

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of October 16, 2002
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld, Loren Muldowney,
Anthony Puniello, Wendy Rosen, Councilman Gary Minkoff

Absent: Jonathan Abrahams

Guests: Anne Barron, Jesse Roehrich of NJ Community Water Watch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:20 PM.
2. The minutes of the September 18, 2002 meeting were approved with one correction: Item 5b) should read, "Green Acres policy may not allow unisex bathrooms" instead of "state law does not allow unisex bathrooms."
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a letter from the DEP Bureau of Underground Storage Tanks informing us that Tosco Corp. at 702 Raritan Avenue has a problem with underground storage tanks and is currently working on a remediation plan.
 - b) We received a letter from NJDEP informing us of the upcoming round of Environmental Services Program matching grants. Grant applications are due December 1.
 - c) Borough Recreation Director Norm Arshan sent a letter inviting Mike and/or any Commission members to do a presentation on environmental awareness to students in the after-school program (grades 3-6). Wendy, Anne, and Mike will form a subcommittee to explore this.
 - d) We received a copy of a magazine article discussing the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the grants it gives to non-profits. The Environmental Commission may not be eligible for one of these grants, but the Fund for Highland Park, which has been constituted as a non-profit organization, might be eligible. Arnold will contact Nathan Imm, a member of both the Shade Tree Advisory Committee and the Fund for Highland Park, for more information about this.
4. Site Plans. There were no site plans to review.
5. Old Business
 - a) Trail Grant Status Report. Loren, Carol Avelsgaard of STAC, Borough Administrator Richard Kunze, and Borough CFO Nick Tresante walked the site and discussed suggestions for the in-kind match, which is being provided in the form of labor by borough employees. They asked DPW to move the dumpster and the shed. Some of the junk along the trail was removed by workers from the Department of Corrections. Richard Kunze and Borough Engineer Bruce Koch visited the area earlier today to consider placing raised boardwalks over an area that is highly eroded. We decided to do informal clearing of the area, possibly by working in conjunction with NJ Water Watch. Anne suggested we co-sponsor a walk along the trail with the borough's Task Force on Pedestrian and Traffic Safety, which wants to do a town-wide walk. She will discuss this with Poldi Binder of the Task Force. Arnold recommended having Joy Norsworthy visit the head of the trail and discuss what it would take to get wheelchairs in. We might be able to put down loose material packed by a roller to create a small spur for wheelchairs. Loren spoke to a DEP representative about getting an extension for the project, and he suggested we write a letter requesting it and ask the Borough Engineer whether and what permits are needed. We also discussed the possibility of applying for a natural trail grant in the Meadows. Mike suggested that DEP would probably want us to finish this project before applying for a second grant.

