



# **Environmental Commission**

November 19, 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, November 19, 2013 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

*Present*

- Paul MacDonald- Chairman
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- Keith Scholz- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- Robert Di Dio- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Associate Member (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
- Jaewook Jun- Associate Member

*Absent*

- John Kashwick- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- VACANT- Alternate #2
- VACANT- Associate Member



**Miscellaneous**

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Jun, to approve the minutes for the October 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 read into the record correspondence received by the Commission, specifically, a memo from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) giving a status report to the ongoing investigation of potential contamination caused by a former dry cleaning establishment located within the Closter Plaza shopping center; he noted the topic would be further discussed later in the evening.



**Old Business**

*Trails*

Mr. Isaacson said he is continuing discussions with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to ensure it would assist in developing/maintaining the proposed “Northern Valley Trail System”. He revealed that, as per the Mayor’s office, the Conference has for several years received compensation (amounting to several thousand dollars) from the Borough for its

collaboration on boardwalk projects at the Nature Center. Ms. Cummings, a former board member of the Center, recalled that she was present during several discussions on the Conference's assistance, and the Center was always under the impression it was participating gratis on behalf of the Borough. Chairman MacDonald stated he would seek clarity on the Conference's previous arrangements with the Borough.

Mr. Isaacson said he provided the Conference with maps to allow for brainstorming how to link the Alpine Scout Camp to the Palisades Interstate Park. He suggested, for the time being, that the Commission scale back its vision for the inter-borough trail project and concentrate on establishing a link with a municipality in 1 direction. Chairman MacDonald questioned if the Nature Center is under the jurisdiction of the Commission being it is construed as a passive park; Mr. Isaacson replied the parcel apparently remains zoned as an industrial area (District #5), while clarifying the Governing Body recently adopted the creation of a conservation zoning district. He further explained the Center, a private entity, leases land from the Borough. Mr. Isaacson stated any Conference assistance with the inter-borough trail project would be minimal, but its mere involvement should influence organizations like the Boy Scouts' Northern New Jersey Council (proposed trail would dissect its parcel via paper street portion of Ruckman Road) and Greater New York Council (proposed trail would merely skirt its parcel) to take no exception to the connection.

### Green Team

Mr. Jun, a senior year high school student, informed he intends to major in environmental studies in college, with his 1<sup>st</sup> choice being Yale University. He stated that in order to ensure the Green Team will always be comprised of, in part, high school students, recruiting of underclassmen is occurring to replace graduating members; he hoped this year's enrollment goals will be met by February 2014.

Mr. Jun said the Team wishes to organize a fundraiser for victims of the recent Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines via the sale of reusable bags to the public; Mr. Isaacson commended the idea, but he believed the donations should benefit victims of the November 17, 2013 tornado outbreak in Illinois or, in the alternative, victims of both natural disasters should receive the monies. Mr. Di Dio questioned from where the funds to purchase the bags would originate; Mr. Jun responded he researched online that 100 bags would cost \$60.00 to \$70.00. He noted some funds have already been collected through an Earth Day event at Tenakill Middle School. He suggested having a table set up in the A&P supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue) to offer bags to shoppers. Mr. Di Dio stressed the Governing Body and Borough Attorney should be made aware of such intentions to confirm no legal and/or financial concerns would arise from the Team collecting money from the public and then distributing it under the cover of a Borough organization. Mr. Isaacson believed Mr. Jun's stated price for 100 bags to be quite cheap and expressed it would be worthwhile to spend \$1.00 to \$2.00 more per bag for higher quality features such as silk-screening. He offered to pay for such a shipment of bags initially and be reimbursed by the Borough afterwards; he said that way any legal and/or financial pitfalls are avoided. Chairman MacDonald stressed the importance of the Commission sending a cooperative message to the region's student body that they can collaborate with each other on this and future joint efforts. Mr. Colwell opined the Commission should buy bags in bulk to hand out at several Borough-sponsored events throughout the year as well as donate some to the Team for said fundraiser; he suggested the remaining bags could be given to Borough Hall for distribution to the public in general as a reminder of future events. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg recommended the black and green mesh bags, dispersed by the Commission several years ago to create sustainability awareness, be offered again. Mr. Isaacson stated he would collect estimates

on such bags being purchased in bulk; Chairman MacDonald requested Mr. Isaacson determine how many mesh bags of a similar quality could be bought for \$500.00.

