



Environmental Commission

March 15, 2011

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

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Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:01pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, March 15, 2011 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Steven Isaacson
- Brenda Cummings
- Arthur Goldberg, MD
- Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
- Adam Nock- Alternate #2
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member
- Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member
- Keith Scholz- Associate Member

Absent

- Mary Mayer
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison



New Business

Ms. Cummings distributed the inaugural issue of the newsletter for the “Green Team”, a body established by the Borough as part 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 said the newsletter would be put on the Borough’s website in the near future and that the body’s next meeting would be March 31st. Ms. Cummings continued saying that March 26th would be “Earth Hour 2011”, an event whereby residents are encouraged not to use electricity between 8:30pm and 9:30pm; she stated the Borough will turn off all non-essential government light sources for 60 minutes as well. Mr. Isaacson interjected, saying he recently noticed there were solar panels installed on street light poles in the vicinity of Hackensack University Medical Center North at Pascack Valley in the Borough of Westwood; Mr. Gotthelf explained that Public Service Enterprise Group (PSEG) made such installations being it has endorsed the use of magnetic induction lighting; however, he stated Rockland Electric Co., the electric utility provider for the Borough, endorses light-emitting diode (LED) lighting instead. Chairwoman Ravit reminded that the convening of the Borough’s bi-annual Joint Meeting (a gathering of land use bodies) would be on March 19th. Ms. Cummings informed she hoped for a better turn-out this year when volunteers, among them the Girl Scouts of the United States of America, participate in cleaning up around the Nature Center and other Borough facilities on April 9th. She summated the body’s last meeting was successful, especially with Mr. Gotthelf’s lecture on energy reduction suggestions; he informed that emails on United States Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Education (ED) grant money had been forwarded to Ms. Cummings. She also noted that

Councilman Kashwick brought up the possible installation of bicycle trails, comprised of crushed stone, to follow the path of railroad tracks throughout the Borough.



Old Business

Responding to Mr. Isaacson's inquiry about mulch and rain barrels, Ms. Mayer stated that incorporating composting (waterless) toilets into the barn project at Mac Bain Farm was becoming a real possibility; she also noted solar panel installations were under consideration with the barn's designer, Douglas Radick, RA. She stated that the barn's 36'x36' dimension has been agreed upon and its position on-site has been staked. Chairwoman Ravit reiterated that some of her co-workers, employed as engineers at Rutgers University, would most likely agree to coordinate the installation of a rain garden in conjunction with the barn's construction.

Mr. Isaacson said he has not been able to contact William Dahle, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), via email, to discuss signage for trails and blazing of curbs; he felt, rather than having to physically mark locations throughout the Borough, both he and Mr. Nock could take it upon themselves to review a Borough map and then inform Mr. Dahle of their suggestions. Chairwoman Ravit believed that marking street crossings with paint for identification would avoid any confusion on the part of the DPW. She noted that landmark tree proposals needed to be identified before Arbor Day (April 29th) and forwarded to Raymond Cywinski, the Borough's Certified Tree Expert, for verification; she concluded that since the curbs in front of said trees would need to be marked, the street crossings slated for blazing could be identified at the same time. Mr. Isaacson questioned whether the Mayor's Office misspoke when indicating that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) had the task of proposing landmark trees for designation. Councilman Kashwick responded the HPC has control over placement of street signs in historical areas, such as those installed for Harrington Avenue and West Street; he further stated the Mayor's Office was speaking of landmark trees in the context of open space funding. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg pointed out that last year, Timothy Adriance, a member of the HPC, mentioned that some fruit trees may date back to the original settlement of the Borough. Chairwoman Ravit asked her to follow up on such, so it can be part of the landmark tree submittal to Mr. Cywinski; she hoped to avoid such ideas/tasks not being followed through with, as was the case last year. Councilman Kashwick agreed, saying such initiative would allow for a Commission vote at its April 19th meeting, prior to Arbor Day. Chairwoman Ravit asked if the morning of March 27th would be acceptable to Mr. Isaacson and Mr. Nock for traveling throughout the Borough and marking both areas to be blazed and trees to be designated; both believed they would be available that date. She asked that they confirm by email.

