have to be constantly pumped out, thus requiring a canal to be dug for channeling spring water out of the area. She hoped that the spring water could be pumped into the hockey pond nearby, thereby salvaging much of the macroinvertebrates for restocking via reverse-pumping back into the dredged pond. Councilman Kashwick asked if pumping into the hockey pond would cause it to flood; Ms. Mayer replied it most likely would not since it would only last for 6 weeks. Being that the hockey pond is shallow, she suggested a berm be placed on either side of it to avoid interference with the surrounding swamplands. She said the entire project would be a challenge, especially with the Nature Center's summer programs taking place at the same time. Chairwoman Ravit said Frank Rossi, PE of Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc. (the Borough Engineer's firm), who Ms. Mayer previously referred to, has an exceptional reputation as a hydrologic engineer. Councilman Kashwick asked about the status of funding; Ms. Mayer said a meeting between the Mayor's Office and the Borough Administrator would hopefully result in answering if the Nature Center could put up the monies for the initial engineering report and be reimbursed later on through open space funding. She said she was aware that the potential purchase of the Closter Swim Club (Blanch Avenue) by the Borough could take precedent; Councilman Kashwick stated that, regardless, there would still be ample funds for the pond project. Mr. Nock asked if there would be access to aquariums to save organisms affected by the draining; Ms. Mayer replied the Nature Center would have enough on-hand for the limited salvaging effort that would ensue. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if the Commission should vote in order to "cement" support for the Center's pond remediation; Chairwoman Ravit said such was unnecessary.

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the February 15, 2011 meeting with no corrections; all eligible members present voted in favor. A motion was made by Mr. Nock and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to approve the minutes for the March 15, 2011 meeting with no corrections; all eligible members present voted in favor.



Old Business

Ms. Mayer announced that John Mc Caffrey, resident and caretaker of Mac Bain Farm, is still working on his planting plan to present to the Commission. Chairwoman Ravit expressed concern that planting would need to start in May; she noted that his contract renewal with the Borough included a planting plan as a condition. Ms. Mayer said she would write a letter, on Borough letterhead, to Mr. Mc Caffrey stating it is imperative for him to present a basic concept, (an elaborate layout is not required), at the May 17th meeting so planting would not be delayed this season; Mr. Isaacson felt Mr. Mc Caffrey should scan and email his plan to the Commission so it has enough time to review before the next meeting. With regards to a complaint filed by the owner-in-fee of 32 Mc Cain Court (Gil Shaked), Ms. Mayer stated she confronted Mr. Mc Caffrey about his children motor-biking on the Farm's grounds and he promised they would stop doing so; Chairwoman Ravit asked she be kept abreast of the issue since neighbors should not have to put up with such noise.

Chairwoman Ravit asked if the Farm's cookbook project was still being actively pursued; Ms. Mayer said the Farm continues its support of the idea, but she has not received any updates on its status.

Ms. Mayer informed that the patio expansion has been completed and said she is very pleased with the workmanship of the Eagle Scout volunteers. Chairwoman Ravit hoped that a dedication could be planned around Memorial Day with Spectrum For Living residents attending since the project was conceived with them in mind.

Chairwoman Ravit said Douglas Radick, RA, is requesting final input from the Commission on items such as solar panels and composting (waterless) toilets for the Mac Bain Farm barn project before he completes his final draft; she stated the rain garden option would be dealt with later on when the site plan is prepared. Ms. Mayer said the latest draft mostly reflects what was discussed at her last meeting with the architect. The Commission could not decipher from the architectural drawings whether or not the project would meet the Zoning Code's bulk standards, thereby negating the need for variances. Chairwoman Ravit said she had spoken with the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., and he informed that if no variances are necessary, the Building Department could review and issue construction permits relatively quick once the bidding process had been completed; she further stated that Mr. Rogan suggested a meeting be set up with the Zoning Officer, Leonard Sinowitz, to assure no issues will arise. Chairwoman Ravit said her only zoning concern was the proposed setbacks from neighboring lots on Mc Cain Court. She asked if there could be building height concerns; Ms. Mayer replied the latest revision seemed to show an increase in the barn's height since the prior draft and asked about the full windows depicted on the upper level. She also asked if the barn was intended to have an entire 2nd floor or merely loft storage space. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the 2 most recent drafts called for a full interior staircase. Mr. Nock said there was prior discussion about more natural light being provided, thus explaining the full windows. Chairwoman Ravit inquired about the barn's positioning, specifically the roof's pitch, in relation to solar panel placement. Ms. Mayer said the length of the barn runs east and west; Mr. Isaacson said it should face southward to allow for sunlight all day equating it to an artist's studio and North light (indirect sunlight). Ms. Mayer said Mr. Radick has placed the barn fairly close to the Commission's liking, but noted it is parallel to the residence on-site for integrity purposes as per Mr. Mc Caffrey's request; Mr. Isaacson added that the barn is also parallel to topographical lines. Ms. Mayer felt an advantage to rotating the barn more is that the solar receptivity would improve and the existing shed in the rear yard would get more sunlight. Mr. Isaacson said other approaches would be to install the solar panels in the fields rather than atop the barn's roof or the use of wind power; both Chairwoman Ravit and Ms. Mayer disagreed saying zoning requirements, storm water runoff and plowing techniques would be negatively-impacted. Chairwoman Ravit believed the center portion of the barn would be open space from the floor to the roof (allowing for large equipment) with both ends serving as lofts. Mr. Nock asked if roof solar panels would need to be mounted flat or on an angle; Chairwoman Ravit answered roof-types tend to be flat while ground-types are usually angled. Ms. Mayer reminded that the barn must be designed to handle the extra load created by the solar panels. Mr. Nock asked if the barn's height will be sufficient enough to discourage theft; Ms. Mayer replied it would. Mr. Isaacson asked if there would be nearby trees affecting sunlight; Ms. Mayer answered there are none, other than a formerly prominent ash tree that has been reduced to a "skeleton". Ms. Bouton-Goldberg pointed out there are some low-lying fruit trees in the vicinity as well. Mr. Nock asked if the solar panels would come with a built-in monitor to calculate energy production; Ms. Mayer replied such depended on the type of unit purchased. She asked if the sliding doors, located in the barn's center section, will be constructed so that both cannot be open at the same time; Chairwoman

