



Environmental Commission

April 17, 2012

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

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Councilman Kashwick called to order, at 8:02pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, April 17, 2012 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Steven Isaacson
- Brenda Cummings
- Keith Scholz- Shade Tree Commission Liaison
- Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
- John Kashwick- Council Liaison
- Mary Mayer- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Absent

- Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
- Paul Mac Donald
- VACANT- Alternate #2
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member
- VACANT- Associate Member



New Business

In lieu of Chairwoman Ravit's absence, Councilman Kashwick chaired the meeting.

A motion was made by Ms. Cummings and seconded by Mr. Scholz, to approve the minutes for the March 20, 2012 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.



Old Business

Ms. Cummings said the Borough-wide garbage/debris cleanup on March 31st was quite successful considering the inclement weather; she reported approximately 60 people helped to collect roughly 70 bags of garbage, much of which was plastic removed from public land and waterways. Councilman Kashwick said he was pleased that the area nearby Tenakill Brook along Demarest Avenue was cleaned. Mr. Isaacson informed that several tires, an air conditioning unit and signage were collected; Ms. Cummings noted that a birdcage, a few snow sleds and remnants of an automobile were removed from Lenapehoking Preserve. Ms. Mayer indicated that the ground sign (plastic sign with a thin metal post having no footing) installed at Scholz Bridge was discarded as well; she and Councilman Kashwick believed it should be

replaced with 1 of more permanence due to the crossing's importance. Mr. Isaacson concurred, saying the new sign should be relocated to the entrance of that section of the Borough's trail system that leads to Scholz Bridge.

Ms. Mayer reminded there had been prior Commission consensus to allow the caretaker and resident of Mac Bain Farm, John Mc Caffrey, to have 1 horse and a dozen chickens live on-site; she informed that after further research, however, housing of chickens is prohibited under the Borough Code. She stated letters have been mailed to owners of neighboring properties to inform them of the Commission's intentions for the Farm, with only 1 expressing opposition to the proposal. Ms. Mayer informed that a meeting between members of the Commission, Board of Health and Recreation Commission was held earlier in the evening to discuss related issues; she reported all in attendance agreed Mac Bain Farm is not agricultural in practice but rather a park utilized as a farm and, therefore, far fewer activities on-site are protected. She said they also acknowledged that better consultation between the 3 bodies is necessary prior to 1 going public with an intended change to its procedures, regulations, etc.; she hoped such would prevent another controversial episode like when the Board of Health recently amended its regulations for wildlife feeding.

With respect to the horse stable and corral, Ms. Mayer pointed out that a construction permit would be required as would an exterminator's visit to the site for vermin abatement; she said while the presence of a horse at the Farm would benefit the entire community, its management would be the sole responsibility of Mr. Mc Caffrey and his family. She noted that any Commission lobbying to have chicken housing permitted in the Borough would not take place at this juncture. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg inquired if such meant that 119 Hickory Lane, a Bergen County-recognized private farm known as "Brooks Farm", could not continue to have chickens on-site; Ms. Mayer replied it can because it is considered an agricultural farm. Councilman Kashwick noted the difference in making such a determination is based on whether or not money is earned from an activity and/or product on-site.

Mr. Isaacson questioned if bee hives are permitted at Mac Bain Farm; Ms. Mayer answered they are regardless of whether the site is considered a farm or park, noting the Board of Health has no objection to their reintroduction.

Mr. Isaacson asked if Mr. Mc Caffrey would be handling the costs associated with the horse relocation; Ms. Mayer replied he will be paying for all labor and materials. Mr. Isaacson asked how horse manure would be dealt with; Ms. Mayer explained regulations are very stringent as to its storage. She pointed out that manure is currently brought to the Farm on a regular basis so the horse's presence would not change that aspect; she noted that horse manure on-site is now stored uphill between the compost piles and an adequate distance from the nearby stream as per the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Mr. Di Dio asked if the horse stable/corral plan would be presented to the Planning Board; Ms. Mayer said it would not, however, to maintain a collegial Borough relationship, it will be reviewed by the Zoning Officer, as a courtesy (zoning permit is not required), as well as the Building Department (construction permit is required).

Mr. Isaacson stated several sections of fencing at the Farm have sustained damage; Ms. Mayer informed that an estimate from Emerson Fence Co. puts the cost for repair of 3 sections (damaged by fallen trees) to be approximately \$1,700.00. She noted such would be a Borough expense and did not know if an insurance claim for repayment would be filed.

Regarding the status of hiring summer help for Mac Bain Farm, Ms. Mayer reported that no decision has been made; she said she spoke with the Recreation Commission on how it hires and left open the possibility of sharing 1 to 2 of its hires to augment the volunteers at the Farm in

terms of supervision as well as to reduce Mr. Mc Caffrey's maintenance expenses. She believed the hires could be paid out of the Commission's budget (\$1,500.00 to \$2,000.00).

