



Environmental Commission

May 21, 2013

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 8:05pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, May 21, 2013 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Paul MacDonald- Chairman
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)

Absent

- Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- VACANT- Alternate #2
- Jaewook Jun- Associate Member
- VACANT- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Councilman Kashwick and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to approve the minutes for the April 16, 2013 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

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

Chairman MacDonald stated there was no correspondence to read into the record.



Old Business

Trails

Mr. Isaacson stated he recently met with Jonathan Martin, a representative from the New York-Jersey Trail Conference, at Mac Bain Farm, and they walked its trail to the entrance of the Alpine Scout Camp; he said Mr. Martin would need to gain the approval of his superiors to allow for the Conference to open and maintain trails (via its contingency of sawyers, volunteers, etc.) in connection with the proposed "Northern Valley Trail System". Mr. Isaacson said the Conference is already involved in such tasks at the Nature Center. He stated the next obstacle is to gain the support of the Boy Scouts' regional leadership (Northern New Jersey Council) in using Ruckman Road (paper street) to link trails east of Route 9W to those of Palisades

Interstate Park; he reiterated that while its permission is not required for use of a public right-of-way, the Council's concern about pedophiles if the general public is permitted to wander through during the warmer climate remains. He believed, however, that the organization does not operate summer sessions on-site but merely utilizes the lands as camping sites during those months. Mr. Isaacson noted that, according to Mr. Martin, because its funds are low, the Council has approached the Conference about clearing trails, which he felt could lead to an opportunity of compromise on the question of using Ruckman Road for expanding the "Northern Valley Trail System". Mr. Isaacson said the Boy Scouts' Greater New York Council has taken issue with Ruckman Road merely skirting the Alpine Scout Camp only and not traveling directly through the grounds. He explained that to the north of the paper street lies the Camp and several private residences while to the south is Kiku Japanese Restaurant on Rout 9W. He stated the Borough Engineer, Nick De Nicola, PE, estimates the northerly distance from the restaurant to the pedestrian bridge crossing over the Palisades Interstate Parkway to be approximately 1/5 mile. Mr. Isaacson informed that both the Palisades Interstate Park Commission and the Borough of Alpine's Mayor's office takes no exception to the inter-borough trail project. He hoped that in the future the Alpine Scout Camp could connect to the spectacular trails in the Borough of Rockleigh and the rails-to-trails layout in Tappan, New York adjacent to Finn Mc Cool's Restaurant. Mr. Isaacson informed that the Borough of Norwood plans on developing its Fox Hill Trails, to the west of which is its 14-acre forest (Central Woods) and the Borough of Northvale.

Chairman MacDonald said both Closter and the Borough of Demarest's trails have different colored blazing; Mr. Isaacson agreed there is overlapping and expressed concern such could cause confusion and delay for emergency services responding to an incident within the trail system. He revealed that for a recent charity run it sponsored, Demarest used red markers to direct the runners through the trails, which resulted in the mismatched blazing; he suggested ribbons, not permanent markers, be used in the future for such events. Mr. Isaacson anticipated the Conference would produce 1 of its sought-after trail maps once its participation in the trail project was confirmed.

Chairman MacDonald believed the sign near the unnamed bridge on the north side of Brook Street is unwelcoming and should be replaced since it fails to inform the public of trails in the vicinity; he felt it combined with the surrounding manicured lawn implies that the area is privately-owned. Councilman Kashwick revealed that the sign in question is actually an orange reflective road sign. Mr. Isaacson reminded the Commission it had been considering the installation of a permanent plaque at Scholz Bridge to replace the temporary signage weather-damaged since its dedication ceremony; he noted that said bridge has yet to be anchored to prevent it from being compromised again by flooding waters. He said that he would contact the Department of Public Works (DPW) on the matter along with tree removal as a result of Hurricane Sandy. Mr. Colwell suggested a gravel path at the Brook Street bridge to better identify the area; Mr. Isaacson agreed, saying such could become an Eagle Scout project. He said geocaching could entice youth to make use of the trail system, noting the Green Team could promote such an activity. Mr. Colwell suggested a boulder with engraving be placed at the entrance to the trails at Brook Street in lieu of a conventional sign; he mentioned he would get an estimate from the establishment, Written In Stone (84 Herbert Avenue), on the cost of sandblasting. In terms of selecting an appropriate boulder, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested inquiring with the Teaneck Creek Conservancy, and Mr. Colwell said he would contact several landscaping operations in the area, noting several boulders were recently removed from The Farm in Closter (515 Piermont Road) prior to it vacating the site; Mr. Isaacson said the DPW may have boulders remaining from last year's dredging of the pond at the Nature Center.

