



Environmental Commission

June 16, 2015

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:33pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, June 16, 2015 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Paul MacDonald- Chairperson
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Brian Stabile- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member (Planning Board Liaison)
- Thomas Hennessey- Full Member (Council Liaison)
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2 (Historic Preservation Commission Liaison)
- Sivert Hagen- Associate Member

Absent

- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member
- VACANT- Associate Member



Miscellaneous

Given the Commission did not convene its meetings on both February 17, 2015 and May 19, 2015 due to lack of quorums, and because of a malfunction to the Borough’s audio system during its April 21, 2015 meeting (resulting in no minutes being prepared), it postponed votes on approving the minutes for both the January 20, 2015 and March 17, 2015 meetings to the July 21, 2015 meeting to allow time for their review again.

Chairman MacDonald noted that the absent Dr. Goldberg has yet to sign his 2015 Oath of Office and be sworn in as an Associate Member.

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

With respect to correspondence, Chairman MacDonald questioned if Commission members have been receiving the quarterly publication from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC); they replied in the negative, with Mr. Isaacson indicating its articles focus mainly on southern New Jersey municipalities.



Old Business

Trails

Mr. Isaacson stated the Borough's trail system still has muddy conditions, which has prevented him from walking them in recent months. He indicated, however, he has been in contact with Peter Coy, Treasurer of the Borough of Demarest's Nature Center, who indicated Demarest is organizing a 6 mile walk of it and Closter's trails in September; he explained the route would stretch from Peace Gazebo (located at the intersection of Hardenburgh Avenue and Piermont Road) to Lupardi's Nursery, Inc. (75 Blanch Avenue). Given such, he hoped to evaluate the Borough's trails for maintenance within 1 to 2 weeks. Mr. Isaacson mentioned he spoke with Leslie Weatherly, an administrative assistant employed with the Borough about remaining trail grant monies. He said he was told some funds have been used for purchasing boardwalk planks installed by Eagle Scout volunteers nearby Scholz Bridge a few years ago, which have since been washed away by rainstorms. He estimated there to be 3 areas of very wet conditions, specifically, at Julia Street and on either side of Scholz Bridge by Brook Street south of Charlie's Creek. Mr. Hagen elaborated there are a series of 3 duckboards leading to a meadow by Scholz Bridge and Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park in need of repair; Chairman MacDonald stated the duckboards are spaced too far apart.

Mac Bain Farm

Chairman MacDonald distributed thin plastic signs (with ultraviolet permanent marker written on them) indicating crop names and pictures; he noted 50 such placards were made by students of a special needs program that regularly volunteer at the Farm; Mr. Hagen reiterated his objection to the use of plastic. Ms. Abrams said she was in possession of ceramic signs that name crops with pictures that could be glued to stakes on-site, noting a local art school would be able to produce such. Councilman Hennessey advised plastic signs should be able to clip onto galvanized steel stakes. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg suggested the plastic signs be placed at the Farm and tested to see if they hold up outside.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted that Mac Bain Farm will open to the public this season on July 8th and be available for picking on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays; she stressed more volunteers are needed. She explained that established plants are being planted on-site; she said John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, did not have the option to plant seeds because of the muddy conditions on-site following a plethora of rainstorms. Ms. Heymann interjected, saying Mr. Mc Caffrey, as part of his 10-year contract with the Borough, is to put up \$25,000.00 worth of expenses annually in operating the Farm; she stated that while he regularly exceeds that amount, some of his practices may not be cost effective or too expensive. As an example, she said during the previous Halloween season, he billed the Borough for labor in obtaining pumpkins at a rate far exceeding the actual compensation he pays to his farmhands; she said he is buying 1 potted plant for every seed/seedling that he would have otherwise planted. She admitted that all expenses in excess of \$25,000.00 yearly are not reimbursed by the Borough to Mr. Mc Caffrey. Ms. Heymann revealed that he was reimbursed, however, for the purchase of pumpkins from 2014 because he asked to be. She explained that crops such as beans are planted by seeds, but with others having to be started early being they have a shorter season or hot weather plants such as peppers and eggplants, Mr. Mc Caffrey uses seedlings instead. She noted he does not plant perennials, only annuals; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg corrected her, saying mint is on-site. Mr. Isaacson said he was under the impression such financial concerns were to be handled by the Borough Administrator; Councilman Hennessey informed that Mr. Mc Caffrey lives in the residence on-site essentially for free. Mr. Hagen noted this year there was a long period without precipitation followed by a short period with much rain. Ms. Heymann suggested the delay in planting on-site this season was not due to weather but rather Mr. Mc Caffrey was awaiting the shipment of his new tractor from Florida. Ms.