Councilman Kashwick said he was not certain if the hiring could be done under the Recreation Commission, with the Environmental Commission simply appropriating 2 of its workers. Ms. Mayer stated that high school and college students, as well as adults, could fill the positions; she stated that Mr. Mc Caffrey presently uses laborers from his landscaping business for most work at the Farm. Mr. Isaacson said the Borough should advertise the available jobs on its website; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked what the pay rate would be. Ms. Mayer believed it to be approximately \$10.00 per hour; she asked that Commission members give her feedback on how to handle the hiring process being the summer is fast approaching.

Following a conference with officials from the Borough of Demarest in which the 15 or so attendees hiked several areas in the vicinity of Mac Bain Farm, Mr. Isaacson said the consensus was that the proposed inter-borough trail system would be named the "Northern Valley Trail System" rather than the "Closter Inter-Borough Trail". He said the initial goal has been to connect Demarest with Closter and, now, the hope is to have a connection to Route 9W via the Alpine Scout Camp; he noted that a tepid approval has been suggested by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, even though permission to blaze trails through the portion of Ruckman Road (paper street) within the campsite is not required. Mr. Isaacson said the Borough of Norwood is contemplating a connection with Closter via its eastern end (using cul de sacs to the east of Piermont Road) through the Borough of Alpine. He said that the revised trail path includes traveling from the Borough's "Marian Village" neighborhood to the Nature Center beyond its cabin and pond. Mr. Isaacson suggested the trail should travel from Irving Avenue to Piermont Road, Hickory Lane or Ruckman Road, Nagel-Auryansen Cemetery (Susan Drive), Mac Bain Farm and end at Anderson Avenue; he noted that street contact should be kept to a minimum. Ms. Mayer asked if Piermont Road is crossed at Ruckman Road (not including Hickory Lane since it is not pedestrian-friendly), would the cemetery connect with Mac Bain Farm; Mr. Isaacson responded it would not because "Brooks Farm" is there, to which the Borough may or may not have an easement. Councilman Kashwick believed the recent purchaser of "Brooks Farm" could be approached about granting an easement for access to the cemetery. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that there is a lock on the cemetery's gate. Councilman Kashwick opted for traveling from Ruckman Road to the Nature Center, Temple Emanu-El, Piermont Road and end at Ruckman Road (to make better use trails in the area); Mr. Isaacson disagreed, saying he was informed the area near Lindbergh Avenue is completely wooded and not cleared for a path. He stated that the area would require to have a boardwalk installed and be blazed in order to make it viable. Mr. Isaacson noted there is a potential area between the southern end of Irving Avenue and the Closter Golf Center; Ms. Mayer interjected, saying the area is too muddy. She reiterated that already-marked trails should be incorporated into the inter-borough trail system so tree removal can be avoided. Mr. Isaacson suggested improving Buzzoni Farm Park (bee sanctuary inclusive), thereby allowing trail users to pass the "alleyway" of trees in the Borough's conservation easement and exit onto Ruckman Road. He summated that, ultimately, the main trail would have several offshoots.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reported that a few non-Borough residents had been given permission by the Mayor's office to pick at Mac Bain Farm recently; she said being there was a surplus, they were each permitted to collect a few cups of cherry tomatoes; Mr. Isaacson suggested such farm visitors should be required to pay a fee and questioned if the Farm is being funded by the NJDEP Green Acres Program; Ms. Mayer replied that while its money is encumbered under the Green Acres Program, it is within the NJDEP's Recreation and Open Space Inventory. Mr.

Isaacson reminded that since Mac Bain Farm is a park, all Bergen County residents have access to it; Councilman Kashwick concurred, noting that only Borough residents can pick its produce.

Councilman Kashwick inquired about the Borough of Alpine's participation in the recent conference on the inter-borough trail system; Mr. Isaacson replied Alpine has several easements and pedestrian pathways that cross-cut into its private estates. Councilman Kashwick questioned if Alpine would oversee the blazing of trails within the Alpine Scout Camp; Mr. Isaacson said it would not because the campsite is leased from the Palisades Interstate Park Commission. Councilman Kashwick felt Norwood should be more forthcoming on its intentions. Mr. Isaacson replied that Norwood is concentrating on improving an internal trail for which it was recently awarded grant money, but he hoped it would eventually connect its individual trail system with the inter-borough.

Ms. Cummings suggested a "green map" be produced to highlight the open space within the inter-borough trail system, which would attract more communities. Mr. Isaacson spoke of implementing geocaching, whereby a global positioning system could be used for scavenger hunts within the trails; he noted there could be checkpoints allowing users to complete the course at their own pace.

Councilman Kashwick reported that 1 letter of consent was received from the owner-in-fee of 11 Cedar Lane with respect to a tree on-site slated for landmark status by the Borough. A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to forward the Commission's recommendation of landmark status for said tree to the Governing Body; the motion passed by acclamation. The Commission agreed that Chairwoman Ravit would draft the letter of recommendation and that a sign would be acquired to post at 11 Cedar Lane.