Ravit asked that Mr. Mc Caffrey review the latest revision and comment on that and other changes to the draft. Chairwoman Ravit said the proposed composting (waterless) toilet is also installed at Greenbrook Sanctuary, a 165 acre woodland along the Palisades Interstate Parkway; she believed that based on the unit's specifications ("daily capacity at average temperature greater than 65 degrees Fahrenheit: 60 visits"), it would serve the Farm well since its largest event, a marshmallow roast, occurs in the winter. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked about maintenance on the unit; Chairwoman Ravit replied Greenbrook Sanctuary should be contacted, possibly visited, to get their feedback on the unit chosen. Mr. Isaacson questioned if the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) could accept the compost being the agency handles such with sewage treatment plants; Chairwoman Ravit replied that compost is not solid waste. Ms. Mayer informed that Milorganite (recycled human waste) is 1 of the most popular fertilizers on the market. Councilman Kashwick asked if such is used on food for human consumption; Ms. Mayer replied she believed it is, but Chairwoman Ravit said the State of New Jersey requires an involved testing and permitting process to do so. Ms. Mayer noted that water and electrical connections would be needed for the toilet's pump.

Updating the Commission on the trail system's urban connections, Mr. Isaacson said he still has not been able to contact Mr. Dahle. He said it has been decided which thoroughfares are to be marked as street crossings; he said green-colored cross walks were discussed, but county roads cannot be marked in such a way. He said the current plan is to blaze the relevant curbs and he informed that Mr. Dahle agreed to do the stenciling. Chairwoman Ravit concurred and asked if such, along with the blazing of some trees, could be completed by Memorial Day. Mr. Isaacson believed he could finish marking the "Cross-Closter Trail" (aka "The Blue Trail" due to its blue blaze demarcations) in time so long as he is supplied with the blue blazes. He mentioned that on 1 of his recent walks of the inter-borough trail system, he noticed a map posted at 1 of the bridges that laid out the trails of both the Boroughs of Closter and Demarest; he felt a computer-generated map of the entire trail system (potentially at a cost of \$300.00) could help "push" the inter-borough trail concept. Chairwoman Ravit said once the last few blazes are installed to direct residents through the trails, the Commission can start advertising the system on websites as Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested.

Chairwoman Ravit revealed that high school students providing senior year service would not be available to work on the vine removal project at Schauble Park this year; she said the alternative is to have those working at the Nature Center sent to Schauble Park if they have any free time. Ms. Mayer said the original 6 volunteers assigned to the Nature Center have now been reduced to 4. She felt that the trail project would only take up approximately 2 of the 5 weeks they will be providing service. Mr. Nock believed it would be best to keep the students at the Nature Center and have Commission members do the vine abatement at Schauble Park; Mr. Isaacson concurred being the work would involve heavy-duty tools. Ms. Mayer said both she and Mr. Nock would visit the site and see what tasks the students could handle there. Mr. Nock said he would not be able to supervise the students, but Chairwoman Ravit said she would be available for supervision when she finishes lecturing on May 2nd. Ms. Mayer suggested the volunteers' job at Schauble Park could be to simply pull out debris near Bergenline Avenue and the DPW could do the removal.

Chairwoman Ravit mentioned that, for several years now, funds have been allocated for the installation of a bicycle rack at Amendola Park; Councilman Kashwick said he only remembered there being monies for stream bank restoration there. He added that he would rather see a rack put by the bus stop on the southwest corner of Piermont Road and Closter Dock Road where bicycles are currently being chained to newly-planted trees (the existing rack is old and not

placed logically). He felt Amendola Park is hidden and rarely used. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg felt Mac Bain Farm could benefit from having a rack on-site. Chairwoman Ravit said the issue would be tabled for when Ms. Ramaswamy is present because the topic is a favorite of hers.

