



# **Environmental Commission**

October 20, 2015

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:35pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at Borough Hall.



## **Attendance**

### Present

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

### Absent

VACANT- Associate Member  
VACANT- Associate Member



## **Miscellaneous**

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Stabile, to approve the minutes for the September 15, 2015 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.



## **Old Business**

### Trails

Ms. Heymann, referring to an email from Kevin Riley, received earlier in the evening, informing that the Board member and Grounds Manager of the Borough of Demarest Nature Center is nearing completion of upgrades being funded through trail grant monies awarded to Closter in 2014. She specified that Mr. Riley completed installation of 4 boardwalks east of the intersection of Ryerson Place and Tenakill Street and 7 boardwalks east of Scholz Bridge, noting he used discretion in installing additional planks in the latter area due to the limited sizes of lumber available at Dykes Lumber Co. (23 Naugle Street). She said Mr. Riley wished to revisit the former area following the next substantial rainfall to see how a depression found nearby is affected. Ms. Heymann stated that based on her request, Mr. Riley also installed a step east of Scholz Bridge to alleviate a steep drop in elevation resulting from soil erosion. She further

stated that the Department of Public Works (DPW) is carting away unusable planks on behalf of Mr. Riley and transporting salvageable wood to the Nature Center for reuse. She said Mr. Riley questioned if Mr. Isaacson had additional trail markers (blazes) to replace/install. Frustrated that he was not kept abreast of the trail issues reported by Ms. Heymann this evening as well as many others throughout his 6 years serving as a delegate on the Trails Committee, Mr. Isaacson resigned from said position effective immediately. Ms. Heymann replied that she was asked to spearhead the trail improvement project by the Mayor's office, which was concerned about the trail grant awarded not being implemented in a timely fashion. Dr. Goldberg suggested such an administrative request asked of Ms. Heymann should have been forwarded to the Commission for its consideration. Ms. Heymann further commented that the trail project was initially the subject of a grant application filed by the Commission, via former Councilman/Commission member John Kashwick, without the consent of the Governing Body; she continued saying that nearly 2 years since being awarded the grant, the project had not commenced and the Borough was in danger of allowing the grant to expire. In arguing she has kept the Commission informed of her efforts on seeing the project to fruition, Ms. Heymann stated Councilman Hennessey walked the relevant trails with Mr. Riley prior to the Borough retaining his services. She also said that the Mr. Riley's email served as merely a progress report on a project only 2 week old.

Chairman MacDonald opined that it is premature to design a new map incorporating trails in Closter and Demarest because the scale would be minimized due to the amount of information to be displayed; he further noted that there are several routes not yet surveyed. He stated both municipalities should also coordinate the color of their blazes; Mr. Hagen concurred, noting that when recently walking a trail from 400 Demarest Avenue (A&P supermarket) into Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park, the trail markers confused him as to where either Borough's trail began and ended. Ms. Heymann agreed, saying more regionalization of trails benefits both a municipality and the public. She disagreed that including both Closter and Demarest into a revised trail map would be drastically scaled down in image because Demarest's trails equate to approximately 1/3 the area of Closter's. Ms. Heymann believed the Nature Center's trails should also be included in a new map in order to make the Borough's entire trail system unified being the Borough and Nature Center's trails have several intersections. Chairman MacDonald suggested such trail matters be dealt with not at the full Commission level but by a committee; he reiterated that newly created trails in Mollicone Park and Schauble Park be part of the revised map. Ms. Heymann noted that unlike the Nature Center's trails, those in said Parks are discrete. Chairman MacDonald responded that there are several trails linked together solely by having to cross a public roadway; Mr. Hagen agreed, saying in order to travel from Olag & Ingeborg Hagen Park to both Farrell Woods and Mollicone Park, one must cross over Brook Street and Lindemann Avenue/Taillon Terrace respectively. Ms. Heymann stressed that the trail grant expires in March 2016, though an extension of time is possible. In response to Mr. Stabile, Chairman MacDonald said a graphic designer should prepare the revised trail map. Replying to Ms. Abrams, Mr. Isaacson said the Borough's Conservation Easement map is an example of a publication that depicts all open space in Closter.

