



# **Environmental Commission**

June 21, 2011

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

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, June 21, 2011 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

Present

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Brenda Cummings
- Adam Nock- Alternate #2
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- Keith Scholz- Associate Member

Absent

- Steven Isaacson
- Mary Mayer
- Arthur Goldberg, MD
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
- Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
- Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member



**New Business**

Chairwoman Ravit informed that due to the Commission’s poor attendance, a vote on the minutes for the May 17, 2011 meeting would be postponed to the July 19, 2011 meeting.

Ms. Cummings informed that the “Green Team” was hard at work organizing a film/lecture series; she said the inaugural showing is slated to be *The Synthetic Sea Story*, a documentary about marine debris studies. She hoped to get the local school system involved in the presentation, noting 2 local middle school students, John Glidden, Jr. and Bryce Zicarelli, have shown great interest on the topic. She stated that *Queen of the Sun*, a film about the global bee crisis is being considered for the 2<sup>nd</sup> showing; she hoped it could be viewed during the summer, followed by a children’s show on bees and a lecture on beekeeping by Marc Gussen of the Nature Center.

Ms. Cummings revealed she began attending a course through *New Jersey Learns*, a program sponsored by The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education, to earn a teaching certificate; she stated it deals with mental models and ways of changing the public’s way of thinking about sustainability. She noted that another course was offered to her, via scholarship, which gives insight on designing a curriculum/method to teach the community.

Lastly, Ms. Cummings said that the Mayor’s office has indicated interest in acquiring compost bins to make available for residents to order and purchase (she distributed a flier to the

Commission that offered bins through the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) until June 24<sup>th</sup>). She informed that if the BCUA ends up having no more in its inventory, the bin manufacturer, *The Earth Machine* which also produces rain barrels, would be contacted directly and, hopefully, it accepts a fair price. Councilman Kashwick asked how the public response has been; she replied it has been little to none. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if the offer is posted on the Borough's website; Ms. Cummings stated it is. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated that while she is interested in buying a bin, she did not know if its placement on her property would conform to the Borough's Zoning Code; Councilman Kashwick said he was not aware of an ordinance that regulated such. Both he and Chairwoman Ravit revealed that their compost bins are near their neighbors' fencing. Chairwoman Ravit said that the bin must be turned so that it is aerated, allowing for the decomposition process to take place and not allow for odors to emanate from the container. Councilman Kashick said that even if rotating was not to occur for a month, the bins are still covered; Chairwoman Ravit concurred and noted that the bins should not be equated to a compost pile out in the open.

Ms. Cummings noted that William Dahle, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), expressed interest in becoming a member of the "Green Team" and he is reviewing which items the Borough has completed in its effort to garner points for certification and grant money via the *Sustainable Jersey* program.

Chairwoman Ravit stated that those high school students assigned to the Nature Center through senior year service accompanied their supervisor, Paul Mac Donald, to Schauble Park and cleaned up some debris; she informed that the trails behind the nearby ball field are overgrown. She noted that Ms. Mayer informed her that Mr. Mac Donald was inquiring about adopting Schauble Park, which is near his residence on Taillon Terrace.

Chairwoman Ravit informed of an email chain between the Mayor's office and Mr. Mac Donald regarding the recent parking of contractors' vehicles near trees at Mollicone Park; she said the trucks were staged on open space for the duration of the sidewalk repair taking place along Knickerbocker Road; she noted that such parking arrangement was required since the Borough does not allow overnight parking in that section of town. Chairwoman Ravit stated Mr. Mac Donald felt an exception to the rule should have been made rather than having heavy equipment compact soil and damage tree roots. Councilman Kashwick stated a similar occurrence took place at Mollicone Park when United Water Co. was replacing utility lines in the area last year; he stated that he would take the matter up with the Governing Body.