Abrams questioned if certain plants could be supplied by Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane); Ms. Bouton-Goldberg informed the establishment offers some annuals, fruits and vegetables, noting she received a large discount when purchasing items for the pollinator garden at Buzzoni Farm Park. Ms. Abrams said the Commission should ask local churches where they obtain their pumpkin collections during the Halloween season. Ms. Heymann said Mr. Mc Caffrey does not husband the pumpkins at the Farm properly, specifically, he did not isolate those that matured early and instead left them in the field; she said he then bought expensive replacements from western New Jersey (resulting in unnecessary transportation costs) instead of reaching out to local nurseries. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg revealed that last year, volunteers stored 150 ripe pumpkins in Ms. Mayer's residence, yet 150 more were still needed for the Harvest Festival. She explained that while volunteers will weed, stake and do some planting at the Farm, the majority of tasks are done by Mr. Mc Caffrey's laborers.

Dumping & Signage on Public Land

Chairman MacDonald stressed the Commission must determine the specifications for signs informing the public about the prohibition of dumping in open space. Mr. Hagen said he is constantly witnessing dumping in Mollicone Park, including birch trees and their entire root system; he noted such happens in spite of a sign posted at the Park's access point on Taillon Terrace. Councilman Hennessey stated the specific ordinance regulating dumping should be stated on the signage; he promised to research possible sign designs. Mr. Isaacson believed the DPW could make such signage or at least order them on-line from Voss Signs Co.; Councilman Hennessey suggested Traffic Safety & Equipment Co. in the Township of Mahwah be contacted for such customized signs. Chairman MacDonald estimated a minimum of 15 to 20 such signs are needed. Mr. Stabile said the standard size for that type of sign is 12"x18". Mr. Hagen said sign postings will be required at all access points of open space. Mr. Isaacson suggested at certain access points, an actual barrier may be required to prevent landscapers from driving their trucks onto Borough property to dump. Chairman MacDonald believed much of the public does not realize grass clippings cannot be dumped. The Commission agreed the Police Department will likely not enforce such a regulation. Ms. Heymann suggested the Commission select a location where illegal dumping is prevalent, and have both signage and a security camera installed; she revealed that a camera recently resulted in the guilty parties of damage to Borough property in Farrell Woods being apprehended. Mr. Stabile expressed disagreement with such means of monitoring the public.

Site Contamination (400 Demarest Avenue)

Mr. Stabile said the Borough can only benefit from having information as to whether contamination has spread from the A&P supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue), the former site of a dry cleaning establishment, to adjacent Borough land; he noted that even if heavy equipment is required for explorations and testing, the Borough Code give guidelines for the environmental consulting firm, Stantec, Inc., to follow. He suggested allowing the firm to access Borough property under Closter's vigilant watch. Councilman Hennessey believed Stantec, Inc. does not want to install monitoring wells but merely take soil samples from Borough land by using a hand auger, not a drilling rig, to pull plugs out of the ground; he noted the Borough Engineer's firm has been conducting sample work at the now-defunct Closter Swim Club (Blanch Avenue), which was recently acquired by the Borough. He confirmed the Governing Body decided against allowing Stantec, Inc. to sample Borough land for contamination but rather would have Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc. do such if need be. Mr. Stabile cautioned that a licensed site remediation professional (LSRP) must conduct such testing. He explained the responsible party must abate contamination on its own property and off-site wherever leaching contaminants have migrated to; he further noted that if a contaminated site is sold, a

seller can remain the responsible party depending on the real estate transaction. Councilman Hennessey surmised that the owner-in-fee of 400 Demarest Avenue should be responsible for remediation and/or monitoring for all adjacent properties found to be contaminated; he promised to discuss such with the Mayor and Council again in light of said discussion.