Mr. Nock updated the Commission on the progress of having high school students, in the senior year service program, curtail the overgrown vines at Shauble Park; Chairwoman Ravit concluded that it was an evolving project that would need to be resolved by May, when the program begins.

Chairwoman Ravit said that weather conditions were preventing the Eagle Scouts from building the bridge over a creek, a project that comes on the heels of United Water agreeing to allow unlimited access to a trail located within its property; she further stated the lumber, to be used, has been on-site for quite some time but that the saturated ground must first dry up.

Mr. Isaacson said that he perused a recent email which indicated the Recreation Commission allows use of Memorial Field, by dog owners and their pets, to counteract its Canadian goose problem; he noted that park is deemed to be active, not passive, and that the answer to the dog run question is to post signs citing the applicable Borough ordinance at open space locations and to act on unleashed dog complaints as they come. He also believed the water utility company may not allow pets on the newly-recognized trail located on its land and if so, sign postings would required there as well. The Commission concluded that being the last complaint was resolved, the “Pet owners” item and associated dog run considerations would be removed from its agenda until another complaint is filed.



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

Dr. Goldberg started a discussion on a 10-acre conservation easement that he said has remained unsatisfied for several years; he explained the reason for a \$1,200.00 sign not being installed on-site revolves around Hartford Boulevard, a paper street located at the southern end of the easement and off Piermont Road. He said it is roughly 50’ wide, and that a fence was erected across it during the construction of Temple Emanu-El of Closter (180 Piermont Road), which received a certificate of occupancy in 2001. He felt there has been reluctance on the part of the Governing Body to have the fence removed for many reasons; he noted, however, that the judge presiding over an appeal of its installation (filed with the Superior Court of New Jersey- Bergen County Law Division) remarked that the fence could be removed at any time. Dr. Goldberg believed the fence obstructs entrance into the parkland, further west of which there is an old path (which needs some maintenance) that links up with the Nature Center at some point. He stated that approximately 5 to 8 years ago, former Commission members petitioned the Governing Body to have the fence removed, at which time both a plan was drawn to up to link the Nature Center and Piermont Road and the conservation easement was established. He commented that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s (NJDEP) *Green Acres Program* insisted there be handicap accessibility across Hartford Boulevard and into the temple’s property. He stated the northern section of the easement was supposed to provide a link to the Buzzoni Farm Park; he said a trail was never made going from the southern end (alley of trees), linking up with the easement and a compost site, before ending at the Nature Center, thereby completing a circular pathway. Dr. Goldberg said, ultimately, what is preventing resolution of the matter is the passive obstructionism by the Borough towards the party whose family has been paying taxes on Hartford Boulevard for more than 4 decades and who clearly should have property rights and unfettered access to the parcel of land; he equated it to the Borough sanctioning the installation of a fence across one’s driveway by their neighbor. He believed that just beyond the fence is very picturesque and while the area tends to be soggy part of the year, it makes for a wonderful trail from June into the winter months. Chairwoman Ravit suggested that prior to addressing Dr. Goldberg’s concerns, the Commission should complete

the non-controversial tasks attached to the Borough's trail system (blazing of urban sections, posting of signs at main entrances, etc.); she stated that in the summer, when the area dries out, an assessment of what can be done with Hartford Boulevard will be made. Dr. Goldberg reiterated the establishing of a trail system in the area would be simple and felt the Borough will show less resistance when it feels the temple is not in a position to file a lawsuit since the question over property rights will have been answered. He mentioned that there is a sidewalk abutting Piermont Road, which slopes down into Hartford Boulevard and he deduced that the temple believed the fence abated any safety concerns to pedestrians. He informed that several years ago, an estimate of \$1,000.00 was given to fill in 10' behind the sidewalk, allowing for a gradual drop in the paper street and negating the need for a fence. Chairwoman Ravit inquired if the property that makes up Hartford Boulevard is deemed wetlands; Dr. Goldberg answered it is not and explained it is only saturated in the northernmost area during the spring and the rest of the natural path can be walked. He further stated that there was previously a plan to install a simple pathway at the entrance, consisting of some boulders and railroad ties. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if he could supply the Commission with maps he possessed so it can visualize all that he has discussed this evening; he agreed to do so and Mr. Scholz stated he could provide some as well. Mr. Nock asked if the temple's rabbi has been contacted to have the fence removed; Mr. Isaacson responded that the temple's leadership would not agree to such. Dr. Goldberg said he, along with the Mayor's Office, have had private discussions with the current rabbi and stated he would discuss the details with the Commission when he is off the record.