Chairwoman Ravit revealed that Ms. Cummings discovered a \$25,000.00 grant available from *Sustainable Jersey*, the deadline of which is July 22<sup>nd</sup>, for those municipalities that are members of the program (certification is not a requirement); both felt that, through a Resolution by the Mayor and Council, the request for grant money could be made to help offset costs of the Mac Bain Farm barn project, specifically the 4 sustainable aspects, which would receive statewide recognition: 1.) rain garden; 2.) composting (waterless) toilet; 3.) green roof (above outdoor classroom); 4.) roof solar panels. Councilman Kashwick said such would be prepared at the Governing Body's 1<sup>st</sup> meeting in July. Ms. Cummings stated biographies and resumes of the Borough's representatives (Ravit/Cummings/Kashwick) would need to accompany the application. Chairwoman Ravit estimated that the potential amount, to be awarded in September and must be spent within 1 year, could cover 25% to 30% of the project's total construction costs.

Chairwoman Ravit opened the meeting to the public for comments. No one wished to be heard.



## **Old Business**

Speaking of the barn project, Chairwoman Ravit stated the Building Department relayed to her that being it involved Borough property, a zoning permit is not required but that construction permits (fees to be waived) and a courtesy review by the Planning Board are. She said all Commission members are welcome to join her and Douglas Radick, RA, for presentation before the Board, the date of which has not yet been decided. Chairwoman Ravit hoped to do the bidding process in July, which hopefully results in the use of many local businesses and contractors. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested that Orlando Tobia, a member of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and retired electrician, be contacted for recommendations; Chairwoman Ravit said she would do such after it is confirmed that the design would incur no more changes. She said she has been referred to DAC Plumbing & Heating Co., (250 High Street) as well. She stated that Mr. Radick felt the construction involved to be relatively simple and that ground should be broken sometime in the fall.

Chairwoman Ravit said that the attendance of John Mc Caffrey this evening, caretaker and resident of Mac Bain Farm, was doubtful; she expressed frustration that the Commission still has not received a planting plan from him this late in the year.

At this time, Chairwoman Ravit presented a series of photographs, via her laptop computer, taken during a recent Eagle Scout ceremony at Mac Bain Farm; as a side note, she commended the work of the volunteers, especially Patrick Dolan, who built the patio expansion on-site. She said the purpose of viewing the pictures was for the Commission to give its thoughts on a large American flag (installed by Mr. Mc Caffrey) depicted, which is currently in residence at the Farm. Chairwoman Ravit felt its presence could take away from the pastoral farm experience and asked if it should be on-site permanently. Councilman Kashwick asked if the intention was to display it for Memorial Day only; Chairwoman Ravit believed it was put up to commemorate the patio project dedication prior to the Eagle Scout ceremony. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg felt the flag's permanent presence would be a distraction to the Farm's visitors; Both she and Chairwoman suggested that it only be permitted on-site from Memorial Day through Independence Day. Councilman Kashwick believed that to be too lengthy and recommended that it be displayed for certain days only rather than entire weeks. Chairwoman Ravit pointed out that the flag is somehow tied up to branches of nearby trees; Mr. Scholtz said he was concerned about a windstorm affecting such a large flag and causing a safety hazard. Mr. Nock inquired if the flag's current presentation is contrary to flag etiquette; Councilman Kashwick confirmed it, in fact, was because it should not be left out 24 hours a day nor be displayed without a light shone on it. The Commission determined that Mr. Mc Caffrey would be informed that said flag's presence, due to safety concerns, shall only be permitted on those holidays where flag display is commonplace.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted that at her last visit to the Farm, buckets were not available to the public in which their picked produce could be collected; Chairwoman Ravit responded that Ms. Mayer could be asked to follow up on the matter.

