



# **Environmental Commission**

May 17, 2011

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:09pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, May 17, 2011 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

Present

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Mary Mayer
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
- Adam Nock- Alternate #2
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Keith Scholz- Associate Member

Absent

- Steven Isaacson
- Brenda Cummings
- Arthur Goldberg, MD
- Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member



**New Business**

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Nock, to approve the minutes for the April 19, 2011 meeting with noted corrections; all eligible members present voted in favor.

Ms. Mayer stated that the Closter Public Library has asked the Nature Center for assistance in producing an “art wall” (separate from the Belskie Museum of Art & Science section of the library) in preparation for a book signing, to be held in July or August, for David Wheeler, author of *Wild New Jersey: Nature Adventures in the Garden State*; she felt the wall’s theme could be the Borough’s open space highlighted by photographs and she stated that both a member of the Nature Center’s board and Jennifer Rothschild, Esq., Chairwoman of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), have volunteered their artistic abilities. Being the Borough’s parks and grounds are involved, she felt the Commission should be involved as well. Ms. Mayer suggested that the project’s expense, possibly \$200.00, be split between the budgets of the Nature Center and the Commission; Chairwoman Ravit agreed. Ms. Mayer said she would inquire if more manpower was needed. Chairwoman Ravit revealed that a similar project she had been involved with incorporated audio recordings of elderly residents being interviewed about their experiences with environmental sites in the community; she felt several people in the Borough could be asked of their memories for the “art wall” project, including Mr. Scholz’ father. Ms. Mayer noted that the project would have to be complete within 6 weeks.

Councilman Kashwick informed that the Governing Body introduced an amendment to Chapter 181 of the Borough Code, which pertains to tree preservation and removal. He said it includes expanding the number of trees required for mitigation and requiring a bond posting for trees (located in the Borough's right-of-way) that are damaged during the course of construction; he elaborated on the latter, saying \$1,500.00 per tree would be held for 3 years to cover removal and replacement of the damaged "shade trees". Ms. Mayer asked if a permit was required for 1 tree removal on private property; he replied it is but that no fee is charged. Chairwoman Ravit asked if such a permit can be denied by the enforcing agency and, if not, what purpose the permit process served; he answered he doubted so and said the permit allows the Borough to keep track of tree removal since only 2 trees can be removed from a property, over a 2-year period, without mitigation.



## **Old Business**

Ms. Mayer expressed disappointment that John Mc Caffrey, resident and caretaker of Mac Bain Farm, was not in attendance this evening, yet again, to present this year's planting plan for the Farm (in simple fashion and not the elaborate presentation that he has been wishing to prepare); she indicated she had tried phoning him 4 times earlier in the day to no avail. She stated a memo was sent to him, urging that he present to the Commission and address the following issues: 1.) plans for low wet section where manure piles were and problems with it being developed as wild flower meadow, etc.; 2.) plans for dealing with erosion across downhill slope; 3.) pros and cons of introducing raspberries and blueberries; 4.) plans for dealing with ongoing problem of various tomato diseases and pests in soil (usage of chemicals, shifting locations, etc.). Chairwoman Ravit informed she had visited the Farm last week and saw that Mr. Mc Caffrey had already begun planting; she expressed concern that he has moved into the season without the Commission having oversight, which is stipulated in his contract renewal with the Borough. Councilman Kashwick revealed that as of last week, Mr. Mc Caffrey had not yet signed the renewal; Chairwoman disagreed, saying she was informed by the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., that the renewal was finalized. She said she would follow up with Mr. Rogan on the status. Ms. Mayer felt, at this point, a letter penned by Chairwoman Ravit was warranted, who agreed to do so. Ms. Mayer continued that in her own memo to Mr. Mc Caffrey, it was stated that she has spoken with someone willing to do a detailed schematic once his intentions are known to the Commission.

Chairwoman Ravit asked for an update on the cookbook project sponsored by the Farm; Ms. Mayer replied there was none. Chairwoman Ravit relayed that the Mayor's Office is interested in being a part of the venture.

With regards to the barn project at the Farm, Ms. Mayer said she spoke with a representative of the composting (waterless) toilet manufacturer that is being vetted by the Borough. She said her concerns over minimal usage and cold temperatures were answered; she reported that less usage of the toilet simply meant that a clean out would be needed in, say, 8 years rather than 4, and odors or malfunctioning would not result if the toilet were not to be used for long periods of time. She said that apparently there are several such toilets installed locally including Girl Scout camps, the Bronx Zoo, the New York Botanical Garden and the World Trade Center site, all of which have seasonal usage; she noted the model in question for the Farm is the smallest version

