

Highland Park Environmental Commission

Meeting of May 16, 2001

Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld, Loren Muldowney, Anthony Puniello, Wendy Rosen

Guests: Anne Barron, Richard Marx, ShayMaria Silvestri, Eugene Young

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:35 PM.
2. The minutes of the April 18, 2001 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received legal notification from PSE&G of Newark informing us that they are submitting a Statewide General Permit #1 application to the NJDEP Land Use Regulatory Program to disturb freshwater wetlands throughout the entire PSE&G territory. This is for the purpose of repair, replacement, and maintenance of gas transmission mains within road rights of way.
 - b) We received the Year 2000 Recycling Tonnage Report from borough Recycling Coordinator Linda Monte. Gene recommended we have Linda come to a meeting to provide us with further information about this.
4. Site Plans. There were no site plans to review.
5. Old Business
 - a) Biosurvey. Arnold walked the site with two Thonet associates. They are very enthusiastic about this project and said while there are too many invasives to restore the whole area, they did find several good pockets to restore. Thonet did a similar study in Harding Township which included a website and virtual tour. For the next step, they need a contour map showing the elevations since the area was filled. ShayMaria said her group can create a map via GIS, but they would charge the borough for it. However, if the borough set up its own GIS system, we could download aerial photographs from the web, along with attribute tables, and create a map ourselves. ShayMaria will create a list of what we would need to buy to do this. Meanwhile, the Thonet naturalists are walking the site and clicking in GIS points. Although Thonet has GIS capability, they do not have a detailed enough map. Richard said Assemblyman Schwartz created a map 10-12 years ago and that Kaplan may have a map as well. Gene and Anne will ask Bruce Koch about Schwartz's map; Arnold will discuss this with Richard Kunze, and Mike will find out if the Y has a topography map of the area.

Thonet will create a short report with appendices given by the Commission (such as bird lists) to characterize this area in natural terms.

The Rutgers Naturalist Group is a newly formed group of undergraduate and graduate students training to be professionals; they have 10 people interested in working on this project with Thonet during the summer. We discussed the idea of having them do the mapping of where to do the plantings. The idea would be to create spot restorations that become environmental education opportunities. Several people raised the issue of liability regarding the students because the site is contaminated. Anne said that according to the DEP, the whole site is contaminated and should have a sign indicating this. We really need someone to pinpoint the areas of contamination with GPS. Since we would like to involve Orchard Heights residents in this project, we need to investigate the legalities and liability issues.
 - b) Open Space Inventory and Plan. Arnold handed out copies of the draft open space list he has written. The goal is the creation of a list to present to Council as an element in an open space plan. We need to make this into a plan of action for both Council and the Master Plan Subcommittee of the Planning Board. Tony informed us that this committee will only do a Master Plan Review Report this year. This report will be an executive summary, which will provide a one-year extension for the actual Master Plan revision. Richard emphasized that the aim of the report is to build a foundation to change our Master Plan and suggested we submit a summary of our concerns to the committee. Arnold emphasized that we need to get our concerns into this first interim report. Anne

said we should send the committee a memo saying that we are requesting an open space plan be incorporated into the Master Plan. The current Master Plan has no environmental component. Tony suggested we write that the Environmental Commission has come up with a potential list of properties that could be incorporated into an open space plan. We could send this list as an appendix to our letter. The Planning Board will next meet on May 24, to talk about goals and objectives for the Master Plan. Loren will write a letter from us for this meeting. We also discussed adding the following properties to a potential open space list: the North 8th Avenue median, the triangle at Lawrence Avenue, the circle by Montgomery Apartments, South Park Avenue between North 5th and North 8th Avenues, and the space on Highland Avenue by Mill Brook. We formed a subcommittee to work on the open space list; the committee includes Gene, Laurel, Anne, and Loren. They will focus on three issues —Direction of the Master Plan, a Draft Open Space Plan, and Actions to Be Taken Independently of the Master Plan.