Dr. Goldberg preferred a map prepared on behalf of an ad hoc committee recently established by the Governing Body; Councilman Hennessey explained said body is tasked with submitting a constitutionally compliant fair share plan in response to the Supreme Court of New Jersey's decision in March to relinquish oversight of the state's affordable housing process from the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). Dr. Goldberg said the COAH map has not been indexed; he revealed he would be gathering on October 22<sup>nd</sup> with Caroline Reiter, PP of the firm, Christopher Statile, PA, to discuss corrections needed, such as depictions relating to the northern sections of trail by Blanch Avenue, Buzzoni Farm Park and the Conservation

Easement. He said he did not know if Mollicone Park and Schauble Park trails are depicted on the COAH map, which is entitled "Vacant Land Inventory" and dated July 7, 2015. Dr. Goldberg stressed that historical reference is critical in creating an accurate map. Counteracting Dr. Goldberg's statement that the names of all active and passive parks in the Borough are not updated on official documents, Ms. Heymann said Chapter 142 of the Borough Code was amended to reflect newly-established open space and renamed parks during her 2<sup>nd</sup> term as Mayor; as an example, she said the former Metropolitan Park is now known as Olaf & Ingeborg Hagen Park. Councilman Hennessey confirmed that certain details, such as trails, are not depicted on the COAH map because it has no bearing on COAH issues; he revealed that Closter's affordable housing obligations have not yet been determined by the courts.

Chairman MacDonald, along with Dr. Goldberg and Ms. Heymann, volunteered for the committee tasked with utilizing the COAH map discussed earlier as a basis for creating a Closter-Demarest trail map. Dr. Goldberg pointed out the COAH map shows all Borough- and privately-owned vacant land. Ms. Heymann explained that the affordable housing obligation placed on Closter depends on how much undeveloped space it has and such areas will weigh more heavily with the courts than the Borough's open space, which is shielded from being developed through its designation with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Mr. Isaacson felt the COAH map should also have an overlay for lands encumbered by the NJDEP's Green Acres Program, which is property whereby money has been borrowed against; he said it should also have an overlay for the Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI).

Mr. Isaacson reminded that the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Harvest Festival will be held at Mac Bain Farm on October 24<sup>th</sup>; he highly suggested all Commission members attend and arrive an hour early (2:00pm) to help in supervising volunteers, cleaning 150 pumpkins donated by Metropolitan Farm (119 Hickory Lane), etc.

#### *Crop Signage at Mac Bain Farm*

With respect to 5"x7" signs installed to identify crops on-site, Ms. Heymann said a trial run proved them to be of no use being the signs did not fit into their slots properly and she further stated that the larger signs posted into the ground were strewn across the fields; she noted many of the fields have already been plowed over. Chairman MacDonald and Ms. Bouton-Goldberg expressed frustration that John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, was not in attendance this evening as they requested to discuss improving his farming practices in 2016; they promised to confirm his presence at the November 17, 2015 meeting. They commented that several signs were made for crops never planted by Mr. Mc Caffrey in 2015. Chairman MacDonald said the initial order with the sign vendor was for 50 smaller crop signs. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg felt no more were needed at this time; she reiterated her frustration that Mr. Mc Caffrey did not plant blueberry and raspberry bushes this year as promised, and she opined that he should plant only 1 row of pumpkins next year but also that he should reintroduce grapes on-site, noting vineyards were apparently at both the Farm and Buzzoni Farm Park sometime in the past; Chairman MacDonald concurred, saying grapes are perennials. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg noted that perennials require less planting, thus would be easier for Mr. Mc Caffrey to manage. In response to Mr. Hagen, she said means by which to regulate public picking of grapes could be either to limit it to a handful or permit their consumption on-site only. Ms. Heymann kept in mind that birds feed on grapes. Speaking of the large amount of apples that went unpicked and fell from trees to the ground at Mac Bain Farm, Ms. Heymann said she attempted to acquire a cider press to produce beverages for the upcoming Harvest Festival. She said apples are easier

