



Environmental Commission

January 15, 2013

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 8:03pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, January 15, 2013 at Borough Hall.



2013 Reorganization

Oaths of Office

- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2015): Brenda Cummings
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2015): Robert Di Dio
Planning Board Liaison
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): VACANT
- ◇ Alternate #1 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): VACANT
- ◇ Alternate #2 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): VACANT
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg
Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): Ethel Abrams
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): VACANT



Attendance

Present

Paul MacDonald- Chairman
Steven Isaacson- Full Member
Brenda Cummings- Full Member
Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
Ethel Abrams- Associate Member

Absent

VACANT- Full Member
VACANT- Alternate #1
VACANT- Alternate #2
VACANT- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to approve the minutes for the October 16, 2012 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

Due to a lack of a quorum at its November 20, 2012 meeting, the Commission merely verified the prepared notes, which could not be considered minutes.

Chairman MacDonald read into the record correspondence received by the Commission, specifically, a renewal notice for annual membership to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC). Mary Mayer, who recently resigned as Alternate #1 from the Commission and speaking from the audience, explained that ANJEC sponsors quality workshops for the environmental commissions of New Jersey’s municipalities and provides a forum for them to collaborate on preserving natural resources and promoting sustainable communities. The Commission decided to continue to have Mr. Isaacson, Ms. Cummings and Councilman Kashwick on ANJEC’s mail list so they can receive correspondence on the Commission’s behalf.



Old Business

Trails

Mr. Isaacson stated the Borough Administrator, Richard Sheola, has informed him that a grant for trails is available with its application deadline being February 13th. Mr. Isaacson believed the Commission should determine if there is a need for such monies currently by inquiring with the Boroughs of Demarest and Norwood as to whether or not funding should begin on the proposed inter-borough “Northern Valley Trail System”; he noted that the Borough was awarded money from the same grant offering a few years ago, which was utilized for the construction of a pedestrian bridge for a portion of the Borough’s trails that encroaches onto property owned by United Water Co. Councilman Kashwick reminded that the Commission did not apply for said grant in 2012; he also said he did not know the specifics involved in drafting grant proposals since the Commission’s former chair, Elizabeth Ravit, PhD, handled such paperwork. Ms. Mayer said in years past, such grant monies have gone towards expanding the Nature Center’s “Cross-Closter Trail”; she noted, however, the consensus has been lately that said grant should not be sought for purposes of expanding trails but rather upgrading and consolidating those existing. She further stated the Commission is not obligated to apply for the grant since it is an external funding possibility; she stated a specific project should be in mind before the Commission applies. Mr. Isaacson suggested holding off on applying until 2014 so that the Borough could potentially receive a larger award than if it were to apply this year; Councilman Kashwick reported that any funds from the Borough’s prior award has since been depleted.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed she recently traveled Blanch Avenue with James Elling, a member of Norwood’s Environmental Commission and proponent of connecting trails between Norwood and Closter; she said Mr. Elling would again try convincing his chair, Christine Hagemen, to approve of Norwood becoming a part of the “Northern Valley Trail System”. She

said Mr. Elling made her aware of a sign documenting the history of an airfield that once existed off Blanch Avenue. Mr. Isaacson noted that the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, which oversees Norwood's 125-acre forest known as "Central Woods" had previously intended to have the area vacated (arguing that any passageway for trail connections would invite motorized vehicles) but was thwarted in its efforts to do so. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated she and Mr. Elling agreed that only a pedestrian bridge would be appropriate.

Mr. Isaacson suggested the trail grant could allow for the Borough's trails to be extended to Schauble Park along with associated benches and signage. Councilman Kashwick interjected, saying the Borough has an overabundance of underused benches; he believed a more appropriate use of funds would be to replace several boardwalks from the corner of Tenakill Street and Ryerson Place to Scholz Bridge behind the supermarket, *A&P*, (400 Demarest Avenue), to which Mr. Isaacson said those by Brook Street and Julia Street are also in need of rehabilitation. Ms. Mayer questioned if such a project would be performed by Eagle Scouts; Councilman Kashwick replied the boardwalk project would be better handled under the supervision of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference. Mr. Isaacson concurred, saying his discussions about the project with Scout leader, Andrew Baron, have not materialized. Councilman Kashwick felt the project should be part of the Borough's request for open space funding as well. Ms. Mayer explained an estimate from the Conference is needed to file for the grant; Mr. Isaacson stated he would contact the Conference to conduct an inspection of damaged boardwalks within 2 weeks subsequent to him and Chairman MacDonald marking out those in need of repair. Both Councilman Kashwick and Mr. Isaacson agreed to peruse the grant application to gauge its difficulty. Ms. Cummings questioned if the Commission's budget allows for the hiring of a grant writer for future applications; the consensus of the Commission was that such an expense would be unnecessary. Mr. Di Dio suggested having Mr. Sheola write up the grant proposal being he is on the Borough's payroll as well as its Chief Financial Officer. Based upon the Nature Center's recent boardwalk replacement project, Ms. Mayer estimated such a job could cost \$25,000.00 to \$30,000.00 (without knowing the length of planks involved).