- c) Middlesex County Land Acquisition for Open Space. Council adopted a resolution on April 17 requesting the Freeholders purchase Red's Marina. The Phase I and II environmental studies on Red's Marina are not available; Richard said they should be available because the county cannot buy the properties if they are contaminated. The county has copies of the studies. Mike will contact the Mayor about getting copies of the Phase I and II studies on the marina. We do have a Phase I study on the limousine lot.
 - d) Greenway Environmental Education Center Plan. The working group on this includes the chair and vice chair of the Environmental Commission and of the Shade Tree Advisory Committee and Gene Young. They are proposing to place stone circles and shelters along the greenway and to use the bulk of the money for natural restoration. The goal is to create a plan to give to the county and then ask the Freeholders to allow the remainder of the grant funds (\$451,000) for this purpose instead of for a building. We need to first get the county's approval for the concept and then seek public input. The question arose as to how many restrooms to build. Donaldson Park has agreed to add one. Loren suggested we consider waterless or composting toilets; however, these require a service to come and clean them and therefore are not exempt from the maintenance requirements of buildings and their restrooms.
 - e) Environmental Commission Website. The site is up but not linked from anywhere. Jonathan suggested we put the minutes into PDF format and get them onto the website. Loren, Jon, and Mike will work as a subcommittee on this; Jon has a digital camera, so we can put in continually changing pictures of the Native Plant Reserve. ShayMaria will create links for DEP, EPA, etc.
6. New Business
- a) Bike Path Upgrades. Arnold said he walked the path and found that it was mowed outside the fence, and many plants had been mowed. We need an interim directive to DPW to water everything now and to not mow outside the fence or in the end areas where the plantings are. Richard said there has been significant dumping of asphalt along the bikeway, which has been killing the white pines. There are also street sweepings by the WCTC tower awaiting testing for contamination. Additionally, the trees along the bikeway are not being watered, and many trees still are held by nylon ropes. Arnold suggested we write a letter to Richard Kunze urging immediate action on these issues; he will write it. Karen Swaine has drafted a similar letter from the Shade Tree Advisory Committee on these issues.
 - b) East Coast Greenway. This is being coordinated by the Rutgers Bikeway Association. Cedar Lane will be part of this greenway, and the bike path will run alongside it. The greenway will run along the existing Delaware and Raritan Canal. Arnold said the bikeway will come up along the existing Johnson Park bikeway and will be built alongside Cedar Lane. It will probably be an ordinary sidewalk. Gene said that Rutgers owns this entire property and leases it on a long-term basis to the borough. We need to send a letter to Rutgers and cc the East Coast Greenway urging that this area have an open space air to it rather than an urban air. We would like it to have a green strip or a short grassy meadow. The canal tow path is not paved; we could make the bikeway be the same material as the tow path, but someone would have to maintain this. Arnold will

draft a letter expressing our concerns to the Rutgers Bikeway Association. As a result of the creation of the East Coast Greenway, Highland Park may get signage, brochures, and a listing of trail spurs. We might be a special attraction along the greenway. The East Coast Greenway Association will create a directory of restaurants and bicycle repair shops along the greenway, which will include those in Highland Park.

- c) Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance. Middlesex County has a draft ordinance to protect streams, which municipalities can adopt. Anne said the Environmental Commission has the power to draft ordinances, which we can then ask Council to consider. Arnold recommended we also send a letter and model ordinance to the Master Plan Review Committee. Richard recommended we look at South Brunswick's stream corridor protection ordinance as a starting point for drafting our own. Laurel will contact South Brunswick and ask for a copy of this.
 - d) Richard informed us that there has been no change regarding the filling of tidal wetlands in Donaldson Park. Mike said that there was a lot of debris piled at the east portion of the park near the community garden, which has since been bulldozed and compacted into the wetlands. Arnold suggested we write a letter to Ralph Albanir expressing the Environmental Commission's concerns about the placement of these debris piles too close to the wetlands and partly into them. Loren said we should give the number of feet that should be a buffer for the marsh and stream. This is normally 50 feet for intermediate value wetlands. Stream encroachment must be 25 feet. Mike will draft a letter to Albanir.
 - e) Maps/Impervious Coverage. ShayMaria said she can create a series of maps showing the borough's current status and a projection of total buildout with the current zoning. Such a map could also illustrate the type of soil on a property and indicate whether it is hydric soil. She could use such a map to determine if an area is soil compacted. Highland Park currently has 36% impervious coverage. Most building lots have more walkway and driveway than grass, and the soil on school properties has become urban soil. Current studies don't take into account the fact that we are compacting our soil. Arnold suggested we write a letter to Richard Kunze advocating that the borough purchase GIS and work this purchase into the municipal budget. ShayMaria will look up the cost of GIS materials. We will look into whether the borough can obtain a grant for this.
 - f) Cleanup. Richard informed us that Chris Cummings is organizing a cleanup of the vacant lots on South Seventh Avenue next to the bike path. This event is sponsored by the Clean Communities Program and will take place from 9-11 AM on May 19.
7. The meeting adjourned at 11:05 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, June 20 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.