



# **Environmental Commission**

October 18, 2011

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:05pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, October 18, 2011 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

*Present*

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Steven Isaacson
- Brenda Cummings
- Mary Mayer
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- Keith Scholz- Associate Member

*Absent*

- Arthur Goldberg, MD
- Philip Gotthelf- Alternate #1
- Adam Nock- Alternate #2
- Jayanthi Ramaswamy- Associate Member



**New Business**

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the September 20, 2011 meeting with a noted correction; all eligible members present voted in favor.

The Commission voted unanimously, less the abstaining Mr. Di Dio, to remove Mr. Nock from his position as Alternate #2 being he is attending college.

A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to recommend that the Governing Body appoint Paul Mac Donald as Alternate #2 for the Commission; all members present voted in favor.

Chairwoman Ravit reminded that the Borough’s bi-annual Joint Meeting, at which land use matters are discussed between various bodies, is on October 29<sup>th</sup>. As such, she asked the Commission for suggestions that could be part of said meeting’s agenda. Ms. Cummings, Ms. Mayer and Mr. Isaacson believed the controversial ordinance recently adopted by the Board of Health regarding wildlife feeding served as a reminder that it should be required to follow the same procedures as the Governing Body (informing both the public and Borough agencies, collecting feedback, etc.) when contemplating a new ordinance. Councilman Kashwick noted that the Commission has no authority in controlling what the autonomous Board wishes to regulate; he reminded, however, that the Governing Body controls its membership through the appointment process. Ms. Mayer believed the solution could be, rather than

creating a new rule in which the Board practices a common procedure of obtaining comment and consensus prior to drafting the final version of a proposed ordinance. Councilman Kashwick informed that the Board would be amending said ordinance following the negative reaction to its passage; he pointed out that it is not custom for the Board to be in attendance at Joint Meetings. Chairman Ravit said she would forward to the Planning Board a recommendation that the Borough's bodies should strive to have more communication and cooperation between themselves.

Ms. Mayer reminded that the Nature Center would be holding its 50-year anniversary on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, which she described as being a casual event of a cross-section of activities to educate the public about the Center.

Mr. Isaacson inquired about the proposed changes to Chapter 16 of the Borough Code, which deals with the powers of the Commission. Councilman Kashwick informed that the Mayor and Council adopted an amendment clarifying the jurisdictions of both the Commission as well as the Board of Recreation Commissioners; to do such, he stated the ordinance now reads the Commission is responsible for "passive" open spaces while the Board rules over "active" parks/playfields.



## **Old Business**

Ms. Cummings reported that the "Green Team" continues to strive for Bronze certification from the *Sustainable Jersey* program. Both she and Chairwoman Ravit wished to avoid having to retain a professional planner for the task of fulfilling 1 particular requirement of the certification; specifically, they hoped several volunteers could collaborate in digitizing the Borough's 1994 "Environmental Resource Inventory" and update it with certain maps in time for the program's next deadline, which is in November. Ms. Ravit noted that the 2008 guidance document prepared by TRC Environmental Corp., on behalf of the Borough, could be incorporated into said inventory. Mr. Mac Donald, in attendance to accept his nomination from the Commission, said he recalled preparing an inventory of public lands with Erik Lenander, the Borough's former Administrator, sometime in the past and promised to follow-up on its whereabouts.

Ms. Cummings reminded that the "Green Team" would be presenting a showing of "Queen of the Sun: What Are The Bees Telling Us?" at the Nature Center on November 6<sup>th</sup>; she added that Ron Breland, a beekeeper featured in the film, would field questions afterwards.

Ms. Cummings stated volunteers would be handing out fliers, on October 27<sup>th</sup>, to parents waiting in idling vehicles for their children to be dismissed from Hillside Elementary School. Ms. Ravit hoped the Governing Body would make changes to Chapter 183-13 of the Borough Code so that it mirrors the statute forbidding idling of vehicles in New Jersey for more than 3 minutes (the ordinance currently allows for a maximum of 30 minutes); Councilman Kashwick promised to discuss the matter with the Ordinance Committee.

Mr. Isaacson announced that on October 29<sup>th</sup> the Police Department would be accepting expired and/or unused medication from the public for safe disposal.

Ms. Mayer reminded that the Harvest Festival at Mac Bain Farm would be held on October 29<sup>th</sup> and noted that Mr. Isaacson produced post cards for advertising the event, which were subsequently distributed to students and teachers at Hillside Elementary School. She informed that Ted Sollod, owner of *The Farm* (515 Piermont Road) would be providing 130 pumpkins at a cost of \$260.00, which she said is double the price from last year; she noted that butternut squash would not be available for the Festival. She stated volunteers are welcome on the day of the event to help set up; Ms. Mayer hoped a result of the Festival would be that the public becomes aware that the Farm is a year-round destination.

Speaking of the barn project at Mac Bain Farm, Chairwoman Ravit said an estimate of construction costs (not a formal bid) was prepared by Thomas Hennessey, a general contractor and former Borough councilman, at the request of the Borough Administrator, Quentin Wiest. She said the \$275,000.00 estimate seems overpriced and included \$50,000.00 in overhead profit margins. She approximated the project to cost \$80,000.00 less green elements. Chairwoman Ravit stated she would ask Mr. Wiest if Mr. Hennessey was given any other information to calculate the estimate other than the architectural prepared by Douglas Radick, RA. She stated at least 3 estimates must ultimately be garnered before selecting a contractor. She indicated the proposed barn's sliding doors, cupola and aspects of the roof are expensive elements of the project that may need to be eliminated from the scope of work. Chairwoman Ravit believed Mr. Hennessey's cost for both concrete and electric seemed high. Ms. Mayer explained that the Nature Center had, in the past, received a \$15,000.00 grant from the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, which could be a potential donor for the green elements' costs. Chairwoman Ravit stated she hoped the 4 proposed green elements (roof solar panels/compost <waterless> toilet/rain garden/green roof) would showcase to the public environmentally-friendly approaches to construction. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the cost differential between solar panels and wind turbines; Chairwoman Ravit replied the use of solar panels during new construction is simple and, thus, quite inexpensive as opposed to their usage in retrofitting projects. She stated Mr. Radick understands his current design must, again, be revised to fit within the Borough's budget.