to grow than grapes, but the public is not making good use of them at the Farm. Chairman MacDonald pondered if pressing apples, and not having the juice pasteurized, could lead to the spread of bacteria. In response to Dr. Goldberg, he said the crop signage was purchased using the Commission's \$3,500.00 operating budget. Dr. Goldberg said Bergen County's Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland & Historic Preservation Trust Fund has significant monies available for maintenance of active and passive parks as well as the purchase of such lands. Ms. Heymann clarified that the Fund could not be utilized to acquire disposable items such as crop signs that are considered temporary; Dr. Goldberg disagreed with Ms. Heymann's argument. Councilman Hennessey promised to have the Borough Attorney confirm the legalities of such.

Signage Prohibiting Dumping on Public Land

Councilman Hennessey stated he is awaiting the Borough Administrator to obtain price quotes for said signage.



**Liaison Reports**

Governing Body

Councilman Hennessey said there were no new matters to discuss.

Planning Board

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

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

Mr. Stabile said the STC is reviewing a resident's request to have a white oak, which was planted by the STC in the Borough's right-of-way, replaced with a different species because the oak's acorns are attracting deer; he noted the STC is proceeding cautiously in making a determination since such would likely set a precedent. Mr. Stabile discussed a complaint filed about several shade trees along Columbus Avenue being removed recently. He revealed that the STC had been, since 2008, contemplating tree replacement in the area and that the Borough Administrator indicated the roadway was being prepared for curb/sidewalk installation; he said while the STC preferred a gradual process, the removal was completed all at once and added to the impact felt by residents. Chairman MacDonald agreed that sidewalks were crucial along Columbus Avenue given much pedestrian traffic in and around nearby Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest. Councilman Hennessey pointed out that Demarest is generally against the installation of sidewalks.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen said the recently-hired Superintendent of the Closter Public School system is not a proponent of having a Team assembled that consists of students from the Tenakill Middle School. He noted if such a Team is to be sanctioned, Maria Costa, a private contractor who operates Mrs. Wonderway's, a science program for preschoolers, would serve as an advisor.

Ms. Abrams said she is still researching, including inquiring with the Borough of Norwood's Environmental Commission, possibilities for a banner/table cloth that would identify the Commission's exhibits at public events.

Mr. Hagen said he will be attending upcoming meetings to organize the 2016 Northern Valley Earth Fair to be held in the Borough of Cresskill; he said he would relay suggestions made by the Commission.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg distributed a draft of the nomination report to designate the 18<sup>th</sup> century-era Blanch Avenue as a historic landmark. Mr. Stabile questioned the legal ramifications to having an entire roadway (both improved and paper street portions) designated; Ms. Bouton-Goldberg responded said the status is strictly honorific, and she hoped a blue and silver marker would be installed by the Bergen County Historical Society in recognition. Dr. Goldberg explained Blanch Avenue was established in 1795 through farmers dedicating land, and it spanned from Closter to Tappan, New York. He said the roadway travels from Piermont Road, across Dwars Kill, followed by 1,000' loop that enters Norwood before returning to Blanch Avenue in western Closter. He hoped that the washed away pedestrian bridge that once crossed over the Kill would be replaced in the near future; Ms. Heymann revealed that several years ago, Closter and Norwood were awarded grant monies to replace said bridge, but Norwood, where most of the span is located, instead used the entire grant for improving its parkland to the west. Dr. Goldberg said that, as a recent compromise to avoid having the paper street portion of Blanch Avenue eliminated, the unimproved section was reduced to 8' in width.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Dr. Goldberg, to have Mr. Colwell author a letter addressed to the Governing Body indicating its support of the HPC nominating the designation of Blanch Avenue as a historic landmark; the motion passed by acclamation.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg updated that the Borough and Michael Pisano, a painting contractor, offering to serve as the caretaker of the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue) in exchange for usage of 1 of its bedrooms as an office for his business, are finalizing a contract.



