

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of September 12, 2001
Minutes

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

Absent: Anthony Puniello

Guests: Kevin Bonin, Justine Bumby, Eugene Young

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:20 PM.
2. The minutes of the July 18, 2001 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a copy of a letter from Save Open Space, written by Anne Barron, to the Planning Board regarding the Master Plan. In this letter, Anne volunteered Save Open Space to assist in working on the Master Plan and also recommended contacting Anne Alexander, of the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic, for assistance. The letter also claimed that by law, any land below Historic Mean High Tide cannot be removed from public access and that this applies to the Barwood Easement.
4. Site Plans
 - a) Robert and Sheryl Magaziner
127 Benner Street
Docket No.: # 14-19-01
Block and Lot: B-14, L-19

This is an application before the Zoning Board to build a deck and addition, including a new master bedroom and breakfast room, to a single family home on a 50'X150' lot. The applicant is seeking a variance for side yard setback because the proposal is for a 6.6 foot setback while the ordinance requires 10 feet. There are also three pre-existing variances for this site, including one for impervious coverage. These are not being changed except for the impervious coverage, which will be decreased from 43%-41% because the area of the proposed addition and deck is currently paved in concrete. No Comments.

- b) Kew Partnership
307 Raritan Avenue
Docket No.: #158-46-01
Block and Lot: B-158, L-46

This application by the Rebarber Chiropractic Clinic is for a variance to allow the construction of an addition. A letter from the applicant's attorney requests that the Zoning Board waive the requirement for site plan review because the addition will be a second story and will not change the amount of impervious coverage.
Comments: We recommend full shielding of the light fixture in the rear.

5. Old Business

- a) Biosurvey. On July 30, we received a report from Thonet discussing their investigations and findings at the site. Approximately 75% of the project is completed. Additional field investigations are scheduled for the summer and fall of 2001. Thonet also would like to meet with the Environmental Commission to finalize the report. The report makes the following comments regarding the site: the site shows significant biodiversity; no endangered species were sighted, but the biodiversity suggests some may utilize the site; 5 acres or 30% of the site is freshwater wetlands; our delineation of the landfill appears accurate; the site has been considerably disturbed; the existing paths are adequate for limited but not general public access; and the area presents excellent opportunities to preserve natural areas.

Thonet also makes the following recommendations for the site: additional site visits in the summer and fall; a meeting on site with the Environmental Commission; requesting a letter from DEP delineating the freshwater wetlands; landscaping the main entrance; putting the trail system near natural areas; identifying the limits of the landfill area; labeling native plants; removing invasive species; removing debris; placing a security fence along the steeper edge of the gorge; and creating a website with a list of plans and goals for the project, including pictures and a map. The report also contains a list of recommended species to plant and a report by the consultant, which we can give to Council. Arnold reported that Thonet asked us to request a narrative from them along with a map detailing what they observed. He recommended we get a large exhibit board on which we can display the potential trail lines. Gene said we should have Thonet comment that this plan is consistent with the borough's plans for the greenway and is an integral part of that greenway. Arnold will invite Thonet to our next meeting.

- b) Greenway Environmental Education Center. The Committee on the Center agreed at its last meeting to have a spread out Center/greenway with features spreading from River Road to the Meadows. River Road will get the bulk of the money, which will go towards pavilions, council rings, parking at the pumphouse, fixing the pumphouse, a sculpture garden, glass panel sign boards, and a planting and watering system. The Shade Tree Committee dug channels at the Native Plant Reserve and put in garden hoses with spigots to water the plants. Arnold added that River Road would be a good place for using drip irrigation. The Valley Place ravine will get a stone council ring and sign boards. ShayMaria has given us information about unusual geology there. This is a Green Acres site, but it has no sign indicating so, and there is a lot of concrete dumped there, which must be hauled out. Red's Marina, aka Ayres' Beach, will include the Barwood marsh, which the county is calling the Donaldson Park extension. Donaldson Park will get a new gazebo, restroom, and parking areas. The Meadows/bikeway area will have walkable trails, council rings, safety fencing, sign boards, and a bench overlooking the marsh. The Committee will present this concept to the Borough Council at a future meeting.

- c) Open Space Inventory and Plan. Arnold suggested we send a memo to Council about the land use ordinance amendments currently being considered, especially since the Planner was not present at the Planning Board meeting at which the environmental concerns were discussed. He recommends mandating only the cluster development option in the new zone as opposed to allowing both cluster and conventional development. He also questions whether the borough could zone the Meadows, which it already owns, as conservation, while zoning Buck Woods as cluster. Finally, he recommends leaving the zoning as it currently is for the Rutgers Ecological Preserve (currently zoned townhouses/historical, a lower zone than the new one proposed for this area) and for the Midland Ross site. The Commission has several concerns about the proposed zoning ordinance. A crucial one is the definition of open space. Cluster zoning mandates that 40% of the land be open space. Open space on such a site should be publicly accessible; the open areas in the sites with cluster zoning could be deeded to the borough or county. Mike recommended that clustering mean attached homes or townhouses. We would also prefer to see stormwater management structures, such as detention and retention basins, excluded from the definition of open space. Additionally, we recommend the borough adopt an ordinance similar to that adopted by Randolph Township to protect steep slopes. Arnold advocated that the ordinance have a strict method of preventing building on environmentally sensitive areas unless there is a hardship and that it incorporate wording to carry out the goal of preventing the destruction of environmentally sensitive areas. The Commission will write a letter to Council asking for a stream corridor protection ordinance and for the Governing Body to direct the Planner to consider and develop such an ordinance based on the guidelines of the model Middlesex County Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance. In the memo, we will also list the following concerns: the definition of open space in the ordinance, the fact that the landfill area is not protected from future development, the removal of the provision protecting steep slopes, the desire for an Environmental Commission representative on the Technical Advisory Committee, and the benefit of adding experts such as a structural engineer, geologist, and geotechnical engineer to this Committee.

6. New Business

- a) Environmental Commission Website. The site is up, and its address is www.leora.com/hpenv. Our flyer on the Native Plant Reserve, our Mission Statement, and Arnold's article on natural space in Highland Park are all posted on the site. Guest Kevin Bonin has website expertise, is interested in the Environmental Commission, and offered to help with the site.
- b) ANJEC Congress. This will take place on Saturday, October 27.
- c) Green Acres Workshops. Elsie gave us a brochure on these; however, none of them are being held locally.
- d) The Shade Tree Committee will hold a cleanup at the Native Plant Reserve on Sunday, September 16 from 9 AM-12 noon.

7. The meeting adjourned at 10:45 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, October 17, 2001, at 8 PM in Borough Hall.