Turning to trails and parks, Chairwoman Ravit said Mr. Isaacson thought more blazing was necessary on Brook Street from the stream north on Demarest Avenue; she said he also noted that some tree branches are blocking several blazes and so he felt more could be installed on

utility poles to avoid that from taking place. She informed that Mr. Isaacson reported blazing is needed along the portion of the Borough's trail system that travels through the United Water Co. property. Chairwoman Ravit asked that any volunteers available to hammer and nail blazes in areas where they would be easily visible to pedestrians, during the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, should reach out to him. Councilman Kashwick stated the DPW had removed 3 sections of guardrails, following Bergen County clearance, which had been blocking access to and from certain points of the trail. Ms. Cummings inquired about the location of the trail system that included portions of the water utility's land; both Chairwoman Ravit and Councilman Kashwick explained that an access gate is on Closter Dock Road near the Borough's 9/11 Memorial on Harrington Avenue and the exit is by Spectrum for Living (50 Blanch Avenue). Councilman Kashwick stated the bridge associated with the trail on United Water Co.'s property, worked on by DPW laborers, should be completed by the end of the week. Chairwoman Ravit said she would confirm that the utility's gates have been open to the public since April as well as who is responsible for maintaining the lawn and blazing located within their gates. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the trail leading from Mac Bain Farm towards Anderson Avenue is quite overgrown; she suggested that wood chips or blazing be placed there as well (near the skunk cabbage signs).

Councilman Kashwick stated that 2 years ago, the Governing Body appropriated \$2,000.00 for bicycle racks; he said it did not specify where the racks needed to be placed and if more funding is needed, such can be requested. Mr. Nock informed that he is researching the manufacturer and cost of a model that was recently installed at his place of employment, which he felt was better than the usual "scrap metal" bike racks in terms of both aesthetics and quality; he stated, though, it was surely to be more expensive. He said he would discuss the potential need for a concrete slab below where such a rack would be placed. Chairwoman Ravit asked if the model he spoke of has slots between individual bars; Mr. Nock replied that such model holds approximately 10 bikes and is equipped with an overhang for protection during inclement weather. The Commission decided that racks should be placed at the following sites: 1.) Pfeiffer Park; 2.) Nature Center; 3.) Mac Bain Farm. Mr. Nock questioned if additional racks could be placed on buffer strips along shopping centers; Councilman Kashwick was unsure if the Borough could do such using open space funds, but it may be possible with capital funds, etc. Chairwoman Ravit asked if a rack could be beneficial at Buzzoni Farm near the Closter Swim Club (Blanch Avenue); Mr. Nock interjected saying that he heard a rumor that the Club was bankrupt. Councilman Kashwick confirmed that it is struggling and that the Borough is looking into buying the property it sits on; he noted that in the 1960's, the Borough donated the land to the Club without including a reverter clause in the contract and, so, it hopes to acquire the parcel to prevent its development by a private party. The Commission decided that in light of such circumstances, a rack would not be placed at Buzzoni Farm. Councilman Kashwick hoped that the model chosen is sturdy like the metal type found in New York City. Mr. Nock stated he would look into having 1 placed at Mollicone Park, Ruckman Park, Schauble Park, Veterans' Park, Alice Barkley Square and/or Borough Hall since the 3 locations chosen are in close proximity to each other. Ms. Cummings suggested putting a rack at the Closter Public Library. Mr. Nock asked about signage being installed on the racks that states the Borough is not liable for theft or vandalism; Councilman Kashwick said he would speak with the Borough Attorney on the matter.

James Elling, a member of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Norwood, was recognized by Chairwoman Ravit. She stated he has been in contact with the manager of the Nature Center for the Borough of Demarest, who designed that municipality's

