



Environmental Commission

June 21, 2016

(Minutes)

Prepared by:

Paul Demarest

Chairman MacDonald called to order, at 7:39pm, the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Environmental Commission for the Borough of Closter, New Jersey, convening Tuesday, June 21, 2016 at Borough Hall.



Attendance

Present

- Paul MacDonald- Full Member
- Steven Isaacson- Full Member
- Thomas Colwell- Full Member
- Sophie Heymann- Full Member/Planning Board Liaison
- Sivert Hagen- Full Member
- Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg- Alternate #2/Historic Preservation Commission Liaison
- Arthur Goldberg, MD- Associate Member

Absent

- Brian Stabile- Full Member/Council Liaison
- VACANT- Full Member/Shade Tree Commission Liaison
- Ethel Abrams- Alternate #1



Miscellaneous

The Commission postponed votes to approve the minutes for the March 15, 2016, April 19, 2016 and May 17, 2016 meetings until the July 19, 2016 meeting.

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



Old Business

Trails

Ms. Heymann commended the effort, especially that of Mr. Isaacson, in designing and producing a revised, yet evolving, trail map incorporating links throughout Closter and the Borough of Demarest; she explained such was accomplished in 3 days so that 500 copies could be distributed during the American Hiking Society's National Trails Day on June 4th. Dr. Goldberg noted the revised trail map, presented as a brochure/pamphlet, is quite handsome, but stated that while the depiction of links in Schauble Park is clear, those in and around the Nature Center and others in development at Buzzoni Farm Park are either not legible or confusing. He suggested the depiction of Demarest's trails be reduced in scale, thereby, allowing for more detail on those located in Closter. Chairman MacDonald said it is important to incorporate Demarest trails being they are contiguous and well-defined; in contrast, he said, and Mr. Hagen agreed, that open space in Closter is spread so far apart that there is a limit as to what can be

pictured on the map. He hoped trails situated in Mollicone Park could be included in the map's next update.

Ms. Heymann reiterated that the Borough's trail system and its associated map are works in progress. She said the proposed trails in and around Buzzoni Farm Park and nearby woodlands (conservation easement) involve the disturbance of wetlands and, thus, permitting by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) is required. She explained obtaining such is quite costly and noted her previous hope to install various boardwalks throughout a portion of Buzzoni Farm Park would have cost \$24,000.00 in engineering and governmental costs. She noted that premature installations begun by Kevin Riley as part of trail improvements relating to the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded the Borough in 2014, have since seized until the Borough acquires approval from the NJDEP for a scaled back project not involving boardwalks (such is estimated to cost \$4,000.00 to \$6,000.00). Ms. Heymann believed that laying woodchips down in wetlands would likely not be permitted due to their prevalence to cause problems when waterways flood. She revealed that once trail signage is installed at both Mollicone Park and Schauble Park, there will be essentially a continuous trail system throughout the Borough and the map could again be revised. Dr. Goldberg disagreed with Ms. Heymann's statement that the 14-acre conservation easement is entirely located in wetlands. Ms. Heymann explained that she recently viewed the flooding of Buzzoni Farm Park just north of the driveway belonging to nearby Temple Emanu-El (180 Piermont Road). She reminded that when previously serving on the Commission 11 years ago, she proposed a trail in and around the easement and the Borough Engineer suggested the inclusion of a bridge from it to Ruckman Park, all of which was estimated to cost \$6,000.00. Ms. Heymann remembered that Dr. Goldberg opposed the proposal at the time, reasoning the price was too high for such a small stretch of trail. She emphasized that Boswell Mc Clave Engineering, Inc. (the Borough's engineering firm, cannot provide an exact cost for the trail project until it has reviewed the land in question, which can only happen if the Governing Body approves funding. Ms. Heymann further commented that the Department of Public Works (DPW) is prohibited by the NJDEP from creating a berm or other artificial impediment so to alleviate the drainage of its compost site in the vicinity. Dr. Goldberg stated the conservation easement was dedicated 20 years ago and has yet to be open to the public because of a fence installed by the Temple; he expressed frustration that the Borough has not compelled the Temple to abate the infringement. He assured that the trails located around the periphery of the Temple and easement are not within wetlands and are usable year-round. Dr. Goldberg emphasized the Commission should be supplied with an adequate map to discuss those trails slated for the area; Ms. Heymann replied that Mr. Riley is documenting trails he enhanced or installed via the Global Positioning System (GPS)-based map provided by the Borough Engineer. Chairman MacDonald stated there is already a trail in place adjacent to the improved section of Blanch Avenue by the DPW's compost site and the Police Department's pistol shooting range (233 Blanch Avenue) under construction, which will ultimately link to the Nature Center's trail system. Ms. Heymann noted that the revised trail map incorporated both the GPS-based map and those in the possession of Dr. Goldberg. Chairman MacDonald reiterated that the main purpose for revising the map recently was to advertise the existence of trails throughout the Borough, not provide an entire inventory. Mr. Isaacson believed being the stated goal is to have a Northern Valley system of trails, Demarest's trails should remain on the map and in the future, those located in the Boroughs of Norwood and Northvale would hopefully be added.