- b) Greenway Environmental Education Center. Gary reported that two contracts have been approved by Council. MKW Landscaping has been hired to do the landscaping work. This firm expressed a strong desire to make interesting, environmentally-compatible projects, and they have previously worked in parks. Kevin Wolfe, the architect hired to design the building, has renovation experience. We have approval from the county Freeholders to create different types of environmental centers all along the greenway. Most of the available money will go to rejuvenating the River Road site, including restoring the pump house and planting flower beds. Since this is a long-term project, plantings will be done continuously at various times. We will also build some type of shelter on River Road, possibly a roof and deck and a pair of restrooms. Mike and Arnold, who both are members of the Working Group on the Environmental Education Center, will provide the contractors with all necessary information. Design and planning work on the River Road project will be done throughout the fall and winter. Mike suggested we hold a groundbreaking in the spring to coincide with Earth Day. Donaldson Park is one of the sites along the greenway, and there the county is adding a pavilion by the Meadows and doing landscaping around the pond. We are also trying to have the county create a natural area in the lower corner of the park.
- c) ANJEC Environmental Congress. The ANJEC Congress is this Friday, October 18. Mike informed the Commission that we have been selected to receive a 2002 Environmental Achievement Award for our web site. ANJEC will present us with this award at 9 AM on Friday; Mike, Arnold, Laurel, Jon, and Leora Wenger will attend the ceremony.
- d) Web Site. When the borough web site comes online, we will need to decide who will host our site. The question arose as to whether we want to be independent or whether we want to be part of the borough site. We need to define the specifications regarding control of the site. Gary is working with the people responsible for development of the borough's web site. Loren will contact Jon about getting our 2002 minutes onto our web site. Gary suggested we put the minutes in PDF files and email them to Leora and Jon to upload.
- e) Buck Woods/Gabrielle Estates Status. Anne reported that DEP did a second visit in August 2002 to look for wetlands but did not inform members of Save Open Space, who had requested to be informed of the visit. Jack Morris obtained the original Letter of Interpretation (LOI) in 1997, which said there were no wetlands or transition areas in Buck Woods. In response, the Environmental Commission sent DEP a letter in 1999 showing a seasonal stream going through the area. Mike reported that there are actually two streams there—an upper one and a lower one. Anne added that there are also illegal dams along the site. The main problem is that DEP did both site visits during drought years, yet they will not take this into account in their findings. This year, they did only one soil boring in the area's lowest point even though there are three different ravines, Anne reported. She has consulted a soil expert, who says we need information on soil mottling or gleying. Tony said there are three parameters for wetlands—the type of plants, the soils, and the area's hydrology. Anne emphasized that Save Open Space is not arguing that there are wetlands on the site but that it is a transition area for wetlands downstream. Along with seven property owners adjacent to Buck Woods, Save Open Space has filed an appeal of the 2002 decision. The appeal is based on the process of the site visits and the fact that DEP did not do a proper analysis of the site during both visits. If DEP accepts that the process was flawed, the goal is to have them revisit the site. Save Open Space also filed an Open Public Records Act appeal regarding their not being informed of the second visit. DEP has 10 days to decide whether to hear the appeal; if they refuse, then it goes before a judge. Anne said that DEP has an aerial wetlands map for the area indicating that wetlands may be downstream. She added that Save Open Space is working with the Baykeeper and the Edison Wetlands Association to set up

established procedures for visits of this type through the Land Use Management Program. We also need to find out when the stream was put in a pipe and whether there were any terms or conditions associated with this. Laurel will contact Joan Hullings about locating the Planning and Zoning Board records for 1977-1981. Mike will write a letter to Chris Jones, Middlesex County section head of DEP, requesting another visit with more conclusive soil borings and stating that we would like consideration of the exact property lines, especially where there are ravine like areas.

Anne also reported that Save Open Space presented a letter to Council on Oct. 1 requesting a new resolution directing the Borough Administrator to search for funds to purchase Buck Woods. Passage will also allow Save Open Space to pursue grants for this purpose. They currently have five people willing to work on finding grants. The Council passed a resolution in April 2000, but it was good for only one year. Anne said the Council responded that only borough committees could enter resolutions, so she asked the Commission to do this. Gary said this first must be discussed by the Council's Public Works Committee, and if they approve it, it then would go to the whole Council. He added that there is preliminary support for it among Council members. Anne will obtain a copy of the 2000 resolution to submit to Council. Resolutions apply for a calendar year, so the borough would have to approve one now and another in January.

6. New Business

- a) Water Watch Cleanup. Jesse informed us that Water Watch is sponsoring a cleanup in Johnson Park on Saturday, Oct. 26. Rutgers students and community members are invited. The group will remove trash along the river. Representatives of Water Watch will visit the site this coming Monday to map out what areas most need cleaning. Arnold suggested they look at the small stream descending from Cleveland Ave. and the area downstream from there. Mike recommended they also remove trash from the Native Plant Reserve. Jesse said that Water Watch would like an endorsement of the cleanup from the Environmental Commission. If we give our endorsement, they will put our name on their banners. The Commission voted unanimously to give our support to this project. We will also set up an information table at the cleanup, where we will display information from our web site and a brochure on the Native Plant Reserve. Jesse reported that Water Watch focuses on three areas—education, stream walking, and river cleanups. They plan to do a stream walk in Highland Park, in which students will map streams and determine their health. She invited us to join them on these walks. Anne suggested the group walk along the Crowells Road stream between Highland Park and Edison.
- b) