



Environmental Commission

January 17, 2012

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairwoman Ravit called to order, at 8:12pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, January 17, 2012 at Borough Hall.



2012 Reorganization

Oaths of Office

- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): Beth Ravit, PhD
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): Steven Isaacson
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): Keith Scholz
Shade Tree Commission Liaison
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): Paul Mac Donald
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): John Kashwick
Council Liaison
- ◇ Alternate #1 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): Mary Mayer
- ◇ Alternate #2 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2012): VACANT
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2012): Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg
Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2012): Arthur Goldberg, MD
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2012): VACANT



Attendance

Present

Beth Ravit, PhD- Chairwoman
Steven Isaacson
Brenda Cummings
Keith Scholz- Shade Tree Commission Liaison
Paul Mac Donald
John Kashwick- Council Liaison

Absent

Robert Di Dio- Planning Board Liaison
Mary Mayer- Alternate #1

VACANT- Alternate #2
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member
VACANT- Associate Member



New Business

Being it did not have a quorum at its November 15, 2011 meeting (3 voting members were in attendance), the Commission was required to merely verify the prepared “notes” rather than conducting a vote because they could not be considered minutes.

Mr. Mac Donald inquired about an issue mentioned in said “notes” that originated from former Associate Member, Jayanthi Ramaswamy, pertaining to plastic bags and bottles; he noted he recycles his plastic bags at grocery store(s). Mr. Isaacson informed that the Borough’s Department of Public Works (DPW) station has garbage bins to handle the recycling of plastic bags.

With respect to the 2012 Reorganization, Chairwoman Ravit noted that Ms. Mayer requested that she be lowered from a Full Member to Alternate #1 while still maintaining her involvement with Mac Bain Farm issues; she stated Ms. Mayer indicated that Mr. Di Dio should replace her as an official liaison to the Farm and she promised to help in the transition. Chairwoman Ravit stated since Mr. Di Dio was still mourning the passing of his mother, his acceptance of the position is not confirmed. She noted that Dr. Goldberg was retained as an Associate Member due to his years of dedicated service despite his recent poor attendance. Furthermore, she informed that as per statute, Philip Gotthelf and Ms. Ramaswamy were not reappointed because they had not been present for at least 4 consecutive meetings. In terms of the Commission’s current vacancies, Chairwoman Ravit stated that Anthony Gray (214 Anderson Avenue), who sits on the Nature Center’s board, would consider becoming Alternate #2 sometime in the future; she noted that Jennifer Rothschild, Esq., Chairwoman of the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), was not eligible for membership being she serves on the HPC. Mr. Isaacson mentioned that Leslie Brunell (2 Taylor Drive), whose active with both the Nature Center and Girl Scouts of USA, could be interested in becoming a member of the Commission; Ms. Cummings said she would contact her.

Mr. Isaacson stated that Ms. Bouton-Goldberg was inquiring about funding of a potential bee garden/haven at Buzzoni Farm Park. He reported that the Mayor’s Office saw no controversy with the idea being the proposed site is not in close proximity to residential areas. Chairwoman Ravit stated that Ms. Bouton-Goldberg would be asking the Master Gardner program if it could assist with the native plants/species that would be part of the garden.

Chairwoman Ravit reported that the new owner (Frank Vastano) of 119 Hickory Lane, a Bergen County-recognized private farm known as “Brooks Farm”, also owns *Metropolitan Plant and Flower Exchange* in the Borough of Fort Lee, and noted he seems willing to be involved with the community; she said she has asked Ms. Rothschild (32 Hickory Lane) to inquire about him

helping the Commission in selecting the proper foliage for the Buzzoni Farm Park project. Mr. Isaacson said that Mr. Vastano discovered that his plans to grow perennials on said farm could

be hindered by the presence of deer on-site and, thus, he would be installing fencing to block them out.

Mr. Isaacson believed such would be necessary for any garden the Commission wished to install. He believed a deer fence would be the only expense associated with a bee garden, aside from the hives themselves. Chairwoman Ravit stated that said project would be a sanctuary for bees to recover rather than to create honey. Mr. Isaacson believed it could serve as an educational tool for children. Mr. Mac Donald said the type of food and flowers to sustain the bees should be a first priority; Chairwoman Ravit replied that “fancy” species were not required and suggested clover, which bees enjoy. Ms. Cummings reported that Ron Breland, a beekeeper featured in the film, *Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us?*, would supply the Commission with hives built by himself for cost only. Chairwoman Ravit asked if certain steps of Chapter 250-30 of the Borough Code must be followed in terms of bee regulation; Councilman Kashwick replied the Board of Health should be consulted about such. Chairwoman Ravit stated the Board’s next meeting is January 19th. Ms. Cummings informed that said ordinance is very specific and requires langstroth hives (designed for honey production), 6’ high fencing and a water source. Mr. Isaacson felt there would be no zoning issues and questioned if fencing was essential being the bees could easily fly around it. Mr. Mac Donald noted that the fencing’s purpose is probably to prevent the public from wondering into the bees’ territory.