Ms. Abrams inquired about raising awareness with respect to climate change by inviting guest speakers to educate residents at public events; Ms. Cummings replied the Green Team hosted such a presentation approximately 1 year ago. Ms. Abrams informed she recently attended the viewing of the film, *Gasland Part II*, at First Presbyterian Church in the City of Englewood and made contact with both the mother of its director (Josh Fox) and a representative of the Food & Water Watch organization, who has certification from The Climate Reality Project (founded by former Vice President Albert Gore). Ms. Abrams asked if a speaking engagement could be arranged; Ms. Cummings felt that the Team should first secure a presentation from renowned environmentalist, Harriet Shugarman. She further noted the Nature Center hosted an event in 2012 attended by a climatologist from Rutgers University. Ms. Abrams suggested any event should involve discussion on hydraulic fracturing. Chairman MacDonald said the Closter Public Library should be considered for a venue to hold such an event. Ms. Cummings interjected, saying it is difficult to have any meaningful question and answer session after presentations at the Library because its employees wish to close the building promptly at 9:00pm; furthermore, she said none of the library employees are proficient in operating the computer technology available on-site and, thus, she concluded the Nature Center is a preferable venue. Mr. Di Dio informed that an advertisement could be placed in the publication, Northern Valley Suburbanite, free of charge.

#### Mac Bain Farm

Mr. Di Dio stated there were no new matters to discuss. Mr. Jun applauded the large turnout at the recent Harvest Festival. Mr. Isaacson detailed the following invoice items totaling \$961.35 received from John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, for reimbursement of money he fronted towards the Festival: 1.) \$255.00 each for 2 palettes each containing 140 “sugar” (miniature) pumpkins; 2.) \$225.00 for 1 palette containing 75 “face” (large) pumpkins; 3.) \$10.00 each for 7 bales of hay; 4.) \$100.00 for fuel; 5.) \$56.35 for sales tax. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Commission budgeted only \$500.00 for the event. He believed future Festivals should have such items provided for by the Farm itself rather than having to purchase them from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. Chairman MacDonald implied that when and where the Farm’s pumpkins were planted this season explained why so few were part of the Festival. Mr. Di Dio believed the Borough should be exempt from paying sales tax and noted the pumpkins were probably sold to the Borough at cost. Mr. Isaacson said Mr. Mc Caffrey also charged \$100.00 to dry the pumpkins to prevent rot, and he estimated the costs for the “sugar” and “face” pumpkins were \$2.00 and \$3.00 each respectively. He suggested charging \$1.00 per person to attend the event in 2014 to offset the costs. Mr. Isaacson revealed the Borough spends \$12,000.00 for fireworks during the annual Labor Day festivities. He felt a significant portion of Mr. Mc Caffrey’s charges for pumpkins derives from the cost to transport them from western Pennsylvania (where most batches originate) to Closter. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted that members of the Mc Caffrey family assisted in preparing the event the day of. She estimated of the 250 or so pumpkins used for the Festival, 10 were grown at the Farm. Mr. Isaacson said approximately 80 rotten pumpkins were dug up prior to the Festival. Both he and Mr. Jun agreed that not all of the 355 pumpkins purchased were on display. Regardless, Mr. Isaacson believed the event is vital by serving as a learning experience to the public while conceding that if the expense for pumpkins does not go down in 2014, other options should be considered to provide entertainment for the attending children. Ms. Cummings inquired about ordering pumpkins in advance and how doing so would affect their price. Chairman MacDonald

suggested the Commission utilize a wholesaler or local grocer to purchase the pumpkins on behalf of the Borough. Mr. Di Dio suggested that Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane), located adjacent to Mac Bain Farm, be asked for a donation of pumpkins next year.

Effluent Plume (400 Demarest Avenue)

Chairman MacDonald informed that the investigation is continuing on the plume (caused by a former dry cleaning establishment on-site) located under the parking lot of the A&P supermarket, and which has spread onto Borough land abutting the site; he noted the site is to be resurveyed.



**Liaison Reports**

Governing Body

There was no discussion on the Mayor and Council due to Councilman Kashwick's absence.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed the Borough is attempting to have the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), a post-World War II, prefabricated residence, transported to Schauble Park. She said there are conflicting reports as to whether not the prospective purchaser of the site, a homebuilder, would pay for the structure's relocation prior to the parcel being redeveloped. She said the Borough is also researching available grants to allow for the transport. She said time is of the essence since the contract purchaser is unlikely to wait up to 6 months for the building to be moved off-site. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg explained the structure would be used for preservation and could not be leased for profit by the Borough since it would be situated on land governed by the NJDEP's Green Acres program. Mr. Isaacson said it is rumored the house could be given to the Recreation Commission to do with it as it pleases. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the Bergen County Historical Society could be offered the building to utilize as its headquarters. She noted the Society indicated the restoration of the structure's enamel should not be an expensive endeavor. Mr. Di Dio felt the buyer should want to wait for the Borough to relocate the building to avoid having to pay for its demolition; Chairman MacDonald estimated the demolition would cost approximately \$10,000.00. Mr. Isaacson said the alternative is for the Borough to purchase the site outright at its appraised value (\$385,000.00); Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted the Borough is required by law to only pay the appraised value, not the seller's asking price (\$400,000.00). Mr. Di Dio reminded that the seller fought against the site being designated as a historic landmark by the HPC, which ultimately was rejected by the Governing Body.

