



Environmental Commission

January 20, 2015

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Mr. MacDonald called to order, at 7:36pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, January 20, 2015 at Borough Hall.



2015 Reorganization

Oaths of Office

- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2017): Paul MacDonald
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2017): Steven Isaacson
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2017): Thomas Colwell
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2017): Brian Stabile
Shade Tree Commission Liaison
- ◇ Full Member (3-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2017): Sophie Heymann
Planning Board Liaison
- ◇ Alternate #2 (2-Year Term Expiring December 31, 2016): Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg
Historic Preservation Commission Liaison

Attendance

<PRESENT>

Paul MacDonald- Full Member

Steven Isaacson- Full Member

Thomas Colwell- Full Member

Brian Stabile- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)

Sophie Heymann- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)

Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1

Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2 (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)

<ABSENT>

Brenda Cummings- Full Member

VACANT- Full Member (Council Liaison)

VACANT- Associate Member

VACANT- Associate Member

VACANT- Associate Member

Election of Officer

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to nominate Mr. MacDonald as Chairperson of the Commission; the motion passed by acclamation.



Miscellaneous

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the October 21, 2014 meeting. The motion passed (5-0-0):

YES- Bouton-Goldberg/Stabile/Colwell/Isaacson/MacDonald;

NO- n/a;

ABSTAIN- n/a;

Recalling the discussion in said minutes, Ms. Heymann inquired about the Commission's intention to forward a memo concerning deer overpopulation in the region to the newly-seated Governing Body; she felt such an approach would prove fruitless, noting as Mayor from 2007 to 2014, she attempted to find solutions to no avail. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg countered by summing the pros and cons of several methods debated by the Commission last year.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to approve the minutes for the November 18, 2014 meeting. The motion passed (5-0-0):

YES- Bouton-Goldberg/Abrams/Stabile/Isaacson/MacDonald;

NO- n/a;

ABSTAIN- n/a;

Chairman MacDonald opened the meeting to the public for questions and/or comments.

Sivert Hagen, 72 Eckerson Avenue, Closter, New Jersey, reiterated that while serving as an Associate Member of the Commission in 2014, he contacted, through his interaction with the Bergen County Animal Shelter & Adoption Center, a Borough of Haworth resident (Joel Albarella) who had been tasked with organizing a committee to address deer overpopulation by the then-unseated Mayor John Dean DeRienzo. Following the election, Mr. Hagen said he and Mr. Albarella, who is a proponent of deer euthanasia, spoke and agreed that Haworth is in a better position to take action due to it having greater open space (United Water Co. property, White Beeches Golf & Country Club, Haworth Country Club, etc.) and being more rural than Closter. He said Mr. Albarella is awaiting a response to his committee's report from the newly-seated Governing Body; Mr. Hagen noted that his request for an advance copy of said report was rejected following an apparent infiltration by an outside party attempting to sabotage the committee's agenda.

Arthur Goldberg, MD, 75 Harvard Street, Closter, New Jersey, said Closter has plenty of open space when considering how to address deer overpopulation, such as Buzzoni Farm Park which is adjacent to the Department of Public Work's compost site. He believed the statutory regulation of not discharging a firearm within 150' of human habitation during a potential deer hunt is possible in Closter, though ensuring a 150' radius is doubtful.

Ms. Heymann said several years ago, the Borough of Rockleigh, which has substantial open space, received special permission from the State of New Jersey to hire specialized shooters to use bow and arrow weaponry to hunt deer, but the plan was abandoned following a last-minute public outcry. She noted that all surrounding communities must join in Closter's efforts to curtail the deer problem; otherwise, she said they will eventually migrate back. Chairman MacDonald concurred, saying the memo, penned by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Mr. Colwell to the Governing Body, was of utmost importance. Ms. Heymann stated that in Ithaca, New York, Cornell University previously installed thousands of feet of 12' high deer fencing in hopes of protecting its grounds from deer infestation; she revealed such failed and that no success stories can be reported in curtailing deer problem regionally.

Mr. Colwell suggested a petition be started to gain public interest. Mr. Hagen opined a disease could be purposely spread to the deer population, which would likely garner more support than importing coyotes to hunt them. He questioned if the Commission has the authority to go into closed session to discuss such a controversial topic; Chairman MacDonald replied the body does not have such a luxury. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg explained the Celery Farm in the Borough of Allendale is considering the allowance of bow-hunting. Mr. Isaacson said it is not the purview of the Commission to take action, but rather to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council.

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) as well as upcoming workshops. Mr. Hagen noted that for an additional \$60.00, Commission members could attend seminars; Mr. Isaacson interjected, saying most are held in southern New Jersey. Chairman MacDonald stated the Commission had also been copied on a freshwater wetlands application checklist filed with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) by a surveying firm (Pac Surveying, Inc.) retained for the construction of a 3-story/104-bedroom assisted living facility planned at 59 West Street, 11 and 15 Van Sciver Street. Ms. Heymann informed that said proposal was before the Planning Board for an informal review, and despite the developer being told such a project would not be well-received in Closter, it filed with the Zoning Board of Adjustment last year to obtain a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval.