New Business

Ms. Heymann revealed that former Commission member/former Councilman John Kashwick applied for a grant in 2013 to improve trail sections; she noted that while monies were awarded to the Borough in 2014, he did not discuss the grant application he filed with the State of New Jersey with either the Mayor's office or Borough Administrator beforehand. She read said application into the record:

"The Borough completed the Cross-Closter Trail project about 6 years ago. This included installation of a bridge across Tenakill Brook along with several minor bridge crossings along Dwars Kill with neighboring municipalities of Demarest, Alpine and possibly Norwood to create a Northern Valley trail that would ultimately connect with the long path on the Palisades. There are several access points to the Trail in Closter. A couple of these locations are through wetland areas. Some planking was installed at the time through volunteer efforts, but this has proven to be an inferior product which shifted through the years and is now a safety hazard. Hikers are walking off-trail causing soil erosion near a Category One waterway as deemed by the New Jersey of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). We are looking to install puncheons covering approximately 300 feet of trail in 3 sections to either replace existing planking or to traverse wetland areas where no planking has been installed. We would work with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to install the new walkways which would also allow for greater access to persons with disabilities."

Mr. Isaacson said former Commission member/Nature Center volunteer Mary Mayer was handling the details of implementing the proposal written by Mr. Kashwick. He believed 4x4 or 4x6 lumber was to be used for planking. Ms. Heymann agreed that Ms. Mayer utilized recommendations set forth by the Conference for recent boardwalk installations at the Nature Center done by volunteer labor (more experienced hands via the Conference were required for installations in wetland areas). She stated she is in contact with a Trail representative through her service with the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, noting it is agreed that mentioned areas of the Borough's trail system require maintenance. She indicated that Mr. Kashwick's proposal, involving a 1/2 to 3/4 mile stretch of trail, would cost \$30,000.00 to implement. Ms. Heymann explained the Borough received \$24,000.00 from the State due to Mr. Kashwick's application, with the Borough having to match 20% (\$6,000.00). She said the Commission must approve said proposal so that specifics can be dealt with. She relayed that the Conference claims it barely meets costs and that the type of wood it uses for planks, black locust having a lifespan of 50 years, is quite expensive. Ms. Heymann reiterated the Borough has 1 year to spend the grant monies and submit invoices. Mr. Stabile suggested the entire \$30,000.00 be put towards a large scale project, but inquired what liability the Borough would have if someone were to be injured on a wood bridge situated in swampy open space, such as behind the A&P supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue); Mr. Isaacson replied that given the project would be public funded, the trails should technically comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Ms. Heymann disagreed, saying trails are not meant to be accessible to everyone.

Mr. Isaacson questioned if large pads of cement could be poured instead of building wood bridges; Ms. Heymann responded such material is not permitted in wetlands. The Commission, in response to Ms. Abrams, could not say how often the Borough trails are utilized by the public. Chairman MacDonald reminded that recently a group of high school senior service volunteers installed boardwalks at the Demarest Nature Center utilizing 4' rebar, as opposed to 2', installed on an angle; Ms. Heymann noted, however that said Center is located in uplands.

In response to Councilman Hennessey, Ms. Heymann said the scope of work, totally \$30,000.00, is detailed in the municipal budget: 1.) \$15,000.00 in grant money for labor/Borough matching with \$3,000.00 (\$1,500.00 of which is for volunteer labor); 2.) \$7,000.00 in grant money for material/Borough matching with \$2,500.00; 3.) \$2,000.00 in grant money for signage/Borough matching with \$500.00.

Chairman MacDonald said he joined Mr. Kashwick in walking the trails at the time he was authoring the grant application and noted 2 areas of concern were between Brook Street and Durie Avenue and behind the A&P supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue). He believed, given the Commission's large investment in Scholz Bridge, a steel structure spanning Tenakill Brook by Tenakill Street, its surrounding area should be a top priority. Ms. Heymann stated that said dedicated bridge goes into deep wetlands and in order to avoid them, one must detour the admired bridge. Chairman MacDonald stressed the Commission should stake out those trail areas to be evaluated by the Conference. With respect to the signage line item, Mr. Isaacson informed that Mr. Kashwick intended to upgrade trail signage because when originally installed, Demarest's trail system was not incorporated into the trail maps; he further commented that the lamination protecting the 3 trail map pedestal signs scattered throughout the Borough has worn away due to weather. Ms. Heymann believed the pedestal signs should be installed at all trail entrances. Ms. Abrams suggested the Commission view the signage installed in a park nearby the Puffin Cultural Forum in the City of Teaneck for ideas. Mr. Isaacson reminded that the pedestal signs, made of aluminum, had the trail map printed on vinyl with an ultraviolet laminate (clear film) on top for protection against the elements; he suggested the angle of the top portion of the pedestal signs be adjusted to prevent snow, etc. from loading atop them. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg pointed out that the color markings on Closter and Demarest's trails do not coordinate, leading to confusion. Mr. Isaacson stated that such issues could be discussed with Demarest at its upcoming walk event.