Prior to conceiving the idea for the bee garden, Mr. Isaacson reported he spoke with a representative of the Belskie Museum of Art and Science about having a sculpture garden at Buzzoni Farm Park, to which he said the cost of insuring the art pieces would prove to be too expensive. Ms. Cummings believed the hives would be a form of art due to their various shapes, however, such hives are not permitted under said ordinance; Mr. Isaacson suggested that the Board of Health’s bee regulations be amended. Councilman Kashwick informed that a majority of the Board must be persuaded to change its ordinance. Ms. Cummings reiterated that the garden would be a haven/sanctuary for bees and no apiculture would take place. Mr. Mac Donald asked if bee hives previously at Mac Bain Farm, then removed, had since been returned; Chairwoman Ravit answered they were not, but said she has asked John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, to see how bees could be reintroduced on-site.

Chairwoman Ravit reported that Mr. Mc Caffrey was not present at the meeting since he is traveling, but was hopeful he would present the Farm’s management plan for 2012 to the Commission at its February 21, 2012 meeting.

Ms. Cummings informed there is a traditional hive (skep) which is weaved with hay/straw into a cap shape having a hole in its bottom; she explained such is difficult to have honey extracted from and is, in any case, illegal in the Borough. Mr. Mac Donald questioned if the hive permitted in Closter was the type once found at the Farm; Ms. Cummings answered they were langstroth hives. Chairwoman Ravit asked if such a hive would be colonized by the bees, noting there are no Borough regulations on sculptural structures in public spaces; Ms. Cummings responded that while hives in trees are quite rare, the bees could be smoked out and reintroduced to a different location. She explained that honey bees can be decipered between wasps, for example, by the way they swarm and added there are still wild hives existing in nature. Chairwoman Ravit summated that the bee garden project consists of 3 parts: 1.)

amendment of Chapter 250-30 of Borough Code; 2.) participation of beekeeper (Ron Breland); 3.) participation of Master Gardener program. She stated funding of the project and public opinion should be the top priorities. Councilman Kashwick inquired about an entity necessary to maintain the bee garden; Ms. Cummings replied oversight would be required, at the least, and

she would ask Mr. Breland to attend the February 21, 2012 meeting to field such questions. Chairwoman Ravit agreed, saying he could educate the Commission before it approaches the Board of Health with its request. Mr. Mac Donald asked when the current ordinance regulating bees was adopted; Councilman Kashwick approximated it to be 1 decade ago, and said it originated due to the complaints of a few residents nearby Mac Bain Farm.

Chairwoman Ravit stated there are 2 grant opportunities for the Borough with deadlines in February and March; she said the 1st is from the *New Jersey Trails* program under the auspices of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). She noted the Commission has consulted with the Boroughs of Demarest and Norwood about partaking in an inter-borough trail system, which Demarest was interested in so long as its Commission approved and Norwood indicated it wished not compete against itself being it had already applied for said grant with respect to 1 of its own trails; Chairwoman Ravit indicated Christine Hageman, Chairwoman of Norwood's Commission, was still interested in having a trail connection with Closter's "East Hill" section. Chairwoman Ravit stated she would craft a compelling grant request keeping in mind last year's awardees had proposed large projects, not small ideas (maps, signs, kiosks and blazing). Mr. Isaacson believed several municipalities would connect with Closter's trails because they already have their own system of trails and he noted bicycle racks should be placed throughout the inter-borough trail system to reach trail heads and promote hiking; he hoped to 1 day have Closter connecting with the Borough of Fort Lee as well as reach into New York via Sparkill and Piermont. Chairwoman Ravit indicated that the Borough would need to match the grant money awarded. The Commission contemplated possibly holding off on filing for said grant since neighboring municipalities have not guaranteed their participation as of yet.