Chairman MacDonald said those participating in this year's high school senior service program were quite productive during their stint from May 16th to June 20th. He said the DPW

provided 30 sizable loads of woodchips that were scattered throughout a large portion of trails in Schauble Park. He stressed that constant trail maintenance is required to prevent growth from overtaking the trails, which has occurred in Buzzoni Farm Park and by the Stop & Shop supermarket (400 Demarest Avenue). Mr. Hagen said a large fallen tree is impeding the use of the trail near the Stop & Shop supermarket; Rather than removing it, Mr. Isaacson replied the tree would merely need voids cut into it for the trail to again be passable.

Ms. Heymann revealed she walked beautifully-constructed trails during her recent trip to Europe and opined the use of materials such as cobblestone and logs make them superior to those in the United States.

Chairman MacDonald said he would inquire with Councilman Stabile if the Governing Body approved the Commission's request made at its May 17, 2016 meeting to compensate Mr. Riley for an additional 100 additional hours, at a \$25.00 hourly rate, so he can complete trail improvements relating to the Recreational Trails Program Grant awarded the Borough in 2014.

Signage Prohibiting Dumping on Public Land

While awaiting permanent metal signage, Mr. Isaacson suggested the Commission purchase temporary signs consisting of Coroplast, a brand name of corrugated plastic rather than foam board; he reminded such was used for signage at Scholz Bridge when it 1st opened. Chairman MacDonald expressed disappointment over the prevalence of organic dumping throughout the Borough's trails, often consisting of grass clippings and yard debris; he stated he is collaborating with the Building Department in deciphering Borough land from private property so to determine violations of the Borough Code, specifically Chapter 169-8.

Mac Bain Farm

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg complimented the fence rehabilitation recently provided by Dimick Fence Co.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that John Mc Caffrey, caretaker and resident of the Farm, is adamant that an irrigation system, even if installed in stages, is required on-site, and noted his laborers must utilize a system of garden hoses and stands to water the fields. Chairman MacDonald reiterated that the specifications provided by Mr. Mc Caffrey several months ago were inadequate. Ms. Heymann believed Mr. Mc Caffrey to be capable of both designing and installing such a system.

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg stated the Farm is opening for its summer season on June 25th and that volunteers are always welcome. She said she recently met with Ophelia Mac Bain, widow of Malcolm, who provided a wedding photograph of his parents, Kenneth and Marjorie Mac Bain (prior owners of the Farm), as well as 1 of the residence on-site before vegetation set in around it.

Mr. Colwell said he would prepare a letter of appreciation to Dimick Fence Co. He said 1 would also be written to Wayne Sapper, both a Borough resident and principal of King Displays Co. (provider of signs for Broadway venues, etc.) who provided a tablecloth and banner to the Commission for use during public events; he said both are stored in the Borough's Land Use office.

2017 Northern Valley Earth Fair

In response to the presentation by Michael Swan, the outgoing Co-Chairperson of the Borough of Cresskill's Environmental Commission, at the May 17, 2016 meeting, Chairman MacDonald said having Closter host next year's Fair would be a large endeavor, especially given the Borough's limited venues. Mr. Hagen stated that Cresskill, Norwood and the Borough of Old Tappan have each shared in hosting the event since its inception in 2011 when it originally began as a Cresskill-only event before growing 3 years later. Ms. Heymann believed Norwood's Kennedy Field and the Cresskill Community Center are much more suitable for such an event as opposed to Closter's Memorial Field. Mr. Isaacson suggested the field at Hillside Elementary School or Schauble Park could be options. Ms. Heymann believed the Borough should co-sponsor the 2017 Fair but have the venue elsewhere. Mr. Isaacson questioned if a portion of Ruckman Road (between Homans Avenue and Piermont Road) could be closed with the event being held at the Nature Center; Ms. Heymann agreed with the suggestion. Chairman MacDonald interjected, saying the temporary rerouting of travel for emergency services would have to be taken into consideration. He further commented that the renting of portable toilets would be necessary; Mr. Hagen revealed that the owner of a large portable toilet company resides in Closter and should be contacted. Chairman MacDonald clarified there are restroom facilities at nearby Ruckman Park. Mr. Colwell inquired about using the parking lot at Saint Mary's School, Convent & Church (300 High Street), which would allow access to Farrell Woods and the restrooms at the Closter Public Library (280 High Street); Ms. Heymann believed such a location would be much too small to handle the event. Mr. Isaacson asked about utilizing the football field at Tenakill Middle School for vendors and having crossing guards at Harrington Avenue and High Street; he further stated that at said location, Saint Mary's parking lot, the Library's restrooms and Memorial Field's facilities, including the band shell, would be in close proximity. He pointed out that the Borough's annual Labor Day fireworks show is centered in said area. Chairman MacDonald noted the Board of Education's approval would be required. The Commission agreed that both potential venues, located in and around Tenakill Middle School and the Nature Center as discussed, are worth investigating. Chairman MacDonald said he would reach out to Mr. Swan for further suggestions; Ms. Heymann stressed the 1st obstacle in determining if Closter should host the 2017 Fair is to obtain permission for a particular venue.