Ms. Heymann reiterated her wish to have more trail development in the Borough's eastern lands and distributed a schematic plan prepared by the Borough's engineering firm, Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc., uncredited and dated December 8, 2013 which details improvements to existing Borough trails, including a connection between Ruckman Park and Blanch Avenue. She clarified the Borough's southern trails are situated in wetlands; she said the Borough Engineer, Nick De Nicola, PE, indicated the cost for permitting and engineering of depicted work would exceed \$20,000. While against allocating such monies, she believed the Commission could install a trail starting from the parking lot of Temple Emanu-El of Closter (180 Piermont Road) by the conservation easement and ending at Blanch Avenue. Ms. Heymann said such an area does not involve wetlands, negating NJDEP permitting and engineering costs, and the Department of Public Works (DPW) indicated it could do the trail work when available. She stated the Temple's driveway would allow access to Ruckman Road (becoming a circular path for the link through Buzzoni Farm Park) and Piermont Road while connecting to the northern section of the Cross-Closter Trail. She reminded that the walk through Buzzoni Farm Park is particularly beautiful because its northern part (near the now-defunct Closter Swim Club) is to become an arboretum for display of native plants, and there is a path through a lovely avenue of

piners. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg hoped a plaque can be installed along Blanch Avenue if the thoroughfare is deemed a historic landmark by the Governing Body. Mr. Isaacson mentioned he noticed a similar trail of wood chips going from County Road past Demarest's recycling center and Duck Pond en route to its Swim Club. Ms. Heymann said the northern area in question for a trail connection has remnants of a trail but in the southern area, the conditions are quite damp and dangerous to walk due to buried logs, etc. In order to use the Temple's parking lot for access and possibly parking of automobiles, Chairman MacDonald assumed permission would be required; Mr. Hagen believed the Borough has a right-of-way through the nearby conservation easement.

Mr. Isaacson and Mr. Hagen suggested the DPW be informed about blockages in Tenakill Brook by both Durie Avenue and Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Councilman Hennessey said the driveway at Mac Bain Farm is scheduled to be repaved later this week, which was approved by the Governing Body as a change order to its contract with Rockborn Trucking & Excavation, Inc., previously hired to improve Hickory Lane. He explained that the driveway leading to the residence on-site (including the turnaround area which is currently being cleared of a shed, boat and logs by Mr. Mc Caffrey) will be overlaid and a gravel parking area will remain, all of which will be done at unit price (asphalt is measured in tonnage). Chairman MacDonald said the cost of such would be \$10,000.00; Councilman Hennessey said he could not confirm the amount but would inquire.

Planning Board

While Ms. Heymann said there were no new matters to discuss, Mr. Hagen mentioned a large tree was recently cut down in the front yard of 383 Durie Avenue, where a new 1-family house is under construction; Mr. Hagen noted that the prior house on-site had been damaged by a fallen tree as a result of Hurricane Sandy, the remnants of which Mr. Isaacson believed were strewn across the adjacent property containing wetlands by the new home builder.

Ms. Heymann informed that the Zoning Board of Adjustment is considering the construction of a new assisted living facility (specializing in memory loss) at 59 West Street, 11 and 15 Van Sciver Street; while she opined the proposal, a 3-story building, is not suitable for the Borough, she questioned why the applicant does not acquire an adjacent lot to the north owned by the Borough (she felt the Borough has no use for it and could generate income from its sale) to supplement the narrow subject properties and allow for additional on-site parking. Councilman Hennessey believed by the applicant obtaining more land, the result will be a larger-scaled project.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Concerning 138 Maple Avenue, Mr. Stabile said that in response to the owner-in-fee requesting the Borough remove a tree whose roots are causing concrete slab(s) of an abutting sidewalk to uplift, the STC decided, due to its budget constraints, to save said tree and instruct the owner to grind the roots to abate the trip hazard.