Mr. Isaacson reported of a large, non-landmark tree at Buzzoni Farm Park being downed by a recent storm; he also pointed out the encased trail map located outside the Closter Public Library needs to have its weather-worn laminate restored or replaced with *Plexiglas*.

Chairman MacDonald stated the Schauble Park trail extension, begun last year by high school senior service volunteers under his supervision, is littered with branches/limbs that partially block the pathway, which inadvertently helps in preventing bicyclists from traveling through the area; Mr. Isaacson agreed, saying the Department of Public Works (DPW) could cut notches out of the logs in lieu of actually removing them so pedestrians find travel easier while still having a barricade against cycling the trail. Chairman MacDonald concurred, saying such was recently done at Mollicone Park. He further stated that there is discussion on cleaning up Lenapehoking Preserve as well as clearing a trail to connect Ver Valen Street with High Street since pedestrians often use the open space as a shortcut to and from "Closter Plaza".

Landmark Trees

Chairman MacDonald stated that after several weeks following Hurricane Sandy, the damaged landmark tree at the northeastern corner of the Durie Avenue and Knickerbocker Road intersection has been removed at the expense of the property owner (275 Durie Avenue).

Nature Center

Regarding the pond on-site following its dredging, Ms. Mayer informed that some fish have returned due to the flooding of nearby streams while others returned with the help of Center volunteers; she noted, however, a restocking will be required in the spring.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Mayer explained that as part of the Borough's agreement with John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, he must provide a report each January to the Commission outlining his intentions in terms of planting and miscellaneous projects for the forthcoming season. She clarified that while the Commission has no final say in row by row planting, the report does give it an opportunity to enlighten him what the public wishes for the Farm; she reminded that his 2012 report was not submitted until March. Ms. Mayer suggested an after-school program, not associated with the local school system to avoid busing expenses, for groups of 8 to 15 children could operate 1x per week for 3 weeks to learn hands-on agricultural skills. She envisioned a raised garden for youths so they would not trample the designated areas they are tending to but rather to be to view their progression. She noted Mr. Mc Caffrey need only participate to the extent that a section of the Farm would have to be set aside, and Farm volunteers could organize the program. Mr. MacDonald stressed that if such a program were held in May or June, high school senior service volunteers could assist.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg believed the Borough's Korean community should be approached in the hopes of establishing an herb garden at the Farm with its culinary tastes in mind; she stated Mr. Mc Caffrey has already planted sesame, a staple of Korean cuisine. Mr. Di Dio suggested reaching out to the Korean Parent-Teacher Organization as well as the New Jersey Harvest Church (370 Demarest Avenue), of which the head pastor is a Borough resident; Ms. Cummings suggested consulting with "Garden Produce", a Korean grocery (136 Oakland Avenue), for promotional assistance.

Chairman MacDonald inquired about the status of 515 Piermont Road, recently vacated by its tenant, "The Farm in Closter", which is in the process of relocating to the "Closter Commons" shopping center. Mr. Di Dio informed no application has been filed with the Planning Board for the redevelopment of the site. Mr. Isaacson reminded that 515 Piermont, LLC, of which Nancy Anderson is a principal, is represented by local attorney, David Watkins, Esq.

Chairwoman MacDonald asked about the possibility of upgrading Mac Bain Farm's water service. Ms. Mayer replied the well on-site, intended for use by the residents only, has of late been a source for irrigating the farmland as well, a fact which concerns Mr. Mc Caffrey in terms of his increased utility bills; she explained that if last year's dry weather repeats itself this season, Mr. Mc Caffrey is concerned the well would be overdrawn. Ms. Mayer believed 119 Hickory Lane, a nearby parcel and future site of "Metropolitan Farm", has a direct water utility connection from Hickory Lane to the residence on-site, as does Mac Bain Farm, which was installed, along with gas and sewer lines by Mr. Mc Caffrey as per his initial 10-year contract with the Borough.

Councilman Kashwick stated the water utility upgrade at Mac Bain Farm would be considered part of open space funding. He pointed out the Commission's operational budget has remained at its current level, \$2,500.00, for several years; he noted the annual Farm Festival and ANJEC membership are the only expenses that draw from the operational budget. Mr. Isaacson believed that so long as the upgrade would not come out of the Commission's budget, a water utility meter as well as a spicket and water fountain for public use should be installed. Ms. Mayer stated an estimate by Mr. Mc Caffrey is needed before submitting a request to Mr. Sheola.

