



# **Environmental Commission**

March 19, 2013

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Councilman Kashwick called to order, at 8:04pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, March 19, 2013 at Borough Hall.



## **2013 Reorganization**

### *Oaths of Office*

- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): Thomas Colwell
- ◇ Alternate #1 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): Ethel Abrams
- ◇ Alternate #2 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2014): VACANT
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): Jaewook Jun
- ◇ Associate Member (1-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2013): VACANT



## **Attendance**

### *Present*

- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
- Jaewook Jun- Associate Member

### *Absent*

- Paul MacDonald- Chairman
- Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- VACANT- Alternate #2
- VACANT- Associate Member



## **Miscellaneous**

*In lieu of the absent Chairman MacDonald, Councilman Kashwick chaired the meeting.*

Mr. Colwell introduced himself by stating he has resided in the Borough for approximately 5 years, prior to which he lived and was raised in the Boroughs of Demarest and Bergenfield

respectively. He informed that he completed a Bergen County-sponsored course in 2012 pertaining to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program; he noted he serves as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Board Vice Chairperson of Vantage Health System, Inc., the entity that conceived the recently-constructed apartment complex for affordable housing (1 Railroad Avenue). He stated his occupation involves nonprofit direct mail, some of which tends to be junk mail nature, but he pointed out that some of his clients include Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Ocean Conservancy, American Rivers and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

A motion was made by Ms. Cummings and seconded by Mr. Di Dio, to approve the minutes for the February 19, 2013 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation with Mr. Isaacson abstaining.

Councilman Kashwick opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments; no one wished to be heard.

Councilman Kashwick stated no new correspondence has been received by the Commission.



## **Old Business**

### **Trails**

Mr. Isaacson stated he has been exchanging emails with both Christopher Connolly and Gary Willick of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference pertaining to the proposed inter-borough trail system, a natural progression following the opening of the “Cross-Closter Trail”, of which trail blazing and maps have been produced. He reported the “Northern Valley Trail System” has the support of Closter, Demarest, the Borough of Northvale and, to some extent, the Borough of Norwood. He reiterated that the use of the Alpine Scout Camp for purposes of linking trails is still unknown due to its leadership’s concern about enabling pedophiles access to the grounds if the general public is permitted to wander through during the warmer climate when the Boy Scouts are present. He stated there remains some difficulty with connecting to both the Borough of Rockleigh and Palisades Interstate Park via the unimproved portion of Ruckman Road; he noted the goal is to eventually link trails from the Borough of Fort Lee to the New York state border. For the time being, Mr. Isaacson stressed that overtures are being made to the Boroughs of Tenafly and Cresskill with the hopes that the Conference’s involvement will convince them to participate.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned if there are alternate trails that skirt the Alpine Scout Camp; Mr. Isaacson replied an option would be to travel east on Ruckman Road (paper street) because while it is partially situated within the Northern New Jersey Council’s campsite (not the New York Greater Councils’ territory), it is, nonetheless, a public right-of-way and the Camp cannot prevent its usage by others. He continued explaining that such would allow for a connection to Route 9W. He revealed suggestions have been made by others to instead continue north to Norwood and then east at that point, an area of trails he is not yet familiar with. Councilman Kashwick informed that the Joseph B. Clarke Rail Trail, located in Orangetown, New York, was recently the subject of an article in a local publication which spoke of both Norwood and Northvale possibly connecting to it from the south; he hinted that Closter could do the same via the inactive Northern Branch freight rail line, so long as the connection would be north of 10 Railroad Avenue (Capital Hardware Supply, Inc.) which may become a future customer of CSX