Mr. Isaacson updated that James Elling, a member of Norwood's Commission, was still in the process of researching and communicating on behalf on the inter-borough trail system and believed the trail's layout could serve as an Eagle Scout project; Chairwoman Ravit interjected, saying that the grant being sought could pay for a design professional to prepare plans with recommended connections rather than relying on volunteers. She cautioned, though, that by involving an engineer, surveyor, etc. would surely result in the Borough not matching funds. Councilman Kashwick stated such monies would be considered open space funding. Chairwoman Ravit said it was possible that the Borough Engineer may have prepared a topographical map of the areas sometime in the past. She explained that the maximum grant available is \$25,000.00; Mr. Isaacson asked if matching funds would be received from Demarest and Norwood so that Closter is not paying solely into the project. Councilman Kashwick informed that the Borough of Alpine could be included in the trail system being its stretch of Ruckman Road becomes a paper street and a county right-of-way; Mr. Isaacson noted the Palisades Interstate Park Commission could have maps on-file. Mr. Mac Donald asked how much detail is needed in the trail layout being aerial photographs are easily obtainable. Councilman Kashwick pondered where else Demarest could be linked to Closter; Mr. Mac Donald suggested the area south of its recreational facilities. Councilman Kashwick replied such a location could be difficult being several residents own to the centerline of a stream running along the area; Mr. Isaacson added many residents would not wish to have the public traveling in their rear yards. The Commission determined it must immediately get official feedback from

Demarest, Norwood, Alpine as well as the Boroughs of Cresskill and Tenafly as to their position on connecting their trails. Thinking on a smaller scale due to the surrounding communities' uncertainty, the Commission decided it would apply for a grant to purchase signs for 2 yet-to-be-determined Borough parks as well as a foldable map resembling the 1 produced by the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference; Mr. Isaacson stated he has been told a metal-plate sign,

having a laminated overlay, could cost roughly \$1,000.00 and a map such as Demarest's may have a price of \$500.00 to \$600.00. Especially since said grant application, to be penned by Chairwoman Ravit, has a deadline of February 15th, the Commission members agreed to try and locate prior grant paperwork to expedite the filing process.

Chairwoman Ravit explained the 2nd grant option for the Borough, which is run by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) and due March 30th, is known as the Sustainable Land Use Planning grant; she reminded the Borough was previously awarded funding through this program, which went towards preparing its Master Plan's Sustainable Element. She stated the maximum grant available is \$15,000.00, but most municipalities are awarded quite less for qualifying projects such as environmental resource inventory updates, conservation easements, Master Plan Sustainable Elements, green design site plan standards for commercial/residential buildings and natural resource or habitat protection ordinances, the last of which could relate to the establishment of a conservation zone if the Borough were to hire a professional planner; she thought an updated/digitized environmental resource inventory could be made by an environmental consultant. Chairwoman Ravit informed with said grant, some of the requirements can be in kind, not cash, meaning the program accepts public meetings and Commission members' time spent and equates them as cash, negating an all cash match in terms of funding; thus, she stated said grant application would be quite simple to write.

Councilman Kashwick stated that, on January 25th, the Governing Body would be introducing a recommended ordinance by the Planning Board, which ties the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification system to the Borough's Limiting Schedule with relation to green building elements; he explained an applicant would be granted additional building and/or impervious coverage (up to 2% greater than the maximum allowances), the amount of which depends on which level of certification is obtained from LEED (silver/gold/platinum). He explained that the Planning Board's recommendation requires an applicant to post a bond equivalent to 1% of the subject property's assessed value to ensure LEED certification; he questioned what would prevent an applicant from forfeiting said bond and simply disregard obtaining LEED certification while still be able to build beyond what is normally permitted in the relevant zoning district. Chairwoman Ravit asked for the average-sized lot in the Borough; Councilman Kashwick replied it to be 10,000 sf. Chairwoman Ravit opined, as an example, an applicant can currently develop a site in a residential zone up to the 30% maximum impervious coverage, but the Planning Board's proposal would require LEED certification, which is very costly and difficult to receive, for a mere 200 sf in additional development; she believed such incentives would result in both non-compliance and over-development. Councilman Kashwick informed there is no other municipality in New Jersey that has a similar ordinance adopted or being considered. Mr. Isaacson asked if said proposal only applies to new construction projects; Councilman Kashwick answered it would regulate both new construction and alterations to existing developments. The Commission believed requiring LEED certification for an existing development to be unpractical. Chairwoman Ravit reminded that at the Borough's previous Joint Meeting, said issue was discussed and a suggestion was made to lower the maximum allowance for building and impervious coverage by 2% altogether; she said the proposal would have the exact opposite affect on development; she further stated

that unintended consequences could arise from those projects requiring variance relief from either the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Adjustment.