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Plans

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

◇ 180 Piermont Road: This is an application for Amendment Approval, whereby the applicant, Temple Emanu-el of Closter, wishes to deviate from the originally-approved proposal consisting of an addition (1st floor extension) and patio (on-grade). Chairwoman Ravit said no additional variances were being sought. Mr. Isaacson said that a stair tower was now being proposed; Chairwoman Ravit stated a new entry door for the social hall lobby has been added as well. Mr. Isaacson said doors were being added at a hallway to negate traveling through classrooms to exit. Councilman Kashwick pointed out that several classrooms would be converted to office space. Mr. Nock and Mr. Scholz suggested the Commission mention the dilemma surrounding both the nearby conservation easement and fencing along Hartford Boulevard as discussed by Dr. Goldberg at the March 15th meeting. Chairwoman Ravit believed a legal opinion should be obtained from Mr. Rogan before the Commission can say the fence on the paper street is illegal. The Commission had no comments at this time.

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Other

Chairwoman Ravit announced that those interested in environmental literacy can attend a citizen forum at Newark Museum on April 25th; she said former Governor Christine Todd Whitman would speak and the following dignitaries would hold a question and answer session: 1.) Michele Byers (New Jersey Conservation Foundation); 2.) Robin Dougherty (Greater Newark Conservancy); 3.) Kimberly Gaddy (New Jersey Environmental Federation); 4.) Fletcher Harper (GreenFaith); 5.) Dena Jaborska (Environment New Jersey); 6.) Jennifer Pappa (City Green, Inc.); 7.) Randall Solomon (Sustainable Jersey).

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she recently attended an event in the Borough of Westwood that dealt with rain barrels/gardens and water conservation; she mentioned that Bergen Save The Watershed Action Network (SWAN) expressed support for the Commission's potential rain barrel workshop. She noted that the Planning Board, at its April 6th hearing, unanimously approved the Historic Preservation Plan Element to the Borough's Master Plan.

Ms. Mayer said the Nature Center would be holding a program on residential compost/recycling on April 29th and the "Green Team" would be sponsoring a hike on April 22nd in celebration of Earth Day.

Councilman Kashwick said the Governing Body passed an amendment to the open space inventory in anticipation to the Borough's purchasing of the Closter Swim Club, should it disband or not have the funds to continue operating.

Chairwoman Ravit questioned if the Borough was an awardee in the 2011 open space funding round of the Green Acres Program coordinated by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP); Councilman Kashwick said he would follow up on the matter.

Councilman Kashwick said a Mayor and Council vote is forthcoming with regards to fires (bonfires, marshmallow roasts, etc.) on public property, which was requested by the Nature Center. He said the purpose is to prevent any individual from randomly starting a fire and also to assign certain Borough officials to be present at all Borough-sponsored events involving fires. He mentioned that, at the April 14th meeting of the "Green Team", Mr. Cywinski spoke of potentially converting the inactive CSX Corp. rail line to a ground trail. He further added that the Governing Body's Ordinance Committee is looking into making stricter idling regulations for vehicles; he stated the local limit is 30 minutes while statewide it is only 3 minutes. Mr. Isaacson felt the latter would be unenforceable and Mr. Nock thought to reduce the permitted time so drastically would make selective enforcement more probable. Ms. Mayer and Chairwoman Ravit believed it would help with parents waiting on their children's dismissal from school.

Mr. Isaacson felt it would be wrong for public funds to be used in acquiring the Closter Swim Club, a private entity having restricted access; he said he would rather see it close down if need be. Councilman Kashwick disagreed and said to allow such would result in there being 5 or 6 "Mc Mansions" being built on-site. Mr. Nock asked if the Borough owned the land; Councilman Kashwick answered that it does not but it used to be Borough land before it was given to the Closter Swim Club. He informed that, unfortunately, no rider was put into the contract stating the land would revert back to the Borough if it went under. He continued to say the proposal would be that the Borough buys the property and leases it back to the Closter Swim Club. Mr. Isaacson interjected saying that because of bad planning (no right of 1st refusal) by a prior administration, the Borough would have to buy back land that it previously gave away and lease it out at a low rate. He proffered that the Borough get a deed restriction instead, which is much cheaper, so that if the Closter Swim Club fails, the land would either revert back to the Borough or a third party could only use the parcel for another club-type use. Councilman Kashwick pointed out that, if purchased, the property (6 acres) would give the Borough access to the wetlands and parking lot on-site and it could allow the lawn to grow into forestry. Mr. Isaacson questioned about the asking price; Councilman Kashwick did not know. Mr. Nock estimated it could be \$600,000.00 per acre.

Mr. Nock said the Shade Tree Commission would be having Arbor Day activities at the local schools on April 28th and at Hagen Park on April 30th.

Chairwoman Ravit stated the Chairman of the Planning Board, John Lignos, RA, indicated it would be much easier to get Borough-owned lands and the Nature Center placed into a conservation zone than previous efforts have gone in trying to put private lands in such a category being the latter requires a professional planner; he suggested the Commission speaks of the matter on May 4th during the public portion of the Board's hearing.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Mayer and seconded by Councilman Kashwick, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:53pm.