Mac Bain Farm

In light of Mr. Di Dio's absence, Chairman MacDonald said 11 volunteers from the high school senior service program ascended on the Farm yesterday (an additional 8 reported to the Nature Center), noting that after planting is completed on-site and before full-scale weeding is necessary, some of them will be relocated elsewhere to do trail maintenance. Councilman Kashwick stated several shopping carts belonging to the supermarket, A&P (400 Demarest Avenue), are situated on the adjacent Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park and should be removed; he said branches should be used to delineate the locations of trails in the vicinity due to the extensive erosion. Chairman MacDonald stated there is also stagnant water in the parking lot behind the grocery store which is not draining to the abutting 10' to 15' long area of maintained lawn that he assumed belongs to A&P. Ms. Cummings stated that during the recent Borough-wide garbage cleanup/recycling event, a large amount of debris (receipts, plastic bags, etc.) originating from the retail store, Kmart (19 Ver Valen Street), was found along the wooded areas of Homans Avenue. Councilman Kashwick said such findings could only lead to an enforcement action by the Borough if the littering is witnessed. Chairman MacDonald informed that full garbage cans behind A&P need to be emptied; Councilman Kashwick stated the cans are maintained by the DPW.

Chairman MacDonald said he discussed the Farm's irrigation project with John Mc Caffrey, its caretaker and resident, who indicated he installed a 3" copper line a decade ago, which was never tied into the water main line. Chairman MacDonald said the Borough Administrator, Richard Sheola, promised to inquire about the prospects of having a water utility meter installed on-site by United Water Co. as well as funding for such. Chairman MacDonald stated Mr. Sheola questioned who would be responsible for the quarterly water utility bill. Councilman Kashwick replied the irrigation system installation, not the water usage payments, would be a capital project. Mr. Isaacson stated it is only fair that the Borough pay the Farm's irrigation utility bill since it pays for the watering of active parks' grounds operated by the Recreation Commission, especially since the Farm provides free food to its residents and serves in preserving the Borough's history as a farming community. Chairman MacDonald believed more oversight on such a matter would be placed on the Farm than ball fields. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg further commented that the Farm is utilized by people of all ages and abilities while the active parks tend to be limited to attracting youngsters. Ms. Cummings commented she has noticed lawn sprinklers operating at active parks during rainstorms on several occasions. Mr. Isaacson said there is a large discrepancy on funds allocated towards passive versus active parks. Mr. Colwell questioned if the Farm would use more water during its 4 to 5 month growing season than the ball fields require (watering occurs every 2 days during the sporting seasons).

Bicycle Racks

Mr. Scholz stated the DPW installed a rack (accommodates 5 to 8 bikes) at Pfeiffer Park near the bus stop on the southwest corner of Closter Dock Road and Piermont Road. He said an additional rack can be placed at Mac Bain Farm, Borough Hall or the Nature Center although the latter may have limited parking space. Chairman MacDonald suggested a larger model may be warranted for the Closter Public Library since it gets substantial use. Mr. Colwell suggested the entrance to a trail site as a possible location. The consensus of the Commission was that a rack should next be installed at Ruckman Park pending approval by the Recreation Commission.

Ruckman Park Tree Plantings

Mr. Scholz said 2 alternating species of trees will be planted along Piermont Road (between the fence and sidewalk) as well as identification signs (means of educating the public) pending approval by the Recreation Commission. Councilman Kashwick informed the selected species

are undetermined types of maple and oak; he noted flowering cherry will be planted between the parking lot and basketball/tennis courts. Mr. Colwell hoped the Park's pathway would remain free of falling seeds and berries so not to hinder children riding bicycles, etc.; Mr. Isaacson replied, based on the chosen species, that acorns would be the concern. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she recently went to the opening of the native garden at the New York Botanical Garden. Ms. Cummings stated that the section of Closter in which she resides was previously known as "The Birches" but noted no such type of tree exists in the area. Chairman MacDonald said the birch tends to become diseased once reaching a 6" caliper measurement; Councilman Kashwick explained the species serves as an interim during forest succession.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Kashwick stated as part of the Borough's 2013 operating budget, \$4,000.00 has been allocated for the 21 tree plantings at Ruckman Park, though George Futterknecht, a member of the Shade Tree Commission (STC), believes an additional \$2,500.00+ is necessary. Councilman Kashwick noted said estimate includes both the removal of several trees (mostly Callery pear) and stump grinding. He stated that a New Jersey-issued grant is available through its "Treasure Our Trees" personalized license plate program, which has a May 31st deadline; he noted the STC wishes to put potential grant monies towards repairing sidewalks in the downtown area. He explained in order to do so, the Borough would have to do an in kind match whereby the State could award \$20,000.00 while \$10,000.00 would be provided by the Borough; he reminded that the STC can only fund tree plantings, not sidewalk repair. Councilman Kashwick said the Borough may also be applying for a State grant to fund not only replacement tree plantings at Ruckman Park but Remembrance Park as well, which is home to the Borough's 9/11 Memorial; Chairman MacDonald was pleased of such since the trees at Remembrance Park have shallow root systems.

