



# **Environmental Commission**

September 15, 2015

*(Minutes)*

Prepared by:

**Paul Demarest**

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:34pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, September 15, 2015 at Borough Hall.



**Attendance**

*Present*

- Paul MacDonald- Chairperson
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- 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
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member

*Absent*

- Brenda Cummings- Full Member
- Brian Stabile- Full Member (Shade Tree Commission Liaison)
- VACANT- Associate Member



**Miscellaneous**

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the January 20, 2015 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Abrams, to approve the minutes for the March 17, 2015 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Isaacson, to approve the minutes for the June 16, 2015 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

A motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to approve the minutes for the July 21, 2015 meeting; the motion passed by acclamation.

A motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Ms. Heymann, to approve the minutes for the August 18, 2015 meeting with 1 noted correction; the motion passed by acclamation.

Mr. Hagen revealed that Ms. Cummings submitted a letter of resignation earlier in the day to the Governing Body effective immediately; Chairman MacDonald indicated he would be recommending that the Mayor and Council elevate Mr. Hagen to Full Member, thereby filling the vacancy left by Ms. Cummings.

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



## **Old Business**

### *Trails*

To clarify, Ms. Heymann reminded the Commission it has already discussed 2 potential trail projects for the near future. She explained 1 was for trail installations in and around Buzzoni Farm Park, which was never submitted as part of a grant application due to potential engineering plan review/inspections costs (via Borough Engineer) exceeding the actual construction costs. She said the other project, for which a presentation was made at the Commission's August 18, 2015 meeting by Kevin Riley, was the subject of a grant application submitted by former Commission member/former Councilman John Kashwick in 2013 and awarded in 2014.

Mr. Isaacson reminded that the Borough of Demarest is hosting a walk event on September 19<sup>th</sup>; Chairman MacDonald assured he would be present to discuss said trail project with Mr. Riley, who is the Vice President of the Demarest Nature Center. Mr. Isaacson said the gathering point for the 6-mile walk will be Peace Gazebo, and it goes to Lupardi's Nursery, Inc. in Closter and back.

Mr. Isaacson distributed Voss Signs Co. samples, which were miniaturized versions of the top portion of pedestal signs being considered by the Commission, noting the actual size would be 24"x48". He explained said signage has a 10-year warranty and is comprised of hot-compressed laminate. He said he preferred such because they will be easier to install onto the aluminum pedestal by simply drilling a hole and using recessed bolts and nuts. While each sign sells for \$500.00 to \$600.00, he believed Demarest could be willing to share in said cost as well as that of incorporating more of Closter's trails onto Demarest's trail maps for the pedestal sign artwork and vice versa; he reminded such negotiations could take place at Demarest's walk event on September 19<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Heymann said there is enough surface area for both Closter and Demarest's trails to be depicted on the pedestal sign by a graphic artist; Mr. Isaacson concurred, saying the graphic artist previously retained by Demarest has reasonable prices. Ms. Heymann reminded that the subject trail grant includes \$3,000.00 for signage, and the cost of the actual trail work, as estimated by Mr. Riley, will be much less than the allotted funds resulting in a surplus for other aspects of the project. Mr. Isaacson noted there is already an adequate amount of trail markers (blazes) throughout the trail system, but some do need adjusting/repairing. Mr. Isaacson said that by replacing 3 existing pedestal signs located at Memorial Field, by the Closter Public Library and near Tenakill Street, the estimated cost would be \$1,800.00, leaving potentially \$1,200.00 in reserve. Mr. Isaacson opined there are different signs available at Voss Signs Co. strictly for depicting and displaying in and around trailheads. Chairman MacDonald informed he was impressed with trail signage during his recent travels throughout Yellowstone National Park located primarily in Wyoming, but also in Idaho and Montana.

