



Environmental Commission

January 18, 2011

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

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Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:03pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, January 18, 2011 at Borough Hall.



Reorganization

Oaths of Office

Member (Term Expiring December 31, 2012): Brenda Cummings
COMPLETION OF VACATED TERM

Alternate #2 (Term Expiring December 31, 2012): Adam Nock

Associate Member (Term Expiring December 31, 2011): Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg
Associate Member (Term Expiring December 31, 2011): Jayanthi Ramaswamy



Attendance

Present

Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
Steven Isaacson
Brenda Cummings
Mary Mayer
Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
Adam Nock- Alternate #2
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member
Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member

Absent

Arthur Goldberg, MD
John Kashwick- Council Liaison



New Business

Chairwoman Ravit stated she had been in contact with the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) and the issue of lackluster communication between the state's 566 municipalities was discussed.

Ms. Cummings spoke of *Sustainable Jersey*, a certification program co-sponsored by the Gerald R. Dodge Foundation ("Dodge") that rewards those municipalities improving quality of life for its residents while controlling costs of such measures. She explained that communities must create a "Green Team", which the Borough has assembled and she now heads, to prioritize

initiatives dealing with energy audits for municipal facilities, municipal carbon footprints, sustainable land use pledges and water conservation ordinances; she continued saying that upon achieving the balance of required actions (via accumulating a minimum of 100 points), certification is awarded and opens up the potential for tax incentive and grant programs for those municipalities. Chairwoman Ravit pointed out that a colleague from Rutgers University started the program and felt it ties into the Borough's "Sustainable Cluster Initiative", an avenue by which the Borough could set an example. She further explained that it provides funds for issues the Commission would want to address while as the same time providing tremendous community awareness through the local school system.

Chairwoman Ravit mentioned that the Borough Hall does not provide any means of recycling paper and/or plastic; she stated that some of the Commission's budget could be used for collections bins. Mr. Isaacson felt that Miele Sanitation Co. should be asked to provide such bins at no cost. Ms. Mayer hoped that the bins' maintenance could be provided by the Department of Public Works (DPW) employee assigned to Borough Hall.

Chairwoman Ravit talked of purchasing an *EnviroScope* for the Borough's Nature Center, a cost of \$700.00 to \$800.00; she explained it is a watershed table-top model that serves as a tool for children learning about pollutants (most effective for a group of 6 to 8 participants). She said the curriculum could be stored at the Nature Center and instructions using Microsoft's *PowerPoint* could enable others to share in its use. She added that such an investment would go toward garnering points for the "Green Team". Mr. Nock suggested that the Commission construct a terrarium and negate the cost of an *EnviroScope*. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated she recently had a rain garden installed at her residence, which Ms. Cummings could use for "Green Team" purposes. The Commission decided to postpone a vote on buying an *EnviroScope* until the February 15, 2011 Meeting to allow for research of its pros and cons.



Old Business

Ms. Mayer reported that the fencing being installed at Mac Bain Farm would be completed in 4 days; she informed that the cookbook project was progressing, especially with the involvement of the Borough's school system.

John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of Mac Bain Farm, presented his suggestions for building on the success of the farm's first decade in which he has presided over its maintenance. He said he hoped the next 10 years would result in the creation of the Farm becoming an agricultural and horticultural park for the education and enjoyment of the entire community. He specified the following objectives: 1.) attention to arboretum and soil to allow for maintaining crops (putting emphasis on ethnic foods which can be mistaken for "weeds"); 2.) Eagle Scouts (Boy Scouts of America) and others in community serving as "vegetable police"; 3.) permanent herb garden (longer cold crops and extended seasons inclusive); 4.) reforestation program for boundaries/buffering (keeping in mind lifespan of species to be planted); 5.) apiary upkeep (setting bees off in certain areas to ensure public's safety); 6.) reorganization of garden club (for plant lovers aside from Commission); 7.) composting (enhancement of soil); 8.) infrastructure (barn and 4-wheel drive equipment upgrading to enhance farm's usage by public, especially students). Mr. Mc Caffrey stated he welcomes anyone to provide him with seeds of

diverse crops for planting at the Farm; he also hoped to add to the orchards for diversifying and supplementing the Farm's boundary lines. Mr. Gotthelf inquired about the creation of a picking area for the Farm's handicapped visitors. The Commission felt such an undertaking would be best implemented as an internal policy rather than having the idea sanctioned by ordinance, thereby bringing state and federal regulations into the equation. Chairwoman Ravit mentioned that an Eagle Scout, Patrick Dolan, has volunteered to expand the Farm's existing patio (installation of planters inclusive) to better accommodate the handicapped. Ms. Ramaswamy asked Mr. Mc Caffrey that all suggestions of ethnic seeds to be introduced to the Farm are forwarded to the Commission, beforehand, so to avoid undesirable effects as with, for instance, bamboo. Mr. Mc Caffrey agreed and said he would follow through with acquiring permits from the Health Department for the bee operation. He suggested a "Ten Commandments of Do's and Don'ts" for the Farm be ratified by the Commission. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked about blueberry bushes being planted in the coming year; Mr. Mc Caffrey said he would look into the possibility and pointed out that they would not require a deer fence and probably would not be overrun by birds. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the Closter area has the largest concentration of moss in the nation. Chairwoman Ravit stated the Borough has retained an architect to work on the Farm's barn, the design of which would be historic in look. Ms. Mayer hoped that raspberry bushes could be planted this year as well. Mr. Mc Caffrey said he would return for the February 15, 2011 Meeting and present plans for summer plantings as well as the patio renovation; Chairwoman Ravit wished that Mr. Dolan would attend the next meeting to enlighten the Commission of his ideas for the patio project. Mr. Nock brought up the possibility of having the Shade Tree Commission provide funding for such plantings rather than depleting the Farm's budget. Mr. Mc Caffrey commended the Borough of Tenafly's efforts in setting a "guiding light" by way of its beautification of different sections in the community, taking into consideration both spacing and overgrowth prevention; he mentioned that he wanted to carry the staff for the arboretum in terms of native and global plantings. Chairwoman Ravit felt the Farm's "green" operation should be an obvious nominee for an ANJEC award this year; she said she would inquire about the rules and procedures for nomination.