Ms. Mayer reported that John Mc Caffrey, resident and caretaker of Mac Bain Farm, has submitted all outstanding quarterly financial reports; she said they would be verified for accuracy and noted he was still both including running costs incurred from previous years on his current reports as well as overspending. Being the Commission will not convene for a meeting in December, Chairwoman Ravit suggested Mr. Mc Caffrey be present at its 1<sup>st</sup> meeting in 2012 to reveal his farm management plan for the coming season; she hoped he would not be planting as many items next year.

With respect to a forthcoming mission statement for the Farm, Ms. Mayer said its Subcommittee is still working on a draft; she felt it is imperative the statement be adopted prior to Mr. Mc Caffrey's farm management plan presentation in January.

Mr. Isaacson stated he is in consultation with David Goodwin, who prepared the "Demarest Nature Center and Closter Green Acres Trail Map" as part of the ongoing effort to garner support for the inter-borough trail system. He stated Dr. Goldberg wished for Blanch Avenue to have a direct trail connection with the Borough of Norwood but reminded such is not possible being Norwood will not allow for its 125 acre forest (Central Woods) to be disturbed; Mr. Isaacson said he forwarded a map of the Borough's Nature Center to Dr. Goldberg indicating a link to the "Cross-Closter Trail" (via Ruckman Road) already exists. He believed it to be

appropriate for Norwood’s Environmental Commission to decide upon an alternate route for trail connection between both municipalities.

Mr. Isaacson stated the Borough Engineer informed him of a website (*historicaerials.com*) whereby 1 can view photographs of open spaces from years past; he stated the site revealed that, at 1 time, Blanch Avenue extended through to Norwood via Central Woods.

Councilman Kashwick stated that while the “rails-to-trails” project is operating in Piermont, Sparkill and Tappan, New York, it does not make a connection with the Borough; he continued to say that being CSX Transportation has rejected the idea of using its rail line as part of such a connection, Senator Frank Lautenberg’s office would be contacted for assistance since he sits on several subcommittees in Congress involving transportation.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg expressed frustration that the gate accessing the portion of the Borough’s trail system situated on United Water Co. land was not open and a visit to the Police Department revealed there was no procedure in place to allow residents to gain entry to said portion of the trail; Mr. Isaacson informed a permit must be obtained via the water utility in order to utilize that section.

Councilman Kashwick informed that a bridge located near Brook Street behind A&P Supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue) is in need of repair and that the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works, William Dahle, would be contacted. Ms. Mayer revealed that several portions of the trails containing double planks, secured by volunteer Boy Scouts earlier in the year, have now gone askew.

Mr. Scholz reported on several models of bicycle racks he discovered on-line. The Commission discussed whether to purchase a surface mounted or in-ground version that can hold 5 bikes; Chairwoman Ravit said she would converse with Mr. Dahle to see if his department could provide the concrete work for the latter model. Mr. Scholz believed if surfaced mounted racks are decided upon, their installation could be handled by volunteer Boy Scouts or Lions Club members since no concrete work is involved. Being the cost between the 2 types of racks was comparative based on the gauge of the metal used, the Commission agreed upon buying in-ground racks for installation at both Mac Bain Farm and the Nature Center; because the Chamber of Commerce expressed its wish to handle any racks placed at “Heidenberg Plaza”, the Commission decided it would concern itself with Borough-owned lands only in terms of rack locations. Mr. Isaacson reminded that signage would be necessary to inform bikers of rules regarding vandalism, abandonment, etc.



## **Plans**

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

### Zoning Board of Adjustment

- ◇ 170 & 176 Closter Dock Road: This is an application for Site Plan Approval seeking the conversion of existing office space to 2 residential units, resulting in a total 4 at the subject mixed-use building. Being the Commission had previously reviewed plans for said project and

the sole reason for the applicant's re-filing is due to a court decision involving a remand, the Commission had no comments at this time.

◇ 597 Piermont Road: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals, which involves the construction of a new commercial/retail bank at the subject property. While disapproving both of several trees being slated for removal and the fact that a plethora of banks already exist in close proximity of the site, the Commission was pleased that the application includes a significant buffer between the proposed development on-site and wetlands located in the rear yard.



## Other

Mr. Isaacson asked that the Commission monitor the future development of 430 Durie Avenue and 440 Durie Avenue, parcels on which single-family residences were recently demolished; he said it is believed New Jersey Harvest Church (370 Demarest Avenue), owner-in-fee of said lots, would be using the properties to expand their house of worship with a gymnasium and/or parking lot.

Councilman Kashwick indicated the Governing Body would be considering another round of open space appropriations for 2012 in the coming months. Ms. Mayer asked that monies be set aside for "anchor trails" in light of heavy damage inflicted by recent storms; she believed it is best for the Borough to have fewer, well-maintained trails rather than several that are neither kept up nor utilized by the public.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Di Dio, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 9:45pm.