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Old Business

Trails

Mr. Isaacson stated many of the Borough's trails have been improved and that Ms. Heymann has ideas for the creation of additional trails. He reiterated that Commission members need to walk Closter's trails, engage surrounding municipalities and, ultimately, produce a trail inventory so to make priorities; Ms. Heymann responded there is more progress to be had, and the Borough should take advantage of available grant monies. Mr. Isaacson stated the Borough's trail maps need to be both updated and merged with those of the Borough of Demarest. Ms. Heymann explained the eastern sections of Closter, such as in and near the conservation easement and Alpine Scout Camp, have the most potential for trail development. Chairman MacDonald inquired about funding for boardwalk repair/installations in low-lying areas by Tenakill Street, Brook Street and Scholz Bridge; Mr. Isaacson replied that boardwalk projects recently done by the New York-Jersey Trail Conference for the Nature Center were quite costly. He believed the Borough allocated \$25,000.00 for trails in its forthcoming budget. Chairman MacDonald stressed the Demarest Nature Center should be consulted on boardwalks, given the superior rehabilitation of its planks last year by a group of high school student volunteers requiring funds for materials only. Mr. Stabile questioned if the eastern section of Closter consists of highlands, thus, not requiring boardwalks and/or bridges; Ms. Heymann replied that the conservation easement is especially laced with streams. Mr. Hagen noted there is a set of duckboards for a trail of Tenakill Street that is in a mucky area and in need of better connection. Ms. Heymann stated the western sections of Closter have more elaborate trails and are within minimal walking distance of each other.

Chairman MacDonald asked that Mr. Isaacson organize an ad hoc committee to walk and evaluate Closter's trails. Mr. Stabile revealed he recently reached out to both Demarest and

Haworth's Environmental Commissions in hopes of integrating their trails and associated maps with Closter's; he said he is awaiting their responses. Mr. Isaacson reiterated Closter had such prior discussions with the Borough of Norwood regarding Blanch Avenue trails on its eastern end, which are protected by the Meadowlands Conservation Trust; however, he said Norwood is open to improve its western lands with trails. Ms. Heymann stated Norwood has not been receptive to working with municipalities on trails but hoped new leadership would improve negotiations. Mr. Isaacson felt his contact on Norwood's Commission, James Elling, is more positive in his thinking than its Chairwoman, Christine Hageman.

In response to Ms. Abrams, Chairman MacDonald informed that Closter's trail system is used quite extensively by the public. Mr. Isaacson said he has in the past inquired about the feasibility of all trails being handicap accessible given public funds are involved. Replying to Mr. Stabile, Mr. Isaacson answered that CSX Transportation Co. is not interested in relinquishing to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy its rights to the inactive portion of its Northern Branch rail line that dissects the Borough's downtown area. He further commented that both Capital Hardware Supply, Inc. (10 Railroad Avenue) and Miele Sanitation Co. (60 Railroad Avenue) have the option of reactivating the line for freight deliveries. Ms. Heymann stated there is no demand for rail service north of Closter; however, she said in Rockland County, New York, there are former railways that have been converted to pedestrian trails. Chairman MacDonald said the proposed Northern Branch Corridor Project, which does not involve the rail line owned by CSX Transportation Co. traveling parallel to Schraalenburgh Road in Closter, is currently slated to have its northernmost point of light rail transit end at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center instead of in the Borough of Tenafly, which rejected such. Chairman MacDonald asked if the railroad company continues to own the land once its railways are converted to trails; Ms. Heymann said it is possible that in the State of New York, legislative action may have been required to make such a determination. Mr. Stabile suggested New Jersey State Senator Gerald Cardinale be contacted to lobby for municipal support of the rails-to-trails concept; Ms. Heymann recalled that while Norwood seemed enthused of the idea, Demarest did not in years past.

Chairman MacDonald asked that Mr. Stabile continue to pursue Haworth and Demarest, along with the latter's Nature Center, specifically Peter Coy and David Emerson, of which the latter prepared Demarest's trail maps. Mr. Isaacson suggested that Raymond Cywinski also be approached being he is not only the Mayor of Demarest but also employed with United Water Co., served as Closter's Tree Expert and is the current Vice President of ANJEC. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg asked if the Borough's trail maps are updated; Ms. Heymann responded the main route of the trail system, which was completed roughly 1 decade ago, is officially mapped and has been reproduced onto pedestal map signs at various trail entrances; Mr. Isaacson reminded that those signs at both the Closter Public Library and near Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park need to be replaced due to weather damage. Mr. Stabile opined leaflets of said maps would be beneficial to the public; Ms. Heymann concurred, saying the trail system is very comprehensive and such would give the Borough the impetus to expand them. Mr. Stabile said that public interest in the trails also serves in maintaining them simply by the actual foot traffic produced. Mr. Isaacson said he is a proponent of geocaching, scavenger hunts, etc. to promote exploring the trails.