Ms. Mayer explained that although a water main line is existing, a web of pipe offshoots placed underground deep enough to allow for plowing with no interference must be installed. She added that if Mr. Mc Caffrey wished to take on the project for compensation, the Borough would have to go out to bid; she hoped he would provide the plan either way, which is required for the bidding process. Mr. Scholz expressed concern about such a project harming the crops; Ms. Mayer responded the farmland is currently fallow. Mr. Di Dio questioned if an overhead irrigation system would cost less; Mr. Isaacson replied an underground piping system would still be necessary along with a plug-in aerial setup.

Chairman MacDonald inquired about reconsidering the stalled barn project at Mac Bain Farm. Councilman Kashwick explained the project was put aside once estimated costs climbed to roughly 4x (\$170,000.00) what was initially anticipated. Ms. Mayer clarified that \$60,000.00 was allocated for preliminary planning and drafting of a site plan and architectural drawings. Mr. Isaacson informed the design professionals cost \$6,000.00 alone. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if the barn could be envisioned on a lesser scale with fewer amenities (omit showcasing green elements) with potential upgrades sometime in the future; Mr. Scholz agreed with such an approach. Ms. Mayer stated that Mr. Mc Caffrey and any future caretaker at the Farm, needs storage space for farm equipment during the winter months. Mr. Di Dio suggested an inexpensive shed instead; Ms. Mayer responded having a 3rd shed on-site would not accommodate large-scale items such as tractors and lawn movers. Mr. Di Dio suggested a Quonset hut to which Ms. Bouton-Goldberg replied such would not be in keeping with the look of the Farm. Ms. Cummings believed bathroom facilities to be essential if educational programs are to be operated out of the barn. Ms. Mayer said she has constantly lobbied, to no avail, having a portable toilet on-site from Memorial Day until after the annual Farm Festival. Councilman Kashwick said such would come out of the Commission's operating budget. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Borough recently approved the construction of bathroom and storage facilities at both Mollicone and Shauble Parks to the tune of \$200,000.00 to \$300,000.00. Mr. Di Dio suggested purchasing a used freight container, made of either aluminum or steel that could be spruced up to resemble a barn while being a fraction of the cost and require no construction. In response, Ms. Mayer said Mr. Mc Caffrey would be the hurdle to overcome in terms of having him rethink his overall vision for the Farm, both in terms of concept and actual appurtenances. She believed a pre-fabricated barn could be acquired for less than \$60,000.00. Chairman MacDonald asked about the cost expended by the Recreation Commission to install new playground equipment throughout the Borough's active parks; Councilman Kashwick replied he did not know but while both Commissions receive open space funding, the Environmental Commission never spends its entire share. Mr. Isaacson believed the cost of the new playgrounds and pavilion at Ruckman Park were \$200,000.00 to \$300,000.00 and \$90,000.00 respectively. Ms. Cummings stated a plethora of programs could be implemented if there were more equal funding between the 2 Commissions.

Vehicle Idling Enforcement

Chairman MacDonald spoke of a new initiative sponsored by the New Jersey Bureau of Mobile Services pertaining to diesel-fueled vehicles. Ms. Cummings reminded that she recently distributed fliers to drivers awaiting student dismissal at the local schools in hopes of enlightening them to the dangers of idling vehicles; she pointed out the Police Department does not consider such enforcement a high priority. Mr. Di Dio suggested placing an advertisement to that effect in the local school newspapers.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Scholz said the STC is contemplating the species of trees to plant at the Closter 9/11 Memorial to replace those fallen from recent storms. Councilman Kashwick informed that because the STC does not receive open space funding nor oversees the Borough's passive parks, it should collaborate with the Commission in terms of tree selection and placement at the site; in turn, he said the Commission would request the funding while the STC puts the project out to bid.

Councilman Kashwick felt a more permanent sign for Scholz Bridge, such as a mounted plaque, should be funded through open space. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned if open space monies could be used toward plantings at Buzzoni Farm Park; Councilman Kashwick replied that while such should be considered a capital expense, the selection of annual, not perennial plants could make open space funding a possibility. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the installation of bat houses at Buzzoni Farm Park has been decided against because there is enough habitat on-site, though she hoped bee- and bat-friendly native vegetation would be considered.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Kashwick said the major impedes behind the proposed creation of a conservation zone as a part of the Borough's bulk zoning requirements (Limiting Schedule) is that the Nature Center is currently located within District #5 (Industrial), which is nonsensical. He explained the Borough's Master Plan calls for the re-zoning of the site. As per the Borough Attorney, Edward Rogan, Esq., he said the drafted ordinance, which pertains to zoning and lists specific sites, does not refer to individual lots or small parcels but rather large tracts consisting of at least 5 acres. Chairman MacDonald pointed out Mac Bain Farm is not included in the draft; Councilman Kashwick replied the site does not meet the size requirement and clarified that the ordinance's purpose is a matter of perception, not protection with any future Governing Body having the right to repeal it. He explained the protection of the sites comes from them being part of the Recreation and Open Space Inventory administered by the Green Acres Program of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Councilman Kashwick emphasized that any parcel the Commission deems worthy of protection should be made part of the Inventory reconciled this year, regardless of its acreage. Chairman MacDonald suggested indicating the area of each parcel listed within the draft. Councilman Kashwick noted while there was consideration made to including additional properties within the ordinance such as Oradell Reservoir (United Water Co. already has a conservation easement with an unknown state-wide agency), the list will consist of Borough-owned properties only; he stated any future prospects would require a new ordinance. Ms. Abrams inquired why the Country Farm Stand, formerly the Abram Demaree Farm, is not included in the draft; Councilman said the tract is privately-owned.

Planning Board

Mr. Di Dio stated the Planning Board, having recently received a new filing of an application to redevelop "Closter Plaza", scheduled weekly meetings to expedite the review process. He reported several postponements have since occurred and the thought is the Board will be dismissing the case for lack of prosecution so to compel the applicant to re-file. Mr. Di Dio believed the developer's intention is still to have Whole Foods Market as an anchor store. Councilman Kashwick stated the reasoning behind the applicant's delay is the discovery of an

antiquated ordinance prohibiting more than 1 principal building per lot in all zoning districts; he revealed the applicant's proposal includes the construction of a new detached building which would exacerbate the site's non-conformity of having 4 existing buildings and require a use variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Mr. Di Dio reported the Governing Body introduced a proposed amendment to said ordinance at its January 9th meeting, which failed on the 1st reading.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Scholz explained the STC has yet to decide which species are suitable for the Borough's right-of-ways along thoroughfares. Chairman MacDonald asked about the trees planted under utility power lines at the intersection of Cedar Lane and Harrington Avenue. Councilman Kashwick responded the low-growing trees were part of New Jersey's Safe Routes to School grant program.

Green Team

Ms. Cummings stated the Team continues to collaborate with the Nature Center, but informed that membership has declined due to people relocating or losing interest. She said she has reached out to Girl Scouts in hopes of creating an educational program. She reported the most recent showing of the Team's film series was "Dirt! The Movie" inspired by the book, "Dirt: The Ecstatic Skin of the Earth" authored by William Bryant Logan; she stated there were 50 to 60 viewers in attendance. Ms. Cummings informed of a film series called the Green Screen being operated out of the Borough of Westwood's public library and movie theatre. She said Westwood's next showing will be "Chasing Ice", which tells of a photographer who documents the melting of the polar ice caps.

Ms. Cummings asks the Commission's opinion about having Harriet Shugarman of the Climate Reality Project (known for previously having former Vice President Albert Gore as a key figure) speak in exchange for \$100.00 to \$200.00 paid to the Project as a form of honorarium. She stated such an event's venue should be the Nature Center, not the Closter Public Library, because the latter's equipment is unreliable, its staff is anxious to close no later than 9:00pm and the overall atmosphere is not relaxed. Councilman Kashwick revealed that Ms. Shugarman is well versed and highly regarded upon which the Commission agreed to such an event; Ms. Cummings said it would be advertised as a joint effort between the Team and Commission. Ms. Mayer stressed that the Nature Center was at its maximum occupancy during the Green Team's last film viewing; Chairman MacDonald felt it important to have the Borough's library staff and equipment be accommodating especially for such important events.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC will be voting on a proposal to reconstruct/enlarge a chicken coop at 119 Hickory Lane; she stated a nomination report should soon be finalized for a privately-owned defunct railroad depot to be designated as a historic landmark. She noted that an adjacent freight house, the only 1 remaining from the Northern Branch rail line, would not be nominated at this time because such could be met with opposition.



New Business

Councilman Kashwick said the Governing Body will be introducing a Resolution supporting both the New Jersey Highlands Council and Highlands Act in protecting against decimation from over development a region that supplies Closter with much of its drinking water. He said another forthcoming Resolution would be to support recently proposed legislation by State Senator Raymond Lesniak, which would ensure the stowing away of trash throughout New Jersey; Councilman Kashwick said such would coincide with a planned event on March 24th at the Nature Center.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative reports:

Planning Board

◇ 37 Mac Arthur Avenue: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving the construction of a new single-family house. The Commission had no comments.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

◇ 11 Homans Avenue: This is an application for both Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals for the tenant separation of a non-residential building whereby 3 tenant spaces to be created would be occupied by the following establishments: 1.) "Tiger Kim's Taekwondo Center"; 2.) undetermined retail use; 3.) undetermined office use. The Commission had no comments.



There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Mr. Scholz, to adjourn the meeting at 9:42pm. The motion passed by acclamation.