Mr. Scholz reported that there was no progress made towards the Borough purchasing bicycle racks.



Plans

The Commission prepared the following administrative reports:

Zoning Board of Adjustment

◇ 170 & 176 Closter Dock Road: This is an application for Site Plan Approval (no Use Variance required) involving the conversion of existing office space to 2 residential units and stemming from a remand ordered on appeal by the Superior Court of New Jersey- Law Division. Ms. Mayer questioned if testing of ground pollution would be required since there is an automotive repair shop on-site; the Commission agreed that because only interior alterations were being proposed, such monitoring would not be required. The Commission had no

comments.

Planning Board

◇ 40 Johnson Court: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the reconstruction of a 14’ high retaining wall with incorporated fencing and steps. Mr. Di Dio

noted that a retaining wall is calculated as part of impervious coverage; as such, he said a storm water management system could be needed for the wall’s drainage and to counter its steep elevations. The Commission had no comments.

◇ 56 Whitney Street: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new single-family house. Aside from prior administrative report(s) on the subject application, the Commission had no comment.

◇ 130 Durie Avenue: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new single-family house. Aside from prior administrative report(s) on the subject application, the Commission had no comment. Councilman Kashwick noted that the site plan filed with said application illustrates where he hoped the trail nearby Scholz Bridge would be extended, specifically from Oak Street (paper street) to Ryerson Place, Knickerbocker Road, Pearle Road and end at Schauble Park.



Other

Ms. Mayer informed that the pond dredging at the Nature Center was initially scheduled to commence in May; she said the Bergen County Mosquito Control Commission has since notified the Borough that the project would be starting imminently. She stated the gravel ramps have been installed and, as expected, a few trees were removed to gain full access to the pond; she noted the damn has been removed from the pond as well, resulting in the lowering of its level by 1’. She said laborers from the Department of Public Works (DPW) would continue to drain the pond on April 22nd and 23rd and they would welcome volunteers to help in the task.

Ms. Mayer said a concerted effort would be made to rescue as much wildlife as possible during the dredging; she said the Nature Center has stocked several aquariums. She noted that the condition of the pond’s floor is unknown and explained that when the water is drawn out, the 4’ high growth of vegetation will lower and potentially trap animals underneath; thus, she said a considerable loss of life is anticipated. Mr. Isaacson asked what is living in the pond; Ms. Mayer responded that, following the die-off of 1,700 fish from the harsh winter of 2011, the 200 or so surviving fish bred during this past summer free from any predators. She explained that while 10% of laid eggs normally survive, the survival rate was 90% in this instance and resulted in a potential fish population of 1,000+. Ms. Mayer reported the NJDEP requires that no carp be salvaged and relocated because the Nature Center cannot confirm they are sterile nor can it disseminate red-eared sliders because they are considered an invasive species. She said 1 of the wetland swamps adjacent to the dredged pond will be maintained to relocate frogs and turtles being they are connected to each other via a culvert. Ms. Mayer said the NJDEP will approve of the Borough’s efforts to save the swamp because as the pond lowers, so will the surrounding wetlands; she revealed that because the level of the nearby “hockey pond” has gone down by

roughly 8", it serving as the sole relocation area is not possible. Ms. Mayer informed that United Water Co. has agreed to allow the portion of Tenakill Brook within its property (nearby the low-lying grounds of the Oradell Reservoir and Closter 9/11 Memorial) to be used for relocating wildlife; she noted that the Borough has permission to make use of both the Demarest Duck Pond and Norwood's pond. Councilman Kashwick asked about the type of fish presently in the pond; Ms. Mayer replied there are existing bass (especially smaller largemouth bass), shiners, bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish, and black crappie.

Councilman Kashwick asked about plans for the dredged soil; Ms. Mayer answered the soil would be placed by the Nature Center's cabin to allow for it to dry out and drain back into the pond. Assuming the soil is marketable after testing confirms it is clean, trailers could be driven up to the edge of the pond for loading. Mr. Isaacson suggested some of the soil be placed over the stone-filled field at Hillside Elementary School.

The Commission agreed to purchase a house plant (azalea bush) for Chairwoman Ravit, who would be resigning from the chairwomanship because she is moving into a condominium in the Borough of Park Ridge. It was undecided as to who would replace her as Chairperson.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she is attending a workshop on April 20th at the New York Botanical Garden to learn about beneficial insects (native bees inclusive) as well as plants needed for bee survival at their different stages of life.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she has fielded several complaints regarding tree removal at "Brooks Farm", to which she replied the Borough has no jurisdiction on the matter.

Mr. Di Dio reported that John and Theresa Mc Namara, 111 Morris Avenue, Haworth, New Jersey, had not attended the Planning Board's most recent hearing in which the 130 Durie Avenue application for Major Soil Movement was presented (as suggested to them by the Commission to quell concerns about tree removal on-site).

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Mayer, to adjourn the meeting at 9:01pm. The motion passed by acclamation.