As an incentive for historic designation, Councilman Kashwick suggested the Planning Board's proposal should include a provision calling for any Borough-designated historic landmark to be

automatically considered LEED certified (silver) because an existing building is not using the resources needed to build new. Chairwoman Ravit said by thinking of the proposed ordinance in terms of square footage, not percentages, it is easy to see that there would not be enough incentive to build "green". Councilman Kashwick interjected, saying he will agree with such a statement in terms of the size of a building's footprint, however, he believed there could be incentive in terms of increasing the density (floor area ratio) of a building. Mr. Isaacson said the proposal may be intended to allude to a sort of credit for the use of permeable surfaces; Councilman Kashwick said if so, he would not support such because those types of materials are not completely open space (pervious). Chairwoman Ravit and Councilman Kashwick disagreed on whether the value of the 1% bond could be recovered with the selling price of a property via its increased coverage. The Commission agreed that the value of the required bond should be increased to 10% of the property assessment to add incentive for obtaining LEED certification; Chairwoman Ravit reminded that a bond is similar to an insurance policy in that the entire amount is not posted and the held money is returned following compliance. Councilman Kashwick stated he would report the Commission's thoughts on the matter to the Governing Body.



Old Business

Updating the Commission on obtaining certification from the *Sustainable Jersey* program, Ms. Cummings spoke of the "Green Team" working on the Borough's environmental resource inventory (Chairwoman Ravit reiterated this task could qualify for the ANJEC grant), and said it needs additional data from the Historic Preservation Commission as well as the NJDEP for information on contamination sites in the Borough. Ms. Cummings stated the tasks she mentioned would garner the Borough 20 points as would a community forestry plan, which is being spearheaded by the Shade Tree Commission (STC); Councilman Kashwick stated the Borough would be starting its 3rd 5-year period as being qualified by Tree City USA, the program sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Mr. Mac Donald asked if the State of New Jersey already had standards in place for municipalities to follow when drafting ordinances on green building; Councilman Kashwick replied such standards only relate to government buildings, not privately-owned commercial and residential structures. Mr. Isaacson suggested the Bergen County chapter of the United States Green Building Council should be consulted. Chairwoman Ravit noted 1 of the ANJEC grant's options is for bicycle/pedestrian or complete streets (sidewalks included), which she felt could tie into achieving an inter-borough trail system. Councilman Kashwick concurred, saying he wants a definitive plan that the Governing Body can refer to when contemplating requests for sidewalk waivers so it can make responsible decisions. The Commission agreed to postpone writing an application for the ANJEC grant until more is known about how the LEED proposal is received by the public.

Ms. Cummings reported the “Green Team” would be speaking to the Borough’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) on February 7th and asking what sustainability/environmental issues concern it. She stated Rutgers University’s Speakers Bureau is being asked to provide a lecturer to lead a discussion on climate changes with the Commission; Chairwoman Ravit felt sometime in March, when the weather improves, would work for the Bureau since travel time is an issue. Ms. Cummings said she has not been able to speak with Mr. Mc Caffrey about bringing children

to Mac Bain Farm as part of a field trip. Chairwoman Ravit commended the “Green Team” on all it has accomplished in its inaugural year.

Mr. Scholz stated the price of bicycle racks has risen since November. Chairwoman Ravit stated she still has not heard back from William Dahle, the Superintendent of the Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding both if the DPW would install the necessary concrete bases and about obtaining signage for landmark trees; Councilman Kashwick said he would reach out to Mr. Dahle. Chairwoman Ravit stated she would contact William Fuchs, who recently replaced Raymond Cywinski as the Borough’s new Certified Tree Expert, with respect to giving his opinion on the current list of suggested landmark trees.

Councilman Kashwick informed that on February 24th and February 26th, New Jersey Transit would be holding meetings in the Borough of Tenafly and the City of Englewood, respectively, to discuss its Northern Branch Corridor Project (restoration of its rail line passenger service from the Township of North Bergen to Tenafly).



Plans

The Commission prepared the following administrative reports:

Zoning Board of Adjustment

◇ 24 Naugle Street: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals, whereby the applicants wish to continue an existing contractor’s yard operation located in District #3 (Commercial). The Commission commented it is concerned the site plan indicates brick pavers within the drip line of several trees located in the Borough’s right-of-way, covering a majority of the buffer area between the curb line and sidewalk (which is a safety hazard since it partially consists of gravel).

◇ 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 the Commission had no comments, it intended to respond in writing to mail correspondence from the NJDEP regarding the agency’s on-going review of the project; the Commission’s response will convey its hope that the NJDEP will not waive adherence to its wetlands regulations regardless of whether the applicant re-vegetates the site, especially since 17 tree removals are proposed.



There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Mac Donald, to adjourn the meeting; all those present voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 10:14pm.