trail system map. She further stated that the trail systems belonging to the Boroughs of Closter and Demarest are already connected and now the mapping is necessary. Both she and Mr. Elling thought the time had come for Closter and Norwood to connect their trail systems as well. Mr. Elling stated that in 2005 or 2006 Norwood wanted to preserve its 116 acres of wetlands but its newly-formed Commission was overwhelmed with the idea of developing its own trail system. He explained that then-Councilwomen Sophie Heymann (Closter) and Dolores Senatore (Norwood) collaborated in securing a grant to study trails, which indicated the construction of a bridge over Dwars Kill, via the Central Woods easement in Norwood, would be prudent; he revealed that such an idea was not popular in Norwood and the project was shelved. He believed the idea should be revisited and he said he has garnered support from the Mayor's office in the Borough of Alpine; he said he envisioned a trail that would loop around to include Norwood, Closter and Alpine. He stated the reason for his attendance this evening was to make contacts. He informed that several years ago, he was a full member on his Commission before leaving for a few years; he felt that while currently only an alternate, his voice has some weight; he stated Norwood is developing, with grant money, a section of trails near its borders with the Boroughs of Northvale and Old Tappan known as "Fox Hill Area". Mr. Elling explained that Dwars Kill is deemed a Category-1 waterway by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), which has been an obstacle to overcome. He, ultimately, felt the mood in Norwood has shifted, and its initial reluctance to have its Central Woods disturbed, could now be overcome. Chairwoman Ravit indicated that the stream, over which the bridge on United Water Co.'s land is being built, was given Category-1 status by the NJDEP as well, but she stated no permits were required from any governing agency since the bridge is not highly-engineered (no use of concrete foundations, etc.); she suggested the same approach be used for Dwars Kill. Mr. Elling stated he would like to visit the site in question. Chairwoman Ravit felt that Mr. Isaacson, Ms. Mayer and Mr. Scholz (replacing Mr. Nock who will be attending college) should be involved in the inter-borough trail discussions as well as Peter Coy, Treasurer of the Demarest Nature Center. Chairwoman Ravit and Mr. Elling felt the Borough of Cresskill could be connected with the trail system, via Alpine, while the Borough of Tenafly may as well through its Nature Center. Mr. Elling felt that residents tend not to understand wetlands because they often cannot get to them; he explained that several former Norwood Commission members had wetlands abutting their own residences and they took the stance that the public should not be permitted to experience them since their own private properties could be affected in some inconsequential way. He believed wetlands should be preserved as well as accessible. Chairwoman Ravit felt an obstacle would be the maintenance issue; she said while the Borough's Nature Center has a dedicated corps of volunteers for its own trails, the Commission does not have that luxury to expend on an inter-borough system. Councilman Kashwick suggested a nonprofit organization be formed, which is devoted to maintenance of trails connecting all municipalities involved. Mr. Elling said Norwood got a heavy turnout of high school students to volunteer working on its trails; Chairwoman Ravit revealed the same could not be said for Closter's senior year service being most of the students do not sign up for outdoor activities. Mr. Elling believed the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference could be contacted for assistance. Chairwoman Ravit asked when Mr. Elling would like to meet again to discuss the inter-borough trail system; Mr. Elling replied his visit to the meeting this evening is very unofficial and he has not yet approached Norwood's Chairwoman, Christine Hageman, on the topic. Ms. Bouton-Golberg commended a trail in Alpine that she and Ms. Mayer have hiked which extends from Autumn Terrace down to Anderson Avenue. Councilman Kashwick stated that being the CSX Transportation rail line is currently inactive within the Borough (though he has heard a rumor that the purchaser of 10 Railroad Avenue, Capital Hardware Supply, Inc., would begin using the rail line within 1 year's time), a possibility could be to connect the rail line's path with the trail