Transportation Co., operator of the rail line. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the need to preserve the existing railroad tracks in the event the freight line is converted to a light rail passenger train route traveling through Closter and north to the eventual Tappan Zee Bridge replacement; Councilman Kashwick clarified that passenger trains would be located on the east side of the Hudson River and connect in Rockland County. Mr. Isaacson said it has been rumored the replaced Tappan Zee Bridge would become an aerial greenway, much like the Hi Line in Manhattan; he believed, however, such a creation would be more appropriate for bicyclists than pedestrians/hikers due to its size. Councilman Kashwick stated, in any event, the tracks within Closter would need replacement and, for safety reasons, installing a trail parallel to the tracks would not be permissible unless there was enough clearance for fencing. He believed if there were 2 sets of tracks side-by-side, a bicycle path could be installed to bring traffic to the Borough's downtown area. Mr. Isaacson revealed a bicycle shop, "Closter Cycle", would soon be opening for business at 214 Closter Dock Road, which could necessitate more bicycle racks within the downtown area.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned what funding would be necessary for a rails-to-trails project. Councilman Kashwick responded that either the Borough could fund it unilaterally or, if a minimum of 3 municipalities were to join the effort, there would be potential county, state and federal grants available for assistance. He stated CSX Transportation Co. would first have to abandon the railway or allow for the project to proceed, which is possible in various ways.

Mr. Isaacson suggested a narrow and striped bicycle lane be considered by the Governing Body within the thoroughfare from Piermont Road to Ver Valen Street and terminating in the downtown area to provide safe access to and from "Closter Cycle". Mr. Di Dio cautioned the Borough may not be in a position to do such with county roads, which Piermont Road, Closter Dock Road and Harrington Avenue are; Mr. Isaacson reconsidered and suggested Homans Avenue be used instead. Ms. Abrams questioned the need for a bicycle lane if a customer intending to purchase a bike would likely drive to said store; Mr. Isaacson disagreed, saying such an establishment would attract bicyclists in the middle of their excursions, be it as a rest stop or to fix a flat tire. He also believed that upon the redevelopment of "Closter Plaza", both Homans Avenue and Ver Valen Street would see a major increase in traffic flow.

#### Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg inquired on behalf of Farm volunteer, Mary Mayer, as to whether or not volunteers from the high school senior service program would be available to assist at the Farm and with Borough trails this season as a means of completing community service as part of their academic obligations; she said it is assumed both Ms. Mayer and John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, would supervise all on-site activities and Ms. Mayer would coordinate with the school administration. Councilman Kashwick said he would confer with Chairman MacDonald, who has supervised the volunteers with trail activities in years past, and decide if the volunteers are needed this year.

#### Bicycle Racks

In light of Mr. Scholz' absence, no reporting was available on racks.

#### Brochure/Flier

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the Mayor's office anticipated the recently-appointed committee (charged with evaluating the pros and cons of privatizing the Borough's garbage collection) would design the layout of a Borough-sponsored brochure/flier for purposes of

informing the public about sustainability. She stated Mr. Isaacson, who is a member of said committee, estimated the cost of printing 1,000 copies of a version similar to Tenafly's, would be \$300.00 to \$400.00. Councilman Kashwick disagreed, saying the Green Team would be a much more suitable body to create the prototype. Acknowledging more paper would be required, Ms. Cummings felt separate brochures/fliers should highlight individual topics so the public is not overwhelmed by information foreign to many; she elaborated that a first printing could discuss waste while future editions could concentrate on clean air energy, conservation, etc. Mr. Isaacson reacted by suggesting a website which would be of no cost and easily accessible to the public; Ms. Cummings replied the Green Team has had its own website for 2 years and already disseminates green material. Mr. Isaacson stated the Chamber of Commerce places its directory within the Borough-issued calendar, which compels the public to its website. Ms. Abrams said she uses said calendar constantly for information on the Borough's recycling practices and schedules. Mr. Isaacson pointed out that from his participation in the committee, he learned pizza boxes are not recyclable due to the presence of grease. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg opted for a brochure/flier since the elderly tend not to go on-line, a population particularly in need of being educated on green practices; Mr. Isaacson disagreed, saying in the very near future all living generations will be computer savvy.

A motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to allow the Green Team to expend up to \$400.00 from the Commission's operating budget to produce a sustainability brochure/flier on recyclable paper, which is to be posted on the Borough website; the motion passed by acclamation.



