

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of January 16, 2002  
Minutes

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

Guest: Eugene Young

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:25 PM.
2. Michael handed out the Commission's 2002 meeting schedule, which he will also send to The Home News Tribune.
3. The minutes of the December 19, 2001 meeting were approved with one correction: Item 5a) should read a "Northern Harrier Hawk" instead of a "Northern Harris Hawk."
4. Election of Officers
  - a) Chair. Loren nominated Michael Rosenberg as Chair. Laurel seconded the nomination. Mike was unanimously elected Chair for 2002.
  - b) Vice Chair. Tony nominated Arnold Henderson as Vice Chair. Wendy seconded the nomination. Arnold was unanimously elected Vice Chair for 2002.
  - c) Secretary. Tony nominated Laurel as Secretary. Loren seconded the nomination. Laurel was unanimously elected Secretary for 2002.
5. Correspondence
  - a) Thonet Associates sent us a letter with a computer disk containing a copy of their final biosurvey report.
  - b) Thonet Associates sent us an invoice for \$2,500 for cost of the second half of the contract.
  - c) Thonet Associates submitted a proposal to do a Freshwater Wetlands Delineation and apply for a DEP Letter of Interpretation (LOI) on wetlands for the biosurvey area at a total cost of \$4,750. The cost breakdown is \$1,500 for the wetlands delineation, \$250 for preparation of the base map and property survey, \$2,500 for the preparation and submission of wetlands documentation and LOI application to DEP, and \$500 for a task force to conduct follow up activities during the DEP review period. Mike said this would be a good project for a future grant application, and Arnold said the trail grants we already have might be used for this. The borough would have to hire a contractor for the project. He also informed us that there is a general permit for trails in wetland areas and added that under this program, we could get quick approval for trails. Tony will follow up on this with DEP.
6. Site Plans. There were no new site plans to review.
7. Old Business
  - a) Biosurvey. Blaine Rothauser of Thonet Associates presented the Biosurvey Report findings at our December meeting. Arnold wrote him a thank you letter, and Mike will also write one. We have Thonet's electronic map for the site. The next step is to have Blaine Rothauser make this presentation to Borough Council to inform them of what we have accomplished so far. Mike emphasized that we need to present a clear scope of the work we want done next, and Gene recommended we tie it in with the greenway environmental education centers. Arnold suggested we first find additional information on our trail grant and possible DEP surveys of the area and then show Council we already have the \$15,000 in trail grants to fund this project. We may not need a delineation to determine that the area is wetlands. If the borough decides to go ahead with restoring the area, Council would have to go out to bid for the contract. One problem is that a part of the area Thonet studied falls in the new RA-E residential zone. Gene recommended we talk with Elsie about the Thonet presentation and the next steps we would like to take so she can bring these up at a future Council agenda meeting.