available. Chairwoman Ravit asked if said model is the 1 that opens from the top; Ms. Mayer said that she has only seen the version with access from underneath, which had 2 seats. Chairwoman Ravit said the barn's designer, Douglas Radick, RA, was contemplating 2 models: 1 where access is underneath for excavating and 1 where the top is opened to remove compost, the latter being, he felt, more than adequate in terms of capacity as well as less costly and easier to build. Chairwoman Ravit said she met with Mr. Radick last week and that, as per the Commission's comments, he agreed to reorient the barn's location on-site to achieve a north-south plane and to get both maximum solar energy for the roof and easier maneuverability in and out of the barn. Ms. Mayer was pleased with such and noted that the shed in the rear yard would also be rotated more west than north. Chairwoman Ravit said the architect noted that if 1 of the large doors was sliding, it would interfere with the other and, thus, he recommended leaving the 2 sliding doors opposite each other as is, allowing for farm equipment to enter through 1 end and exit from another; she said Mr. Radick believed another sliding door was not necessary and the existing doorway, near the classroom and bathroom, could be made smaller with 2, 3' wide doors that open out. She noted, at their meeting, Mr. Radick presented a design having a full 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, to which Chairwoman Ravit informed such was not needed; she said a higher priority would be storage space for students, supplies and other non-farm items. She said the architect will revise the plan to have a staircase leading to loft storage (resembling an attic with low ceiling height below the eaves). She informed that his plan also called for a small, flat roof over the proposed outdoor classroom area; she suggested that a green roof (covered with vegetation) be installed instead and noted the plantings would then serve as a form of insulation. She said the growing medium's affect on the roof load (snow and, now, soil) would depend on the type of plants used; she said Mr. Radick was referred to a firm that installed a green wall at Hackensack University Medical Center. She summated that such a roof would be the 4<sup>th</sup> green element, along with a composting (waterless) toilet, rain garden and solar roof panels, to be showcased in the barn project. Chairwoman Ravit stated variance relief was not needed, aside from possibly a courtesy review from the Planning Board; she said the 1<sup>st</sup> step would be to have a preliminary meeting with the Zoning Officer, Leonard Sinowitz, for confirmation of such. Ms. Mayer asked if Mr. Radick had a solar designer/provider in mind; Chairwoman Ravit did not know, but indicated a "Green Team" member showed interest in the task. Ms. Mayer said possibly the same "Green Team" member had advised the Nature Center on its solar roof panel project; she said the Center was told its large, flat roof facing open space was not appropriate for panels because of both tree orientation and the fact that the chimney would constantly be casting a large shadow. Chairwoman Ravit said the Borough Administrator, Quentin Wiest, believed choosing a provider is a very important factor of the project; she noted that over the next few days, she will be at a conference with members of the United States Green Building Council, whom she will inquire with about suppliers.

Chairwoman Ravit said William Dahle, Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW), had begun placing blue-colored arrows and painting curbs to identify urban connections to the Borough's trail system; she believed he finished the area by the Closter Public Library (280 High Street) and informed that Mr. Isaacson had put up some blazes as well. Councilman Kashwick confirmed that both Demarest Avenue and the parking lot of Saint Mary's School, Convent & Church (300 High Street) have been completed. Councilman Kashwick revealed that blue arrows were put in the street rather than on the curbing; Ms. Mayer felt such could be mistaken for surveyor markings. Chairwoman Ravit assumed that marking the local streets was of no concern, but that such could not be done to county roads; she welcomed feedback from Commission members on the project. She felt that, when Mr. Isaacson is present again, the issue of blazing within United Water Co.'s property should be discussed; she noted the utility agreed to allow blazing and the installation of benches, but she felt another walk-through with

Raymond Cywinski, both an employee of the water company and the Borough's Certified Tree Expert, would be prudent. Councilman Kashwick said that DPW laborers have built the anticipated bridge on the utility's land but, according to Mr. Cywinski, it had to be adjusted due to height concerns and apparently is still not correct; he informed that both entrance gates to the reservoir territory, 1 being located by Tenakill Brook and Memorial Field and the other by the Spectrum For Living healthcare facility (50 Blanch Avenue), should have been open now since April. Chairwoman Ravit announced that on the morning of June 4<sup>th</sup>, the utility will hold canoe and kayak races between locally-elected officials on its reservoir; she said in the afternoon the reservoir would be opened to the public and equipment rentals would be available.

Ms. Mayer informed that high school students providing senior year service have begun working at the Nature Center; she added that in a week or so, she should know how much available time the volunteers would have to spend doing vine removal at Schauble Park. Both she and Mr. Nock hoped to visit said park later in the week to evaluate the scope of work.