Planning Board

Mr. Di Dio reported the application for the redevelopment of Closter Plaza is entering its final stages, with the next meeting taking place on November 21<sup>st</sup> to complete testimony from objectors' witnesses. He said he recently visited, during a rainstorm, The Shops at Nanuet, a new outdoor shopping mall with high-end stores, located on Route 59 West; he said he was reminded of Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California because of the mall's open, clean and attractive layout. Mr. Di Dio informed that the grocery chain, Fairway Market, is located on-site. He stated that said store's 6 handicap parking spaces were occupied at the time of his visit. He also noticed while some of the businesses were equipped with roof overhangs to protect customers from inclement weather, many were not; he hoped his observations could result in an

enhanced design for Closter Plaza. He expressed uncertainty as to the reasoning behind the applicant's request for Subdivision Approval to create a new lot from the site's existing parking lot; he said such requires its own set of parking requirements based on the type of structure to be situated on the new parcel. Mr. Isaacson said the existing Closter Plaza is deficient in parking spaces by approximately 50% (roughly 700 spaces exist while about 1,500 spaces are required); he further stated that a building placed on the newly-created lot could eliminate an additional 40 or so spaces. Mr. Di Dio noted that impervious coverage would increase with the installation of additional parking spaces. He theorized the conditions of long-term/overlapping lease agreements could be the cause of the proposed subdivision, namely, the number of a certain type of establishment (restaurant, bank, etc.) may be restricted to 1 on the existing 16-acre lot. He informed that the developer of the site hopes the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of construction (consisting of new Whole Foods Market building and rehabilitation of entire site eastward) would be completed within 1 year followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (rehabilitation of entire site westward including reconfiguration of existing building to be vacated by Kmart as of August 2015).

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Scholz stated the STC reviewed its 5-year plan for tree maintenance. He said the replanting of trees at Ruckman Park should occur next summer; he said he would confirm the species to be planted.

Green Team

Ms. Cummings stated the 2014 Green Fair would be regional in that several municipalities would participate. She reminded that 2013's consisted of Closter and the Borough of Norwood only; she said, however, the Boroughs of Northvale, Harrington Park, Old Tappan and Cresskill have expressed interest for next year. She said a meeting would be hold on December 2<sup>nd</sup> at Norwood's Borough Hall to discuss vendors, exhibits, etc.



**New Business**

Effluent Plume (19 Ver Valen Street)

Chairman MacDonald said a plume under Closter Plaza, caused by a former dry cleaning establishment on-site, is quite extensive and the remediation is the responsibility of the property owner(s).

Trail Maintenance

Chairman MacDonald said he is coordinating with the Department of Public Works (DPW) to have downed trees and limbs removed from various trails throughout Schauble Park; he hoped such would be completed this winter.

Proposed Trail Connection (Parsells Lane to Giletta Court)

Chairman MacDonald stated there was nothing to report about a deer path recently discovered near Parsells Lane, which could make for a connection to Giletta Court via Anderson Avenue.

Proposed Trail Connection (Demarest Avenue)

Chairman MacDonald said a trail link is being contemplated off Demarest Avenue, which would connect the A&P supermarket site nearby a cluster of spruces. He explained there is a 15' to 20' wide Borough right-of-way that, along with an extensive walkway, separating the supermarket

and the adjacent New Jersey Harvest Church. He felt it was necessary to install signage in the vicinity to advertise the existence of a trail access point, especially since the existing trail sign situated behind the A&P supermarket is poorly located. He noted the area should be cleared to make it more prominent. Chairman MacDonald commended the placement of a trail sign along Demarest Avenue at the exit of Saint Mary Roman Catholic Church.



## **Plan Review**

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



## **Adjournment**

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the Flat Rock Brook Nature Center in Englewood is trying control its deer population, which is destroying its understory and causing issues for the other wildlife; she said an acquaintance of hers who sits on the Center's board would keep her abreast of their progress. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said neutering and spaying is not a viable option because the procedures are very expensive and often unsuccessful because, following the initial injections, the deer are difficult to trap again for secondary shots.

Mr. Isaacson revealed there are 400 to 500 deer on Fire Island off Long Island, New York, and they have no natural predators; he said community leaders are considering the import of pumas to reduce both the deer population and the high incident rate of Lyme disease occurring on the Island. He said the puma is nocturnal, a non-threat to humans and would digest the deer in its entirety. He stated bow hunts have taken place (with limited permitting) as near as the Borough of Rockleigh to curtail the deer problem. Mr. Colwell noted that Morris County conducts an annual 6-week deer hunt with guns. Both Mr. Isaacson and Mr. Colwell stated they regularly have several deer roaming their properties on Columbus Avenue and Cedar Court respectively. Mr. Di Dio believed the main concern of the deer overpopulation is the safety threat to motor vehicle drivers.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Cummings, to have the Commission gather monthly for its 2014 meetings, less December, and convene at 7:30pm, not 8:00pm. The motion passed by acclamation with Mr. Scholz abstaining.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Di Dio and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to adjourn the meeting at 9:22pm. The motion passed by acclamation.