Mr. Isaacson felt the since both the extenuating "ice cap" and excessive vegetation caused a major fish kill (1,700 died) at the Nature Center this year, he was in favor of removing some of the vegetation while the fish population is low; realizing the Nature Center was against altering any aspect of its pond to avoid what has already occurred, he believed the main culprit for the fish kill was the enormous amount of oxygen consumed by the plant overgrowth. Councilman Kashwick added that such was the result of excess fertilizer in its water source; he, therefore, demanded that a stricter ordinance be passed by the Mayor and Council regarding fertilizer applications as opposed to having to dredge the pond or use other dangerous chemicals. Chairwoman Ravit responded that the Borough should mirror the very strict lawn fertilizer legislation recently signed into law by Governor Christopher Christie, which centered on Barnegat Bay, a brackish arm of the Atlantic Ocean. She continued saying the Borough should have its soil tested and if it is found that phosphorus is plentiful, the ordinance should outlaw its use in applications; she noted that freshwater systems, such as the pond, tend to have large quantities of the mineral. Mr. Isaacson said he thought the law pertained only to publicly-owned properties, not private lands; she answered that the law, which regulates nitrogen usage, regulated all land in New Jersey. Mr. Isaacson understood but felt the pond's excessive vegetation must be addressed right away with 1 complete clean-up, not over a long period of time; Chairwoman Ravit concurred and tabled the issue since Ms. Mayer was not present to give the Nature Center's opinion on such an ordinance proposal. Dr. Goldberg informed that the fish pond at his residence has thrived for many years, including winters, by way of both a constant opening and a pump to circulate the water and vent the build-up of toxic gases. Mr. Nock questioned whether the regulation of fertilizer sales should be handled at the county level rather than the Borough; Councilman Kashwick stated the idea is to regulate the application (use of correct proportions), not sale, of lawn fertilizers by, for example, licensing contractors since few homeowners do their own landscaping these days. Chairwoman Ravit revealed that New Jersey's soils tend to be naturally high in phosphate; she suggested the public should take advantage of the Soil Testing Laboratory at Rutgers University, a very affordable service unit which analyzes soil samples and can indicate what minerals are lacking or excessive in a

person's lawn. She felt knowing the mineral makeup of the Borough's soils would solve the plant growth issue at the Nature Center's pond as well as other large properties such as the Closter Golf Center (151 Homans Avenue). The Commission concurred that it must educate the public on the issue via the "Green Team".

Ms. Ramaswamy said she researched rain barrels and found that even if the Borough sells them to those willing to purchase, the device is difficult to install. Chairwoman Ravit said Rutgers University's *Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program* builds rain gardens and its "Rain Garden Team" purchases the necessary items in bulk for workshops where it teaches the public on how to build, use and maintain the storm water management system (retrofitting barrels, disconnecting downspouts, mosquito screening, etc.); she pointed out that often the rain barrels are later donated to workshop participants and she believed the "Rain Garden Team" would be an intricate part in the potential rain garden that would accessorize the future barn at Mac Bain Farm. Mr. Isaacson hoped the Commission could teach residents about drip hoses for overflowing rain barrels, which would allow excess water to be used for irrigating gardens, flowers, etc.; he explained, by doing so, homeowners would tend not to direct their gutters' rainspouts in the street, a measure taken to avoid having their basements flooded in a storm. Chairwoman Ravit concurred and said rain barrels show their importance during a drought.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that, on April 6th, the Planning Board would be discussing the proposed Historic Preservation Plan Element, which would be incorporated into the Borough's Master Plan. She also expressed her support for rain barrels and gardens, both of which are installed at her residence.