As a side note, Chairman MacDonald reported that the celebrated, centuries-old red oak on Cedar Lane in the City of Teaneck may be removed due to possible rot.

Planning Board

In light of Mr. Di Dio's absence, Mr. Isaacson reported that the Board will hold a Work Session on June 5th to review the re-filed application for the redevelopment of "Closter Plaza".

Green Team

Ms. Cummings said the Team was present at the Norwood Earth Day Fair and noted Norwood's Environmental Commission Chairwoman, Christine Hageman hopes to have greater municipal collaboration to increase attendance at future events. Ms. Cumming stated she attended the Green Up Trade Show, sponsored by the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA), and collected material. She wished that Commission members would join the Team and 10 young volunteers marching in the Borough's Memorial Day parade on May 27th. She informed that both the Team and Nature Center would be partaking in "Nature's Calling Day" on June 2nd at the Borough's weekly farmers' market held in the parking lot of the "Closter Commons" shopping center; she stated rain barrels and compost bins would be available for purchase through the BCUA, and Councilman Kashwick stated several nonprofit organizations would be participating in said event. He reminded that the Closter Spring Fair is on June 1st.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she recently met with a teacher who wished to plant a vegetable garden on the ground of Hillside Elementary School to educate the student body; she said she advised her to contact Frank Vastano, owner of Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane) to see if he would make donations in exchange for free publicity. She informed that she hosted a recent gathering at her residence to discuss recycling options for the Borough, which is lagging behind the rest of Bergen County; she revealed that many municipalities have weekly collection and several accept #'s 1 through 7 of the Society of the Plastic Industry (SPI) resin identification coding system, which is identified on packaging inside a 3-chasing-arrow recycling symbol (Closter takes #'s 1 and 2 only). Ms. Bouton-Goldberg further stated that several recycle flower pots, toothbrushes and toys. She explained the Borough of Wyckoff has a "Nifty Fifty" program whereby it seeks to attain a 50% recycling rate and a \$100,000.00 property tax savings in the process; she stated the Borough of Franklin Lakes operates a similar initiative having a 60% goal.

In speaking with Mark Vangieri of the BCUA, Ms. Cummings said she was informed business owners and merchants are required to recycle and the municipalities are charged with enforcing such; she noted that Closter does not do so. Mr. Isaacson stated he was a member of the committee charged with evaluating the pros and cons of privatizing the Borough's garbage collection (its recommendations will be released in the near future) and said it felt the education of parents is of utmost importance since they often are too lazy to rinse out containers and opt instead to place them in the garbage; he revealed that, according to the DPW, 90% of the Borough's garbage collected contains recyclable material. Mr. Isaacson reiterated that the Borough's calendar devotes 2 pages to the issue of recycling, but he stressed the Governing Body should negotiate with its recycling vendor (Miele Sanitation Co.) on having weekly pick-up to entice residents into recycling on the notion that items would not have to remain in their homes for 2 weeks. He noted that garbage is a \$5 billion industry with most of it getting shipped overseas rather than recycled in the United States. Chairman MacDonald said there is plenty more than #'s 1 and 2 plastics being brought to the Borough's recycling center, which would be a wasted effort on the part of the residents if Miele Sanitation is not processing those additional items. Ms. Cummings suggested having feedback from the Recycling Coordinator, Carol Dacey, to further the discussion; Mr. Isaacson felt representatives of the Wyckoff and Franklin Lakes programs spoken of earlier should be sought out for advice. He noted that the recycling center does not accept batteries, and he refused its suggestion to dispose of them in the garbage; Chairman MacDonald noted that the Bergen County Department of Health Services (Environmental Program) does not accept them unless they are rechargeable. Ms. Abrams said she is under the impression they do not contain mercury. In order to take advantage of social media, Mr. Isaacson said he would set up a link to the Green Team's Facebook page so that Commission members can become its administrators; Ms. Cummings concurred, though she believed the Borough's pending brochure/flier should still become a reality to assist those who are not computer savvy. Mr. Colwell felt it beneficial to organize an assembly for students at Hillside Elementary School to educate them and, in turn, they would ensure their parents practice recycling at home; he mentioned a group of 3rd and 4th graders recently wrote to the Mayor and Council demanding that plastic bottles be recycled in more volume.