## **Liaison Reports**

### **Governing Body**

Councilman Kashwick stated the Borough's 2013 operating budget was introduced on March 13<sup>th</sup> and will likely be adopted on April 10<sup>th</sup>, noting the Commission's portion increased from last year's \$2,950.00 to \$3,000.00. He informed that open space funding requests are due April 1<sup>st</sup> and explained that subsequent to a municipal operating budget being approved, a capital budget, of which open space funding is part, is prepared. Councilman Kashwick believed the Commission should request such monies for the following: 1.) permanent plaque at Scholz Bridge; 2.) more prominent "No Dumping" signage to replace existing; 3.) water utility service upgrades at Mac Bain Farm (cost unknown until consultation with Borough Administrator); 4.) tree plantings at Ruckman Park (\$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00 estimate as per Mr. Scholz).

Councilman Kashwick noted that the Ruckman Park project, which is being coordinated by both the Shade Tree Commission and Recreation Commission, could be seen as a capital project if said trees survive more than 5 years. Mr. Isaacson suggested additional bicycle racks being part of the request as well; he reiterated the Chamber of Commerce is considering installation of 1 each at both "Heidenberg Plaza" and "Closter Commons". Councilman Kashwick advised against buying more racks until it is confirmed that the Department of Public Works has installed (including concrete base) 2 recently purchased.

Councilman Kashwick explained that open space funding originates from a small percentage of property tax collection and is dedicated for 4 types of expenditures: 1.) acquisitions and improvements; 2.) recreation and active parks; 3.) farmland preservation; 4.) historic preservation. He stated the relevant bodies, on an annual basis, request funding and the

Governing Body determines the allocation of monies. Mr. Colwell inquired if it would be appropriate to request the construction of a restroom at Mac Bain Farm as part of its water utility service upgrades proposal, stressing the importance of such an appurtenance to visiting families with young children. Councilman Kashwick said it may be possible to redirect funds set aside for the abandoned barn project on-site, which included the installation of a restroom. Mr. Isaacson revealed that the Borough allocated \$214,000.00 towards the future restrooms at Mollicone Park and Schauble Park; Councilman Kashwick clarified that the actual cost of said project will be \$180,000.00 to \$200,000.00. Mr. Isaacson suggested using portable toilets, a cheap alternative (approximately \$800.00 each for a 1-year rental), at Mac Bain Farm for the upcoming growing season until water and sewer connection issues have been resolved. Ms. Cummings questioned if estimates had been received for a compost (waterless) toilet during the vetting of the barn project; Councilman Kashwick replied they had not. Mr. Isaacson revealed the City of New York, at a cost of \$1,800,000.00, hopes to install an eco-friendly toilet in Prospect Park, located in Brooklyn, whereby human waste would be converted to fertilizer; he noted such a procedure is currently illegal in the State of New Jersey. Mr. Colwell reported that during recent travels to New Jersey beach communities, he viewed shed-like structures containing restrooms along the shoreline, which have been constructed by local contractors retained at low cost through the bidding process. Councilman Kashwick stated that the Borough went out to bid for both prefabricated and constructed on-site proposals, which revealed a minimal cost differential. Mr. Isaacson pointed out that government projects tend to cost more because prevailing wages must be paid to labor and the facilities must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Mr. Colwell believed residents, especially parents, would respond if donations for such projects were asked of them in a proper fashion.

#### Planning Board

Mr. Di Dio stated there to be no new activity to report.

#### Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Isaacson reported that possible clear-cutting of trees has occurred at 437-439 Durie Avenue, a 2-family house being renovated.

#### Green Team

Ms. Cummings stated the Team's next Borough-wide garbage cleanup/recycling event will take place on April 6<sup>th</sup>. She asked for volunteers who can use their own trucks/vans to transport garbage and rubbish collected throughout the day to the front lawn of Borough Hall as a means of illustrating the urgency of the event's theme. She said there would be a scavenger hunt for the youth with prizes for "Funniest", "Most Unusual" and "Dirtiest" items collected. She said the Nature Center, along with Borough Hall, would serve as staging areas. Ms. Cummings noted that Bergen County would provide gloves, tools, bags, etc. for the participants; she explained that while the supermarket, A&P, should be donating food and drink, more donations are needed. Councilman Kashwick asked that advertisements be available to distribute to those attending a Sierra Club-sponsored event at the Nature Center on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Cummings said there is a bi-state cleanup event that is unfortunately scheduled for the same time this year as the Borough's. She stated the Team will provide a table with material/information at Norwood's upcoming Earth Day festivities. Ms. Cummings announced 2 new members of the Team, Maria and Francesca Costa.

#### Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC voted on March 18<sup>th</sup> to designate both a privately-owned defunct railroad depot and 421 Durie Avenue (Harold Hess Lustron House) as historic

landmarks. She noted the nominations will be forwarded to the Governing Body, then the Planning Board before returning the Governing Body for final passage. She revealed that the individual owners of 421 Durie Avenue are in the process of getting divorced; she explained the wife has opined that the building should not be designated while the husband seems to be in favor of preserving the site. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg acknowledged the structure is in deterioration but stated it is 1 of only 2 post-World War II, prefabricated houses remaining in Bergen County (the other being located in the Borough of Alpine). She pointed out that as part of the HPC's nomination, it was recommended the site be purchased by the Borough and possibly converted to a museum or rental property whereby a tenant would agree to have the building available for public viewing 4 times per year. She indicated the HPC has issued a moratorium against demolition in the meantime. Councilman Kashwick revealed the asking price is \$389,000.00. Mr. Colwell questioned if the structure could be relocated; Mr. Isaacson replied that because it is made entirely of metal, it would have to dis- and reassembled, costing \$200,000.00 to do so.



## **New Business**

Councilman Kashwick reminded that the Borough's bi-annual Joint Meeting, a forum at which land use matters are discussed, is on April 27<sup>th</sup>. He also reported that the Mayor's office has forwarded information on a vegetation management pilot program being initiated by either utility companies and/or the New Jersey State League of Municipalities as a means to address trees' interference with overhead power lines. He expressed his skepticism due to the utilities' lackluster history with tree preservation. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed that according to a member of the City of Englewood Environmental Commission, utility companies are considering the use of helicopters to cut away the tops of trees growing into their wires, an approach which the Commission disapproved of. Mr. Isaacson stated the industry should universally install all future utilities underground.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stressed the Borough should be recycling more than the items marked as #'s 1 and 2 of the Society of the Plastic Industry (SPI) resin identification coding system, which is identified on packaging inside a 3-chasing-arrow recycling symbol. She believed the City of San Francisco is recycling almost all #'s of the SPI system. Mr. Isaacson stated the Borough's recycling vendor (Miele Sanitation Co.) merely handpicks comingled recyclables from conveyor belts. Ms. Cummings informed of an organization called TerraCycle which accepts all types of recyclables so long as they are pre-packaged before being shipped. Councilman Kashwick stressed there must be a market for a particular type of item so that a recycling vendor sees a profit.

Ms. Abrams questioned if existing Commission fliers in circulation need updating to reflect the Borough's trail system as it is currently; Councilman Kashwick responded said fliers are accurate as is; he suggested more copies being printed until a new version is produced once the "Northern Valley Trail System" is completed.

Mr. Isaacson stressed there are numerous trees in the public right-of-way throughout the Borough that are deteriorating and/or in a hazardous condition, noting there are 5 to 6 trees along Columbus Avenue that fit such a description. Mr. Colwell concurred, saying when Cedar

Court was last repaved, it was supposed to become a 1-way thoroughfare to reduce its width and protect abutting sycamores, but it did not.

Mr. Jun questioned whose responsibility it is to maintain a tree planted by the STC within the Borough's right-of-way; Councilman Kashwick responded that the STC will install a deer guard upon initial planting and provide pruning every 6 years based on election districts. He pointed out the abutting property owner should water the tree periodically following initial planting. He explained the decision of where the STC will plant trees is based on where trees have been lost/removed, which takes priority over selecting locations never adorned with a tree.



**Plan Review**

Being no land use board applications were forwarded to the Commission for its consideration, plan review was not conducted.



There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to adjourn the meeting at 8:59pm. The motion passed by acclamation.