**New Business**

Abandoned Service Station (121 Schraalenburgh Road)

Chairman MacDonald said the Code Enforcement Bureau recently issued a Notice of Violation for the dilapidated roof of the building on-site. He said there are no known proposals for the redevelopment of the contaminated site, which has been owned for 6 years by 121 Schraalenburgh Road Associates, LLC, of which the principal is Borough of Edgewater-based developer, Fred Daibes. Chairman MacDonald said the current licensed site remediation professional (LSRP) was assigned to the site approximate 1 year ago according to the NJDEP; he further stated that samples of the monitoring well(s) were taken in 2005 and 2014. He explained that Mary Crain, a principal of Abram Demaree Homestead, Inc., which owns farmland and a homestead at 40 Old Hook Road and 45 Old Hook Road respectively, has objected to allowing the LSRP to sample within her properties. Chairman MacDonald said, nonetheless, sampling would occur within the Borough right-of-ways along both Old Hook Road and Schraalenburgh Road.

Mr. Hagen said Brenda Flanagan, a reporter with NJTV, a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member network serving New Jersey, has been researching the history of 121 Schraalenburgh Road as part of a state-wide investigation into contaminated sites and the politics behind the

delay of their remediation. Chairman MacDonald said there are 3 monitoring wells on-site, including 1 located to the rear of the building that indicated no contamination; he noted the site shows an overall diminishing degree of contamination from 2005 to 2014. Mr. Stabile noted a common approach is to allow for the contaminants to break down naturally over time. Ms. Heymann said the Borough, during her tenure as Mayor, began evaluation of the site through the assistance of grant monies. Chairman MacDonald said the former gas station went out of business around 1995, noting the next sampling is scheduled for January 2016. Ms. Heymann said due to the slope of the subject property, it is no surprise there is flowing down across Schraalenburgh Road towards Oradell Reservoir. Mr. Stabile opined that the remedial investigation seems reasonable given the constraints.

Defunct Closter Swim Club (Blanch Avenue)

Councilman Hennessey said the Borough Engineer's firm, Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc., recently did testing on-site and there to be 2 areas of contaminations, specifically, in the northern portion in wetlands and by the parking lot. He said the approach for the wetlands cleanup is to allow it to dissipate naturally. Chairman MacDonald said the apparent cost to remediate the entire site was estimated to be \$2,000,000.00. Ms. Heymann said the Borough had several offers to purchase the parcel, but it wanted to prevent it from being developed, thus, it acquired the lot. Councilman Hennessey said he did not know how much of the 15-acre site is usable.

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**Plan Review**

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

**15 William Street:** This is an application for Site Plan Approval involving the as-built expansion of a parking lot and 1 shed installation. The Commission made the following comment: 1.) address how 26 William Street (Evergreen Kids Academy) will be protected from traffic and potential noise safety hazards resulting from commercial vehicles entering/exiting subject site.

**80 Knickerbocker Road:** This is an application for Minor Subdivision Approval for the creation of 2 lots. The Commission had no comments.

Zoning Board of Adjustment

**511 Durie Avenue:** This is an application for a Use Variance and Site Plan Approval involving the conversion of an abandoned public school (formerly Village Middle School) to 33 condominiums (market rate). The Commission made the following comment: 1.) ensure continuous fence along westerly property line to mitigate light intrusion into neighboring properties.

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**Adjournment**

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Stabile and seconded by Mr. Hagen, to adjourn the meeting at 9:35pm. The motion passed by acclamation.