Ms. Heymann said Miele Sanitation Co. may utilize the Northern Branch rail line to haul garbage north to its facility in West Nyack, New York; Mr. Colwell disagreed, saying the railway terminates at Sparkill, New York, at which point, trails commence by Piermont Road. Mr.

Isaacson stated Miele Sanitation Co. likely sends its garbage south and then transfers it to the Midwestern United States. Mr. Colwell disclosed that the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, which has had much success in the City of Camden, is a client of his in the bulk mail industry, and he would contact them for feedback; he noted the organization does not have local affiliates, and they merely supply information and guidance.

Ms. Heymann expressed that Mollicone Park needs extra consideration in terms of a path leading from the western end of Knickerbocker Road and connecting to the wooden bridge (construction by Eagle Scouts) spanning Tenakill Brook; she said such would create a 2nd access point for the Girl Scouts' camp site, which is now only reachable from Taillon Terrace. She further commented that while the area has a poison ivy problem needing to be abated, Mollicone Park has great potential; she reminded that an ice skating pond was previously established by the nearby stream/dam to serve the west side of the Borough. Mr. Hagen reported that several trees, ash and oak among them, were recently cut down at Mollicone Park for purposes of supplying additional parking spaces for visitors to the ball field. Chairman MacDonald informed that he had expressed his dismay to James Oettinger, Director of the Recreation Commission, which oversaw the unauthorized tree removal; he noted the remaining logs were never removed from the site. Mr. Hagen commented that in the past, logs placed purposely at Mollicone Park to alleviate erosion by the stream embankments were removed. Mr. Isaacson said that a path reaching from the Knickerbocker Road to the Girl Scouts camp site could also connect to the Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park and Schauble Park via Lindemann Avenue; Chairman MacDonald said fallen trees impeding the trails around Schauble Park still have not been cleared.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Given the Governing Body has yet to appoint a Council Liaison to the Commission, no report was given.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann stated there were no new matters to discuss.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Stabile said several pear trees in the downtown area have been pruned noting, however, the hired tree service (De Carlo Landscape Design & Maintenance Co.) trimmed without much consideration to the aesthetic result; he said the STC learned to be more specific instructing its wishes to future contractors. He informed that said project took 1 day to perform at a cost of \$2,100.00. Ms. Heymann said recent tree maintenance completed by her neighborhood on Garry Road was not to her satisfaction; Mr. Stabile noted said project was done by Arrow Tree Service, Inc. He announced the Borough has again qualified for the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA program in 2015, a distinction that requires a municipality to meet certain criteria in terms of tree maintenance/planting, funding allocation, creation of a STC, permitting procedures, etc. Ms. Heymann noted that the Borough's street signs indicating its Tree City USA designation are from 2012 and need updating. Chairman MacDonald noted that both Closter and the Borough of Paramus, especially, have been honored with such status for decades.

Green Team

On behalf of the absent Ms. Cummings, Mr. Hagen said the Team is still recruiting enthusiastic high school-age members to replace those who recently resigned to attend college. He said Ms. Cummings and Maria Costa (82 Everett Street), whose son is in 8th grade, recently collaborated with his daughter and her friend to form a middle school-aged Team which would then be announced to the school administration at Tenakill Middle School. Chairman MacDonald, speaking from experience, advised that a teacher serving as a mentor would be a catalyst in bringing about change in the way the local school system has addressed environmental issues; he noted such would likely require funding to compensate teacher(s). Mr. Hagen explained that Ms. Costa, who is not on a school faculty but heads the Mrs. Wonderwhy science program, has agreed to shepherd the cause. He said that Ms. Cummings' Granny Green's Green Machine theatrical show will next perform at the Nature Center on January 25th; he noted that Marc Gussen, naturalist and Director of the Center, is no longer as involved in said show.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg recently spoke with Mary Mayer, a volunteer at the Farm, who asked that it be decided which of the participants of the upcoming high school senior service program will be assigned to the Farm for 4 weeks; Chairman MacDonald noted that last year, the caretaker and resident of the Farm, John Mc Caffrey, was supposed to spearhead the volunteers' tasks but did not. Ms. Heymann said the Commission should compile lists of assignments required at both the Farm and Nature Center ahead of time along with who will provide supervision.