that ends at Oak Tree Road in Tappan, New York. He hoped such a connection would remove some of the bike traffic off Piermont Road; he believed even if the State of New Jersey were to eventually approve plans to convert said freight line to a passenger rail line, the northernmost point is anticipated to be Tenafly. Mr. Elling said he heard CSX was against such an idea and was actively patrolling its lines to keep pedestrians off their right-of-way. Councilman Kashwick responded that the inactive rail line is now a safety hazard because its ties are rotted and a “rails-to-trails” concept could be utilized, as done in Blauvelt and Tappan, New York, whereby municipalities come together and apply for county and state grants. Mr. Nock inquired if the Commission should be pushing use of “mass transit” instead; he also said he understood that the Borough was to be part of any new passenger rail line, and if so, why put any effort into converting the rail line into trails when it could be eliminated in a few decades. Councilman Kashwick replied that the benefit of the “rails-to-trails” approach is that the corridor is kept, allowing for easy reversion to a rail line if need be; he also pointed out that the current rail line is so dilapidated that, either way, new installations are necessary. Ms. Cummings stated such a project would be good to include in a green map, which locates living, nature and cultural resources; she explained that *Sustainable Jersey* would be hosting a workshop, followed by a “webinar”, which discusses green mapping. Chairwoman Ravit agreed and said she felt such a tangible idea could truly grow organically.

Mr. Elling revealed that Norwood’s Commission also serves as its “Green Team”; Chairwoman Ravit noted that Closter’s “Green Team” is only a few months old, yet very unique, because that it and the Commission support each other, which allows both entities to leverage its resources and accomplish more than if operating separately.

Mr. Elling stated that Norwood recently held an environmental fair, with several sponsors offering their products and service, but the event was both poorly advertised and attended; Ms. Cummings believed much better public turnout would result from having several communities join in having 1 large fair.



## **Plans**

Being no land use board applications were forwarded to the Commission for its consideration, plan review was not conducted and administrative reports were not written.



## **Other**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated that the HPC has reported Auryansen Cemetery would have its lands maintained and fencing installed by Eagle Scouts volunteering their services.

Chairwoman Ravit stated that Mr. Isaacson produced a banner for the “art wall” exhibit at the Closter Public Library, in preparation for a book signing to be held on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, for David Wheeler, author of *Wild New Jersey: Nature Adventures in the Garden State*; Ms. Cummings informed that the HPC wished to have the trail system be a part of the exhibit.

Councilman Kashwick asked for an update on the nominations for landmark trees. Chairwoman Ravit reminded that 2 have been confirmed for nomination; she further stated that she and Mr. Dahle are continuing to seek signage at little to no cost. She said that Raymond Cywinski, the Borough's Certified Tree Expert, was asked to inspect a tree at 11 Cedar Lane and to investigate the whereabouts of an orchard; Councilman Kashwick informed that Mr. Cywinski would not be inspecting a tulip tree on Perry Street until nearby poison ivy was removed. He also explained that a vote on landmark tree designations must be conducted by the Commission, followed by confirmation from the Governing Body; Councilman Kashwick further noted that trees situated on private land must have their designation approved of by the owners-in-fee prior to any vote. Mr. Nock asked about the benefit of a tree having landmark status; Chairwoman Ravit said the purpose is to recognize old, large and/or unique trees throughout the Borough and such trees cannot be removed. She explained that there are currently 4 trees that have such distinction: 1.) ginkgo- Piermont Road; 2.) beech- nearby Buzzoni Farm; 3.) pine- 305 Durie Avenue; 4.) tulip- corner of Durie Avenue and Knickerbocker Road. Mr. Nock asked if there is any funding for arbor care; Chairwoman Ravit said there was not and, other than the beech, all designated trees are privately owned. Mr. Elling asked if private landowners are required to care for a landmark tree on their own property; Councilman Kashwick answered in the negative. Chairwoman Ravit explained that designated trees are and would be well established and have withstood decades, sometimes centuries, of harsh weather conditions. Mr. Nock asked if the 4 landmark trees are pictured on the Borough's website; Councilman Kashwick believed they were.

Councilman Kashwick informed that the final changes have been made to an ordinance amendment regulating tree preservation and removal; he noted the revisions, pertaining to mitigation and bonding, should be approved at the next meeting of the Mayor and Council.

Chairwoman Ravit confirmed that the Mac Bain Farm contract between Mr. Mc Caffrey and the Borough has been finalized.

There being no further items to discuss, the Commission affirmed by acclamation to adjourn the meeting at 9:24pm.