Dr. Goldberg felt a proper re-mapping of trails, especially those depicted in the vicinity of Buzzoni Farm Park, was warranted; he said there are several possibilities in which said open space could link to the Nature Center and other points of the overall trail system. Ms. Heymann said another pedestal sign should be installed along West Street by the pedestrian bridge located

on United Water Co. property. Chairman MacDonald noted that new trails within Schauble Park he helped create a few years ago with volunteers from the high school senior service program should be indicated on new artwork (map); Ms. Heymann concurred, saying there will likely be monies available from the grant, which expires in May 2016. To properly address concerns posed by Dr. Goldberg regarding what map(s) had been submitted by Mr. Kashwick as part of the trail grant application filed with the State of New Jersey in 2013 (Mr. Isaacson believed Dr. Goldberg was confusing such with the referral map prepared by Mr. Riley as part of his trail project presentation to the Commission), the Commission tabled the issue until the October 20, 2015 meeting.

#### Dumping & Signage on Public Land

Ms. Heymann suggested the Department of Public Works (DPW) be tasked with providing signage prohibiting dumping on Borough grounds given they routinely handle street signage; she noted such signage must cite a specific ordinance in order to have validity. Chairman MacDonald stressed the signage must clarify that grass clippings, tree branches, etc. cannot be dumped; Mr. Hagen suggested the term “garden waste” properly communicates such. Mr. Isaacson suggested the Commission determine the areas in the Borough where dumping is prevalent and such would dictate how many signs are necessary. Chairman MacDonald felt the majority of dumping occurs near open space that abuts residential properties. He and Mr. Isaacson reiterated that a memo could be sent out to property owners, possibly enclosed with the Borough’s real estate tax bill or calendar mailings, enlightening them on the Borough’s concern. In response to Chairman MacDonald, Ms. Heymann said the Borough’s newsletter, Currently Closter, is emailed quarterly but reaches only about 500 out of approximately 2,700 Borough households; she stated the newsletter can only increase its readership if residents register their email addresses through the Borough website. Councilman Hennessey said the Commission should review a zoning map to determine where to strategically place such signage. Mr. Isaacson said often the culprits of illegal dumping are not residents, but rather non-local landscape contractors; Ms. Heymann reacted that by default, the landscapers’ customers (property owners) are responsible for actions by those they hire. Mr. Colwell confirmed that the relevant citation, Chapter 169-8 of the Borough Code, mentions “garden refuse” as part of the illegal dumping ordinance. Mr. Isaacson said 12”x18” would be an appropriate size for such signage, which could be comprised of aluminum or plastic and posted on trees, poles, posts, etc.; Mr. Hagen preferred the signage to be driven into the ground as done in Farrell Woods. Mr. Colwell determined that Chapter 1-15 of the Borough Code states in the event a specific penalty amount is not expressed within a code section, the default penalty should be no more than \$2,000.00 per violation and no more than 90 days imprisonment and/or community service; Ms. Heymann noted the Municipal Court would determine the punishment on a case by case basis. As opposed to Chairman MacDonald and Ms. Heymann, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg and Dr. Goldberg believed stating the possible punishment for illegal dumping on the signage would serve as a deterrent. Mr. Colwell inquired if landscape contractors were required to register their business entities with the Borough annually; Ms. Heymann answered in the negative. Councilman Hennessey said often such signage is displayed as a 12”x18” sign reading a “no dumping” message with a 6”x12” sign immediately below it stating the potential punishment. He noted that the DPW does not actually make signage. Mr. Isaacson replied that the signage indicating shopper parking in the downtown area, which he designed, was made by the DPW.

A motion was made by Councilman Hennessey and seconded by Ms. Heymann, to recommend to the Governing Body that 24 signs reading “NO DUMPING Including Garden Refuse/Ordinance 169-8/PENALTY up to \$2,000.00” be purchased for display throughout the

Borough and the locations of which would be determined by the Commission. The motion passed by acclamation.

Councilman Hennessey said the proposal would be discussed at the Mayor and Council's meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup>; he further stated that the Borough Administrator would price out potential signage.