Councilman Kashwick said there has been recent communication with Mr. Cywinski regarding landmark tree designations. He noted the location of an ancient orchard, as attested to by Timothy Adriance, a member of the HPC, is still in question; Councilman Kashwick stated it is not in Willow Park but rather in the rear yard of a private residence. Chairwoman Ravit said the list of trees up for nomination still stands at 2 with others in question; she said she is awaiting a response from Mr. Dahle on obtaining landmark tree signs at little cost. Councilman Kashwick hoped that a tree located on United Water Co.'s property could be considered for designation as well; he asked which 2 trees have been agreed to by Mr. Cywinski. Chairwoman Ravit said she would find out the answer for the next meeting.

Councilman Kashwick said that the Governing Body has introduced an ordinance to fund the Nature Center's pond dredging with \$28,000.00; Ms. Mayer believed that while said amount seemed within the estimate prepared by the Borough Engineer's firm, Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc., the exact figure would not be known until the pond's soil makeup is determined as well as the volume to be dredged. Mr. Di Dio asked how much potential sediment would be excavated; Ms. Mayer said a minimum of 2' would need to be dredged, saying the original depth is estimated to have been 6' to 8' and it measures today, 50+ years later, 3.5' to 4.5'. Mr. Nock asked if the rate of sediment build-up should be expected to accelerate due to increased construction taking place; Councilman Kashwick thought the greatest influx in construction experienced by the area came during the 1960's. Mr. Scholz asked if it would be feasible to excavate deeper than the pond's original depth so to allow for more time between dredges; while reasonable, Ms. Mayer said the layer of clay below becomes a factor in that she does not know if the pond's bottom could be held. Mr. Nock asked how rich the excavated soil is expected to be; Ms. Mayer felt it should be good enough for potting. She further explained that it would be taken to the local compost and mixed in the leaf supply; she hoped that after the dug-up soil is dried out for 1 to 2 months, local landscapers needing clean fill will help themselves to it and, as a result, save the Borough on soil transport costs. She said the top priority, at this point, is to get the project started so DPW laborers can be utilized before the leaf pick-up season arrives.



## **Plans**

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Zoning Board of Adjustment

- ◇ 208 Piermont Road: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals involving the construction of an outdoor café/dining area (patio, fountain and light posts inclusive) to complement an existing restaurant. Mr. Di Dio, a supporter of the application, said the dining area would be placed to the left of the existing building on-site and that 2 handicap parking spaces would be relocated to accommodate it. Chairwoman Ravit pointed out the applicant currently has 58 spaces on-site, is proposing 52 but the requirement is 122; Mr. Di Dio felt the existing, off-street parking would be more than adequate. He stated there is an existing outbuilding on-site that, while previously used as a residence for restaurant employees, is presently utilized for storage purposes only. Ms. Mayer felt any overflow of parking could be alleviated by the parking lot across the street at Ruckman Park. Chairwoman Ravit was pleased that several trees were proposed for planting along with a berm and the use of paver stones to allow for drainage. The Commission approved of the application without conditions.
  
- ◇ 237-241 Closter Dock Road: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals involving both the construction of an addition and the conversion of existing office space to 3 residential units for a mixed-use building. Chairwoman Ravit said there are 2 existing apartments (a total of 5 are proposed) and the existing retail space is to be reduced. Councilman Kashwick informed that the subject building was used as a hotel and a portion of the structure is 3 stories. He continued that the existing brick façade is to be restored and the existing vinyl siding replaced with a mansard roof having fiberglass shingles. Mr. Di Dio noted that the site is adjacent to both Veterans Park and the Consolidated Rail Corp. (CONRAIL) line. He stated there is no green strip to consider in the Borough’s right-of-way along Closter Dock Road or Railroad Avenue. Mr. Nock inquired about the population density of the proposed apartments; Chairwoman Ravit said there is to be a studio and 2, 1-bedroom apartments introduced to the building. She informed there was no indication that any of the residences would be deemed a Council on Affordable Housing (COAH)-obligated unit (low or moderate income housing). The Commission had no comments at this time.



**Other**

Mr. Di Dio mentioned that construction was on-going at 411 Piermont Road; he speculated that the renovated building, to be occupied by a restaurant called “Sear Steakhouse”, could have outdoor dining on the upper level deck.

Chairwoman Ravit said she attended the May 4<sup>th</sup> Work Session of the Planning Board, which agreed that 1 of the tasks for the professional planner, to be retained by the Borough in the near future, would include investigating the creation of a conservation zone for Borough-owned lands. Mr. Di Dio commented that the Board has yet to decide between 2 firms (Hakim Associates Co. and Banisch Associates, Inc.) that have applied for the position; he noted the Board is considering hiring both, having 1 assigned to the downtown area and the other to commercial/residential areas surrounding John Street. Chairwoman Ravit asked if the potential conservation zone could be written into an ordinance, prior to the hiring of a planner, to

expedite the process; Councilman Kashwick concurred. Mr. Di Dio said he would inquire about such an approach.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Mayer, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.