Green Team

On behalf of the absent Ms. Cummings, Mr. Hagen said an Earth Day fair was hosted by the Borough of Old Tappan on April 25th, at which a Team consisting of Tenakill Middle School students participated in the event. He explained it informed the public of those plastics not often recycled, such as bottle screw caps, which are categorized as #7 by the Society of the Plastic Industry (SPI) resin identification coding system (identifiable on packaging by 3-chasing-arrow recycling symbol); Mr. Hagen noted the Team made refrigerator magnets from such caps as a means of teaching a lesson to the youth in attendance. He said there was general participation in the fair by high school students volunteering with the Team.

Mr. Hagen mentioned that he and Ms. Cummings have been attending various trade shows and exhibitions to promote her environmental theatrical show, Granny Green's Green Machine; he said she makes all puppets from recycled material as well as writes all music. Mr. Hagen said at a recent show in the Borough of Paramus, he spoke to a member of the Bergen County Environmental Council about deer overpopulation in the region, who agreed to make such a point of discussion at the body's annual gathering; Mr. Hagen said the Council member also showed interest in Paramus' efforts to have a ban on plastic bags, which has received much resistance from local merchants. Ms. Heymann mentioned the League of Women Voters is considering such a ban throughout Bergen County.

Ms. Abrams said she ran a booth at the mentioned fair and distributed literature; she felt a banner/table cloth identifying the Commission, as is done by other municipalities, is more appropriate to have for such events than a letter-size piece of paper taped to a table. Mr. Isaacson said he could produce such given his line of work after he is given a design.

Mr. Hagen said a representative from the Bergen County Utilities Authority (BCUA) was at the Earth Day fair and had a hazardous material apparatus as part of its exhibit. He said Ms. Cummings engaged the representative about the dangers of having rail cars transport crude oil via the Bakken Formation from parts of North Dakota, Montana and Canada through the County; he said she was told the BCUA could do nothing being such is a federal matter. Ms. Heymann pointed out that railroads need not obey local law; she noted, however, that both CSX Transportation Co. and law enforcement officials have assured that those tank cars holding the crude oil throughout the County will be the newest models sanctioned by the United States government. Ms. Heymann stressed that the public's concern should instead be with the aging infrastructure, specifically, the rail beds which includes the bridges and tracks, which are usually the cause of rail disasters. She reiterated the relevant tracks travel through many water supplies of both Bergen and Rockland Counties. Ms. Abrams said that while the federal government has lowered the speed limit for such trains hauling crude oil, her friend residing in the Borough of Bergenfield repeatedly witnesses such trains speeding during overnight hours. She said there is talk of contacting United States Senator and former Borough of Harrington Park resident, Cory Booker, to take up the issue with his colleagues.

Ms. Heymann stressed the State of New Jersey is not supporting efforts to create rail trails, which involve the conversion of a disused railway into a multiple-use path, typically for walking, cycling and sometimes horseback riding. She noted that while the inactive rail line owned by CSX Transportation Co. in Bergen County is lying dormant, the portion in Rockland County has become a rail trail because New York legislators have applied the necessary pressure.

Regarding the plight of the honey bee, Ms. Abrams distributed information to the Commission about harm caused by pesticides; Mr. Hagen stated that several pollinators are being affected by

such chemicals. He said he and Ms. Cummings have 70 milkweed plants on their property to facilitate butterflies; he noted that such requires their grass to be slightly overgrown but believed society's attitude about having manicured lawns needs to change. Ms. Heymann said she read in a recent news article that only commercial apiculture involving the transport of bees from farm to farm are being afflicted; Mr. Hagen disagreed. Ms. Heymann stated commercial bee entrepreneurs have to replace their hives far too often; Mr. Hagen interjected, saying the problem is caused by colony collapse disorder.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg indicated there to be no new issues to discuss.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

445 Durie Avenue: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) provide intended tree mitigation.

77 Legion Place: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving construction of a new 1-family house. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) provide intended tree mitigation.



Adjournment

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