Liaison Reports

Governing Body

Due to Councilman Stabile's absence, no report was given.

Planning Board

Ms. Heymann said the Borough was recently granted another extension to July 31st by the assigned judge overseeing its pending submission of a constitutionally compliant fair share plan in response to the Supreme Court of New Jersey's decision in March 2015 to relinquish oversight of the state's affordable housing process from the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). She said the Board disagrees on how to move forward, especially with 511 Durie Avenue, the site of an abandoned public school (formerly Village Middle School). She said the site, which is the subject of a pending application before the Zoning Board of Adjustment, is proposed to be converted to 33 condominiums with 3 slated to be purchased by the Borough for \$600,000.00 and designated for COAH. She hoped the Borough could purchase more of the 33 units. Ms. Heymann revealed that she and several Councilmembers believe the optimal

property in the Borough for providing COAH housing would be 59 West Street, 11 and 15 Van Sciver Street, a stretch of 3 contiguous lots that abut Borough land and are located in District #6 (Affordable Housing); she noted the parcels are on the market for approximately \$900,000.00 and had been the subject of a recent application before the Zoning Board of Adjustment to construct a 99-unit memory loss center, which was ultimately denied. She explained that rental COAH units would reap double the amount of credits for the Borough than purchased COAH units would. She stated the Borough should aim for units that accommodate people with special needs rather than low-income, the latter of which would result in the expansion of the local school system and higher property taxes. Mr. Isaacson inquired about the Borough donating land to the Bergen County Housing Authority for it to construct and administrator affordable housing units; Ms. Heymann replied that a better option would be to go out to public bid and award land to an organization such as United Way of America or Vantage Health System, which have vastly greater access to financing for such a project.

Shade Tree Commission (STC)

In light of there still being no Liaison appointed by the Governing Body for the calendar year 2016, no report was given.

Green Team

Mr. Hagen indicated there were no new matters to discuss.

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Ms. Bouton-Goldberg reminded that the Borough was recently awarded a non-matching grant for approximately \$30,000.00 to restore the Harold Hess Lustron House (421 Durie Avenue). She noted additional public bids from contractors may be required.



New Business

The Commission did not discuss any new matters.



Plan Review

The Commission prepared the following administrative report(s):

Planning Board

53 Taillon Terrace: This is an application for Major Soil Movement Approval involving construction of a new 1-family house. 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 comments: 1.) install irrigation system for trees and shrubs; 2.) utilize special soil mixture to handle drainage of walkways, sidewalks and parking lot.

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Adjournment

Regarding the pollinator garden situated at Buzzoni Farm Park, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she has been collaborating with the Superintendent of the DPW, William Dahle, about having it widened and bordered with landscape material and mulch to curtail weeds. She noted she would be attending a lecture on pollinator gardens on June 22nd in the Borough of Westwood. In recognition of Mr. Dahle's assistance in creating/maintaining the garden, Ms. Bouton-Goldberg recommended it be dedicated in his name; she said he plows, delivers soil and mulch and installed an irrigation system connected to the nearby water well. Ms. Heymann concurred, stating the DPW is both overworked and understaffed. She noted a sitting Governing Body often believes the DPW is overpaid and has an exorbitant budget, which she wholeheartedly disagrees with. Mr. Hagen agreed that Mr. Dahle is very environmentally-conscious in the way he operates the DPW. Ms. Bouton-Goldberg said she would prepare a draft recommending to the Mayor and Council that the pollinator garden be named in honor of Mr. Dahle.

A motion was made by Dr. Goldberg and seconded by Mr. Colwell, to have the Commission allocate \$100.00 for Ms. Bouton-Goldberg to purchase landscape material for a border to curtail weeds around 25% of the pollinator garden located in Buzzoni Farm Park, with additional purchasing for the remaining 75% if the installation proves to be successful. The motion passed by acclamation.

Mr. Hagen stated the Borough of Harrington Park recently obtained a grant from the State of New Jersey for beekeeping at a park located on United Water Co. grounds, potentially to avoid any liability concerns if involving public lands. Ms. Heymann reminded that the Board of Health is adamant about not easing its beekeeping regulations as per Chapter 250-30 of the Borough Code despite the New Jersey Legislature's recent passage of a law prohibiting municipalities from preventing the harboring and proliferation of the European honey bee, which is the state insect; she further stated that the Board has been given presentations on the issue by experts such as Ronald Breland, a beekeeper from Rockland County, New York who was featured in the film, Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us? Mr. Colwell hoped the Board would, at the very least, consider removing its 5-acre requirement for beekeeping.

Mr. Hagen inquired about future redevelopment at 81 Eckerson Avenue, which is vacant following the demolition of a 1-family house; the Commission had no status on such.

There being no further items to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Heymann and seconded by Ms. Bouton-Goldberg, to adjourn the meeting at 9:26pm. The motion passed by acclamation.