Site Contamination (400 Demarest Avenue)

In light of the absent Mr. Stabile, Councilman Hennessey asked that the reports prepared by Stantec, Inc., the licensed site remediation professional (LSRP) for 400 Demarest Avenue, be forwarded to him so they can be reviewed by the Borough Engineer; he reiterated that Mayor and Council approval is required to enter Borough land and install monitoring wells. Ms. Heymann reminded that Mr. Stabile, a geologist, seemed satisfied that as of last month the LSRP was handling the matter properly.



**Liaison Reports**

Governing Body

Councilman Hennessey said he and Mr. Riley recently walked those trail sections that are slated for improvement and was impressed with his knowledge; he said the Governing Body will authorize that Mr. Riley be put on the Borough's payroll for said project, and he will be provided a Borough-owned vehicle for material transport. Ms. Heymann pointed out that any assistance to be provided to Mr. Riley by DPW employees will be considered part of their normal duties/hours (negating overtime pay to them); she explained such will offset the Borough's matching requirement (\$6,000.00) for the \$30,000.00 grant awarded. Councilman Hennessey announced Mr. Riley will likely start the trail project in late September. He noted that Mr. Riley will salvage, wherever possible, any plastic/wood composite blocks and 16' long wood planks, which will be given to Marc Gussen, Director of the Nature Center. Councilman Hennessey said Mr. Riley does not recommend reusing the existing plastic/wood composite blocks because a 4"x6" pressure treated type would provide better stability; he further said that 4' long rebar will be installed at opposite angles to prevent the planks from shifting.

Planning Board

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

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

In light of Mr. Stabile's absence, no matters were discussed.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen said he has been in contact with Brenda Anderson, Recycling Coordinator for the City of Newark, who will forward him the City's ordinance(s) pertaining to its practices, some of which may be mandatory for high-rises and certain business establishments. Referring to a recent news article, Ms. Heymann said no action has more of a positive effect on sustainability than composting. She explained there is also savings to taxpayers because composting garbage lessens the need for hauling it away on trucks, resulting in a reduction in tipping fees to the municipality; she pointed out that Closter is currently charged a rate of \$60.00 per ton of garbage. Ms. Heymann said the Commission should do a Borough-wide outreach/long-term

endeavor to educate and excite residents, noting that composting is possible in an apartment via a small pot on a kitchen counter or by simply placing garbage in a pile in a garden and churning it every so often until the organic waste is converted to soil-building substances. Ms. Abrams said that her former employer, Bergen Community College, composts its cafeteria garbage and suggested a representative be asked to speak to Borough residents about the institution's practices. Mr. Hagen reminded that the Green Team already hosted a lecture on composting at the Nature Center a few years ago; he stated the response and public reaction was disappointing despite inexpensive compost bins being offered by Bergen County. Ms. Heymann stressed a concerted effort is required to bring about change, not merely a 1-day event. Ms. Abrams suggested composting be joined with an existing program to raise more public interest. Mr. Isaacson revealed that every year his family transports raked leaves to the Borough's compost facility, where they are spread onto chipping fields after being grinded down; he believed such is a way to engage the public through a simple practice of reusing household items.

Ms. Abrams said she will inquire with Bergen Community College on ideas for acquiring a banner/table cloth that would identify the Commission's exhibits at public events.

Ms. Abrams informed that a free public forum will be held on September 20<sup>th</sup> at Temple Emeth in the City of Teaneck to protest the dangers of having rail cars transport crude oil via the Bakken Formation from parts of North Dakota, Montana and Canada through Bergen County. She asked that Commission members distribute event pamphlets to local religious organizations to increase turnout. She noted that the subject rail line dissects the Boroughs of Northvale, Norwood, Harrington Park, Closter, Haworth, Dumont and Bergenfield as well as passes over the Oradell Reservoir. Ms. Heymann revealed that the decking of the 86 year-old bridge crossing over said reservoir was recently rehabilitated. She said residents on several occasions have witnessed those rail cars transporting oil not abiding the speed reduction (from 40 mph to 25 mph) required by the federal government, especially during evening hours. Mr. Colwell revealed that the trains would no longer be restricted to a maximum speed of 25 mph over the Oradell Reservoir in Closter because of the repairs Ms. Heymann spoke of. She expressed concern that the road beds are of most concern in terms of safety, noting production of the triple-wall model of rail car required by the federal government to transport the crude oil is behind schedule. Ms. Abrams revealed there are apparently only 4 federal railroad bridge inspectors in the United States.

#### Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated several HPC members have been attending recent meetings of the Mayor and Council to discuss the Borough's intentions for the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue), a post-World War II era prefabricated enameled steel house, which was recently acquired by the Borough and given local historic designation. She said Michael Pisano, a painting contractor and Borough resident (44 Columbus Avenue), offered to serve as the site's caretaker in exchange that he be permitted to utilize 1 of the house's bedrooms as an office for his business. She said Mr. Pisano tested the paint mistakenly put on the exterior of the house and determined it was not lead-based; she said he would remove such with a mild paint stripper, noting each square of enameled steel panels would be individually stripped instead of power washed. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg further explained that Mr. Pisano would improve/maintain the landscaping on-site; however, she stressed utilities must first be reactivated. She said he also agreed to the house being available to the public 6 times per year during events such as parades or classes affiliated with the Belskie Museum of Arts and Science (280 High Street). She revealed that Jennifer Rothschild, an HPC member, recently visited Columbus, Ohio, where the now-defunct Lustron Corp. had its headquarters and took part in the celebration of "Lustron

Day”; she said she acquired several household items from the 1950’s such as a telephone, radio and refrigerator, all of which were placed inside the Harold Hess Lustron House for staging. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said former Borough Administrator, Erik Lenander, is assisting in drawing up a contract between the Borough and Mr. Pisano, and an architect, William Martin, RA, is designing plans for the structure’s rehabilitation. Councilman Hennessey stated the reason for the slight delay by the Governing Body in giving its approval to Mr. Pisano is because the Northern Valley Regional High School District also expressed interest in the site initially, but has since withdrawn its offer after determining it would cost approximately \$100,000.00 to bring the site into compliance with handicap accessibility requirements; he said the Governing Body’s first step would be to restore the gas, water and electric utilities so Mr. Pisano and volunteers could begin work on-site and take advantage of the clement weather.

### Mac Bain Farm

Chairman MacDonald said a quarterly report was filed by John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm; he said the Borough Administrator, Jonathan De Joseph, asked that the Commission review the maintenance of the residence on-site. He said there are no expenditures for the house indicated in the report. Ms. Heymann said Mr. Mc Caffrey’s contract with the Borough dictates that the residence’s major expenses, such as roofing, are to be paid for by the Borough via open space funds; she said the home’s interior is the caretaker’s responsibility. Ms. Heymann continued saying that Mr. Mc Caffrey is responsible for \$25,000.00 worth of annual expenses, which he often exceeds threefold. She explains, however, he is not spending that amount, but merely creating bills that are exorbitant and unrealistic; she theorized that Mr. Mc Caffrey indicates much higher labor costs within his reports than what he actually pays his laborers for working the Farm. Ms. Heymann said the exaggerated expenses, while longstanding, were never of consequence until this year because Mr. Mc Caffrey has neglected the Farm in 2015. She explained that no weeding had been done, and the field now looks atrocious. She said he ordered a tractor from Florida earlier in the year, which was delivered late and had to be tweaked before it was first used in May; Chairman MacDonald revealed that Mr. Mc Caffrey had to pay for its purchase after the Borough rejected his request to do so. Ms. Heymann said to make matters worse, there was very wet weather early in the planting season followed by arid conditions; she noted he continues to water the field using the well on-site, which is intended solely for the residence, because the Farm is still not equipped with an irrigation system. In response to the aforementioned, Ms. Heymann said Mr. Mc Caffrey decided to plant large plantings instead of seedlings and small plants in trays, which was a very expensive alternative; she reported that 4” pots with grown eggplants were being planted, which she considered utter mismanagement. Mr. Hagen said the quarterly report indicates his laborers are paid an hourly rate of \$30.00, and that 450 hours to spread fertilizer and 245 hours to water/weed had been completed; Councilman Hennessey calculated that to be 10 hours a day/6 days a week in which work was dedicated to the Farm and questioned the plausibility of such. Chairman MacDonald reminded that there were also high school senior service volunteers assisting at the Farm for 20 days in May and June. Ms. Heymann said it was volunteers who staked the tomatoes that were left on the ground to rot.