Mr. Isaacson reiterated that funding by the Governing Body of the Environmental Commission should match that of the Recreation Commission given they both oversee parks. Ms. Heymann explained that most funding for active parks is provided via fees collected by the Recreation Commission. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that Mac Bain Farm needs a water utility service connection to irrigate the fields on-site via Hickory Lane; she hoped a spigot could be provided to visitors for drinking water and washing off. She said Mr. Mc Caffrey continues to use his well water, intended for the residence on-site only, on the crops as well. She said she did not understand why the Recreation Commission is given monies for lawn sprinkler systems to water ball fields but the Environmental Commission is not supported to irrigate farm fields. Ms. Heymann said there is a non-metered water establishment (shed) at Buzzoni Farm Park. She said the concern by the Borough is not the cost to install a water utility meter at Mac Bain Farm, but rather the resulting usage bills; she said the contract signed by Mr. Mc Caffrey with the Borough calls for him to be responsible for all utility expenses, and there is contention because the residential usage is not being separated from the Farm's. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg questioned if Mr. Mc Caffrey should be asked to attend the Commission's next meeting to present his planting plan for the upcoming season, and she noted that \$200.00 has been raised for the purchase of berry bushes. Ms. Heymann asked how Mr. Mc Caffrey's invoices are scrutinized; Chairman MacDonald replied that not all submitted bills, which are usually far in excess of what his contract stipulates, are reviewed by the Commission. Ms. Heymann believed he tends to charge a lot for labor.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed that the group leader of autistic youths who regularly volunteer at Mac Bain Farm agreed to build 3 insect hotels on-site and 3 more at Buzzoni Farm Park; she said she is scavenging for building materials. She felt some could be hammered onto trees along the trail on the west end of Mac Bain Farm. Ms. Heymann said the population of pollinators such as honey bees needs to be increased, noting they are only 4 municipalities in New Jersey with ordinances prohibiting beekeeping, 1 of which is Closter; she updated that the City of

Englewood recently adopted an amendment to its Health Code allowing such. Mr. Hagen explained that the resistance to raising bees in the Borough originated from the Board of Health, an autonomous body; he elaborated that there had been a Board member who resided on Mc Cain Court next to Mac Bain Farm, which at the time had bee hives on-site. He stated the Board member lobbied and succeeded in having such deemed a public hazard. Chairman MacDonald said pressure should be placed on the Mayor's office to appoint new members with a different perspective on the matter. Ms. Heymann suggested a public campaign to raise awareness about the necessity of honey bees as well as the planting of milkweeds, which benefits the butterfly population. Mr. Hagen stated Ms. Cummings hands out milkweed seeds during her theatrical show; Mr. Isaacson suggested an event along the lines of the annual Harvest Festival at the Farm. Mr. Colwell volunteered to contact the Board of Health in hopes of that it would be willing to reconsider Chapter 250-30 of the Borough Code, which was amended in 2004 to ban beekeeping.

The Commission endorsed the installation of 6 insect hotels at said parks. Mr. Stabile advised against hammering the hotels into trees, which could introduce infestation and rot; he believed the hotels should stand alone on posts.

The Commission decided to have Mr. Mc Caffrey attend an upcoming Commission meeting. Ms. Heymann suggested the newly-hired Borough Administrator, Jonathan De Joseph, be approached about the installation of a water utility meter at Mac Bain Farm; she noted that Mr. Mc Caffrey does not receive a usage bill from United Water Co. since he uses well water on-site.

Mr. Colwell agreed to assist Ms. Bouton-Goldberg on all future matters/reports regarding Mac Bain Farm.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said the HPC is still preparing a nomination report designating Blanch Avenue, both its improved and unimproved (paper street) sections, as historic; she explained additional information was recently received on Blanch Woods.



New Business

Chairman MacDonald reminded that the Commission will convene for meetings every month in 2015.

Chairman MacDonald distributed copies of the Commission's powers as indicated in Chapter 16 of the Borough Code; Mr. Isaacson noted none address the control of passive parks, merely that the Commission should study and recommend; he further commented that most, if not all, Borough trails run through parks. Mr. Hagen revealed that his father, Olag, a former Chairperson of the Commission, relayed to him that the Commission should provide advice to the Planning Board, which was not obligated to act. Ms. Heymann assured that the Board takes any Commission comments into consideration when reviewing land use applications. Mr. Isaacson felt the Commission should prepare a list of requests in time for the Borough's next Master Plan Reexamination. Mr. Colwell noted that the Code indicates the Commission is authorized to manage properties, index open areas and acquire lands.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Zoning Board of Adjustment

309 Closter Dock Road: This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the construction of a new building (containing a delicatessen and 1 apartment). The Commission made the following comments: 1.) clarify if vapor mitigation is required for existing building and underground contamination; 2.) clarify access to/from refuse collection area.



Adjournment

Chairman MacDonald announced he would not be present at the February 17, 2015 meeting.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Stabile and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to adjourn the meeting at 9:37pm. The motion passed by acclamation.