Mr. Isaacson briefed the Commission on the Borough's trails and parks; he mentioned his travels throughout the Borough following the recent snowfall revealed beautiful scenery. He said proposals were coming in for sign designs and suggested curbing in more urban areas to provide safety. He informed that a complaint had been received regarding unleashed dogs running loose behind the "A & P" supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue). He questioned whether the Borough, as is the case in New York City, should set aside certain times throughout the day to allow for unleashed dogs to exercise in parks. Mr. Gotthelf cautioned that such could increase incidents of dog bites and bacterial infections (feces). The Commission saw the potential in using those areas under-utilized by children for dog runs instead. Mr. Isaacson felt, ultimately, that the Borough already has a tremendous amount of open space and owners need to leash their dogs at all times; Chairwoman Ravit concurred saying that the Borough's current ordinance on the matter should remain written as is. Mr. Gotthelf stated that the suggestion of dog fecal composts would be highly regulated; Ms. Mayer did not want children using trails to be exposed to harmful bacteria. Chairwoman Ravit asked that Mr. Isaacson and Mr. Nock form a subcommittee to deal with the issues surrounding dog runs, keeping in mind trail and park maintenance as well as public safety. Mr. Isaacson suggested the Borough's ordinance be posted at the entrances of strategic locations, in lieu of dog runs, thereby putting the public on notice (followed up by strict enforcement from the Police Department). Mr. Nock said he would contact the Recreation Commission for potentially having the fenced-in area at Memorial Park serve as a dog run, which would also result in dogs not roaming the adjacent ball fields.

Mr. Nock reported on the appurtenances at Shauble Park. He believed the equipment to be in acceptable condition, although one could see the hockey net, slides and bleachers as needing improvement; in light of his findings, Mr. Nock thought the \$10,000.00 allocated for Shauble Park could be returned to the Recreation Commission. Chairwoman Ravit disagreed and said all parks must be inspected for any required maintenance, pointing out that the funds can be spent on open space items only.

Turning to bike racks, the Commission agreed to meet its obligations by taking advantage of available funds for new installations at Amendola Park, Mac Bain Farm, etc.

Chairwoman Ravit asked for input on resolving the issue of residents' access to the United Water property; she felt a key could be issued by the Borough to residents on an annual basis, relating it to a library card or the protocol for cemetery visits. Ms. Mayer mentioned that master keys could be issued, free of charge, and released to residents upon signing them out, though, she reminded, that the locks would need to be changed yearly. Mr. Di Dio suggested the use of magnetic keys, an inexpensive approach; he stated they come with an automatic lock on a timer and the gate would be self-closing. The Commission agreed that a digital key, or something to that affect, would prove to be much more efficient than having the Police Department responsible for monitoring access. Chairwoman Ravit promised to coordinate such details with Raymond Cywinski, the Borough's Certified Tree Expert, who is also employed by United Water.

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Plans

The Commission prepared the following administrative reports:

Planning Board

◇ 10 Railroad Avenue: This is an application for Site Plan Approval whereby the applicant wishes to reconstruct (on the existing foundation) a portion of the commercial building, which was previously occupied by the pulp and paper manufacturer, *Weyerhaeuser*, and partially destroyed by a fire in 2007. The Commission requested an increase in landscaping ("green wall") on-site in order to compensate for the lack of buffering.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

◇ 24 Naugle Street: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval whereby the applicants wish to continue an existing contractor's yard operation located in District #3 (Commercial). The Commission had no comments.

◇ 211 Irving Avenue: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval whereby the applicant wishes to construct a 1st floor addition, deck and retaining wall at the *Lindgren Nursery School & Camp*. The Commission questioned how the proposal would affect storm water runoff; it also inquired about the number of trees to be removed as well as if the retaining wall would alter existing elevations.

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Other

Mr. Gotthelf touched upon energy audits/deductions with relation to the “Green Team” effort, emphasizing Borough Hall’s illumination methods. He pointed out it must be taken into account that by utilizing more earth-friendly and cost-saving electrical components, the livelihood of those whose job it is to maintain light fixtures, etc., is directly affected.

Chairwoman Ravit encouraged all to bring forth those issues that are important to them. Ms. Ramaswamy stated she would forward data on pharmaceutical disposal to the Commission.

Chairwoman Ravit informed that a planner would be required to submit applications and designs for the 2011 ANJEC Smart Growth Grants, of which the deadline is March 31st.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Chairwoman Ravit and seconded by Mr. Gotthelf, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 10:12pm.