- b) Greenway Environmental Education Center. Arnold, Gene, and Mayor Frank presented the new concept to the Middlesex County Freeholders, who gave permission to go ahead with the plan. Arnold met with Steve Barnes, a representative of the Watershed 9 Lower Raritan Basin Committee (the state has a total of 21 watersheds), and they created a list of the site work needed and the order in which it should be done. Steve has access to committees that can get us grants for this project. Both he and Loren serve on the Watershed 9 Committee. He also told Arnold that the Rahway River Association could manage this project for the borough although it would still be a borough project. This is different from the way the borough usually does contracts. Mike reported that a meeting of the Environmental Education Center Advisory Group would be scheduled for February. Arnold added that the Mayor also wants to get the Borough Administrator and Borough Engineer together to discuss the next steps of the project. They would decide which contracts need to be done and report back to both committees. Certain tasks would be done by CME, such as laying the water lines. We would have to hire a company to do upland work at the meadows. The borough may use convict labor to perform clean-up work at the Native Plant Reserve in the spring. They might also be able to use a boat to clean the area along the river by the meadows. Arnold emphasized that Steve Barnes' group does riverine work and does not want to be responsible for overall management of the project. Wendy suggested we contact key teachers at the high school, summarize what we are doing, and invite them and student representatives to Thonet's Council presentation. She will write a letter and draw up a list of whom to invite. Mike will keep everyone informed on the general progress of this project.
- c) Open Space Inventory and Plan. Our Open Space Inventory is now official, but the plan is not yet. Arnold is following state guidelines in drafting the plan. We decided that each Commission member would review one chapter he has written to determine whether it matches the state's guidelines. We need to put our recommended action items in print so they are incorporated into the Master Plan process. Tony said that open space will have its own subsection in the new Master Plan and that our inventory will be incorporated into the Plan. The Planning Board has our inventory. The Master Plan Subcommittee will draft a Master Plan, present it to the Planning Board, and make it available to the public. Mike asked whether the conservation element of the Master Plan could be our open space plan, and Tony recommended we ask the Planning Board to set up a special subcommittee on this. Meanwhile, Arnold will continue working on the draft open space plan, email it to us, and incorporate our comments into it. He will also create an action list recommending that certain lands not currently zoned for open space be rezoned for it. These will include the end of Cleveland Avenue overlooking Mill Brook, a small parcel at Crowells Road and South 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a parcel on North 11<sup>th</sup>, and municipal land at the top of Buck Woods. An important goal will be to create contiguous open space by rezoning larger properties. Also, we would like the borough to adopt a Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance and Overlay Zone and a Greenway Overlay Zone. The latter would mean the land would keep its current zoning, but there would be an overlay on the map showing that we would like it to be a greenway. Homeowners would then be able to donate easements and receive tax deductions. We also want to establish bicycle paths; however, since borough ordinance says these must be asphalt, we need to describe them as handicapped-accessible pedestrian paths. Other actions we would like to see include municipal ownership or an easement for Buck Woods, partial natural preservation with some public access for the Midland Ross property, and possible rezoning to mark the whole Rutgers Ecological Preserve for conservation. The current Master Plan does call for some of these properties to be rezoned conservation although this never was done. Laurel pointed out that the state requires two public hearings for adoption of an open space plan, and Loren questioned whether those would be conducted at Council meetings or at our meetings. Laurel recommended we ask the Planning Board to begin proceedings for the two required hearings to adopt the plan.
- d) Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance. These were adopted at the Dec. 18 Council meeting. Gene said the Planner received our comments and considered them. Loren reported that the new RA-E zone contains the option of three units per acre on 10,000-12,000-foot lots as the conventional option and 4.5 units per acre on 5,000-foot lots as the cluster option. The original cluster option was for 4 units per acre. She added that it would probably be impossible for applicants to comply with the 4.5 units per acre cluster option, so they will very likely ask for

variances. Gene said he recommended that an Environmental Commission representative be included in the new Technical Advisory Committee, and that the Planner responded that professionals will be called in for meetings with developers and applicants before regular hearings on applications.

- e) Environmental Commission Website. We still need to publicize the site more widely. Arnold will put up flyers in the library and Borough Hall, and we will submit the site to NJServices.org, an Internet directory of community organizations. We will also put a notice about the site on the HPTV bulletin board.

8. New Business

- a) Alternate Members. We are interested in adding positions for two alternate members. Mike will check with ANJEC on provisions for alternate members.
- b) YM-YWHA Wall. The concrete retaining wall along Raritan Avenue by the Y is bleeding sediment into the river. We questioned whether this is an enforcement issue and if it is, who enforces this type of regulation? We also questioned who owns the wall. Gene recommended we contact Zoning Officer Tim Coyle and said this is a construction code issue. Loren informed us that sediment is a regulatory issue. The Commission authorized her to pursue this matter as a representative of the Environmental Commission.
- c) New DEP Commissioner and EPA Administrator. Mike handed out copies of press releases informing us that Brad Campbell will now be the state's new DEP Commissioner and that Jane Kenny (of Highland Park) will now be the EPA's new Region 2 Administrator.
- d) Digging at Cedar Lane. Arnold will call the person in charge of the Rutgers bikeway project to find out why there is digging in this area. A retaining wall is being built on the north side of the street.
- e) Native Plant Reserve. There are holes on the site that need to be filled. We can get a waiver from DEP to fill in the holes. Arnold will work on the waiver application.
- f) DPW Debris from Water Relining Project. Arnold discussed this issue with Borough Administrator Richard Kunze and told him that our goal for the meadows project is to restore this site to a meadows area. The end of the bikeway is a terrible spot for DPW debris. A better option would be to set the debris it back with an access road and ring the area with shrubs and trees. We could ask the contractor to restore the meadow condition after removing the debris and give him directives to leave the topsoil on top and seed the area properly. This summer would be an appropriate time to start permanent meadows at each end of the site and later work toward the middle. Richard will inform us about his long-term plans for construction staging.

- 9. The meeting adjourned at 10:25 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, February 20, 2002 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.