New Business

Chairman MacDonald stated that Donald Moore, a representative from Stantec, Inc., explained that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) asked his firm to determine if an existing plume (effluent) located under the parking lot of the A&P supermarket is shifting towards a nearby stream in Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park. Chairman MacDonald said there have been monitoring wells in place since 2000 and Stantec, Inc. has taken over the project as of a few months ago. He stated he was present 3 weeks ago when 3 initial well points (perforated pipes with 8' length and 1.5" diameter) were established to retrieve water samples. He believed that the origin of the contamination on-site is a former dry cleaning establishment. Chairman MacDonald stressed the Borough had no financial obligation in the matter. Councilman Kashwick questioned if Stantec, Inc. gained Borough permission to perform testing on public land; Chairman MacDonald said he did not know but that he made the Mayor's office aware of the situation. Mr. Isaacson said the same protocol was most likely used in the remediation effort for the adjacent DTR Automotive Services Center (422 Demarest Avenue); he revealed a lawn mower repair shop previously existed at 400 Demarest Avenue as well.

Mr. Isaacson stated that Teterboro Airport wishes to expand its runways and in order to do so, it must create wetlands elsewhere to mitigate the wetland to be lost through its expansion; he revealed that a parcel in Closter (a 14-acre site along the Oradell Reservoir near Roden Way) was chosen to accommodate wetlands but is owned by United Water Co. He said the water utility promised no tree removals would be required, only the clearing of invasive undergrowth (Japanese barberry and knot weed); he said it also pledged to plant native understory vegetation as well as enclose the area with fencing to hinder deer infiltration. Mr. Isaacson expressed concern, however, that herbicides would be used within 200' of the Borough's potable water source.

Mr. Isaacson inquired about a circulating document dated July 10, 2012 which details the Tenakill Brook Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan, a project funded by the NJDEP and coordinated by Rutgers University; the Commission had no knowledge.

Ms. Abrams questioned if the Commission could place a resource table at both Closter's A&P supermarket and weekly farmers' market to distribute material she has collected from events; she also inquired about starting petitions against hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and on behalf of groups such as Food & Water Watch. Councilman Kashwick replied he believed that such tables should fall under the auspices of the Green Team being the Commission is a government/political entity. He explained the Governing Body could be petitioned to adopt a Resolution supporting or disapproving certain activities; he noted that Governor Chris Christie vetoed a bill by the New Jersey Legislature that would have banned fracking. Mr. Isaacson suggested starting online petitions.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative reports:

Planning Board

19 Ver Valen Street: This is an application for both Site plan and Subdivision Approvals involving the redevelopment of "Closter Plaza". Mr. Isaacson stated the retained and proposed

landscaping along Ver Valen Street may hinder the view of storefronts; Councilman Kashwick said such should not be a concern of the Commission. Mr. Isaacson noted there are 20 tree removals being proposed and that the new lot to be created through subdivision could allow for the construction of a new bank since there is apparently a deed restriction preventing the presence of more than 1 bank on the existing lot. He stated the new building (supposedly to be occupied by Whole Foods Market) is approximately 41,000 sf and that both Kmart and Dollar Tree's leases expire in 2015. Mr. Isaacson stated there are 50+ year-old metal drainage pipes under the parking lot where streams flow. The Commission recommended the following: 1.) increase width of narrowed sidewalks along both Homans Avenue and Ver Valen Street to ensure pedestrian safety and provide buffer areas between sidewalks and thoroughfares; 2.) provide native species ground cover; 3.) consider incorporating green elements into construction; 4.) provide adequate tree cover in portion of parking lot facing proposed building (labeled "Retail A" on site plan); 5.) determine integrity of drainage system beneath parking lot (site was formerly wetlands); 6.) prevent conditions conducive to water stagnation;

Zoning Board of Adjustment

411 Piermont Road: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals involving the construction of outdoor (rooftop) restaurant dining accommodations. The Commission recommended there be prevention of light pollution onto neighboring properties.

437-439 Durie Avenue: This is an application for Use Variance and Site Plan Approvals involving both the 4-family use conversion of a 2-family house and the 1-family use conversion of a detached garage. The Commission recommended a landscaping proposal be submitted, especially in light of several tree being removed, possibly without Borough permission.



There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to adjourn the meeting at 10:10pm. The motion passed by acclamation.