Mr. Kashwick stated the Shade Tree Commission (STC) would be planting trees at both Hillside Elementary School and Tenakill Middle School on April 29th and at Hagen Park on April 30th in celebration of Arbor Day.

Mr. Gotthelf inquired about the Code Enforcement Bureau's policy towards overgrown vegetation impeding pedestrian travel on sidewalks, especially in the vicinity of Trautwein Crescent (he was aware it issues Notices of Violation for sidewalks needing repair); Councilman Kashwick responded that if trees in the Borough's right-of-way are in need of pruning, he would coordinate such with the STC. He pointed out that if overgrowth is coming from private property, the Bureau would act on a complaint, but he noted only 2 inspectors are charged with the entire Borough, split into eastern and western zones.

Ms. Ramaswamy complained that, at the corner of Schraalenburgh Road and Durie Avenue going south, pedestrians walking towards the Oradell Reservoir on Durie Avenue are in danger of being struck by vehicles because they are allowed turn right when the traffic light is red; Councilman Kashwick said he would consult with the Police Department and the County of Bergen to see if a "NO TURN ON RED" sign can be installed. Mr. Isaacson added that there is currently no pedestrian walkway in the area.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg she asked Mr. Radick, a member of the HPC and avid bicyclist, about paths, loops, etc. for around Ruckman Park, which can be presented to the Commission; Chairwoman Ravit encouraged such, saying several grants are available.

Ms. Cummings asked who is responsible for installing speed bumps; Councilman Kashwick said if a major thoroughfare is involved, the Police and Fire Departments would object since it would hinder their emergency response time. He continued that if a secondary road was in question,

the DPW Superintendent or Police Chief would have jurisdiction.

Dr. Goldberg stated the issue of constructing a pedestrian bridge across Dwars Kill by Blanch Avenue is still unresolved; Mr. Isaacson stated that link to the Borough of Norwood was known as Phase #4 of the regional trails project. Chairwoman Ravit revealed there have been positive talks with the Borough of Demarest, a willing partner in the project; she felt the cooperation between the 2 boroughs on issues such as developing maps, connections and blazing of trails, could be used as a model approach to entice the unenthusiastic Borough of Norwood. She informed that the Meadowlands Conservation Trust, which has been stripped of its funding and executive director (Tina Schvejda) by the State of New Jersey, was in favor of the project; she said the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission (NJMC) is currently administering the Trust. Dr. Goldberg questioned what happened to the prior agreement made between the Borough of Norwood and the Trust; Chairwoman Ravit answered that while it is still being held by the Trust, the NJMC is only involving itself in planning/zoning matters concerning the 30.4 square mile area along the Hackensack River that it oversees. Dr. Goldberg asked who represents the Trust; she stated William Sheehan (Hackensack Riverkeeper, Inc.) chairs and noted that the Trust still holds the Central Woods easement located in the Borough of Norwood. Chairwoman Ravit said the Trust is currently in a state of flux, however, she will try getting the latest on the project's future at the Trust's next meeting in a few weeks. She stated that, at this point, the Borough of Norwood is not in favor of disturbing its 125 acre forest to build a bridge; Dr. Goldberg argued that its objection is baseless since construction would involve only the easement's western portion, which is away from residences. Chairwoman Ravit concluded that while the Mayor's Office might be in favor of the project, the Borough of Norwood is not; Councilman Kashwick concurred, saying that the autonomous Borough of Norwood cannot be forced into the project, and that a better approach would be to move forward with the Boroughs of Demarest, and possibly Cresskill. He believed the Borough of Norwood would then link into the regional trails project by its own choosing.

Chairwoman Ravit stated that the Commission would vote on the minutes for both February 15th and this evening at its April 19th meeting.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Gotthelf, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:11pm.