Being a bi-weekly volunteer at Mac Bain Farm, Ms. Heymann said she noticed the same few people visit and pick, the result of a poor publicity effort by the Borough. She said while an increase in the volume of visitors would naturally lead to a greater demand of produce, further restrictions could be placed if such was needed. She pointed out there are current limits enforced such as 4 large tomatoes and 1 bucket-full of on individual crops per person. She said there are never enough pumpkins available for the lone event that takes place at the Farm each year (Harvest Festival) because they are either rotting in the ground or eaten by deer; in 2014,

she said Mr. Mc Caffrey opted to obtain extra pumpkins in Morris County, which was costly in part due to transporting expenses, rather than shopping at a local nursery, church, etc. Chairman MacDonald said Mr. Mc Caffrey should be required to report to the Commission in-person biannually. Dr. Goldberg remembered the Farm Committee, a sort of liaison between the Farm and Commission, would have regular monthly meetings with Mr. Mc Caffrey when he served on it several years ago with Ms. Heymann and former Commission member, Mary Mayer. He believed that while Ms. Mayer is a very active Farm volunteer but no longer serving on the Commission, such an arrangement has led to the subpar oversight of today. Chairman MacDonald speculated that while Mr. Mc Caffrey is definitely strong-willed, he may feel the Commission no longer considers the Farm a top priority. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she is still waiting for Mr. Mc Caffrey to plant blueberry and/or raspberry bushes on-site; she further stated that is he often difficult to get in contact with, noting the voicemail to his cellular phone is usually full and unable to accept new messages. Mr. Colwell informed that Mr. Stabile spoke at a recent Governing Body meeting about the prospects of having either a holding tank or water tower placed at the Farm in lieu of a full-scale irrigation system.

Chairman MacDonald said he would request that Mr. Mc Caffrey attend the October 20, 2015 meeting to discuss all relevant Farm matters with the Commission.



## **Plan Review**

The Commission did not receive any land use board applications for its consideration.



## **Adjournment**

Mr. Isaacson said he was perplexed that the Recreation Commission is requesting the Mayor and Council approve \$275,000.00 for light pole installations around the walking path and parking lot at Ruckman Park. He reported that Teaneck has an open space tax which is written into ordinance such that 50% of collections must be dedicated to acquiring property while the other 50% is for said property's development only. Chairman MacDonald said the active parks are well-irrigated and, yet, the Commission cannot get clearance for installing a water service connection at Mac Bain Farm. Ms. Heymann revealed the Governing Body, during her administration as Mayor, approved a lighting plan for both the playground at Memorial Field and the walking path at Ruckman Park for a total of \$36,000.00; she said, however, Mr. De Joseph cancelled the contracts which had already been let, possibly without consulting the Borough Attorney. Councilman Hennessey said he was not aware of a prior lighting plan being approved. He further commented that he had been led to believe by the Recreation Commission that its proposal would require \$100,000.00, but then 10 days later, the price rose to \$250,000.00 and then another \$25,000.00 to include compensation to the Borough Engineer's for services rendered, which it neglected to budget for. Councilman Hennessey said the Borough is awaiting a decision on a grant it has since applied for with the Bergen County Open Space Fund; he said \$137,500.00 in funding is being sought.

Chairman MacDonald said he would inquire with the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) as to why some Commission members are still not receiving its quarterly publication.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Isaacson and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to adjourn the meeting at 9:22pm. The motion passed by acclamation.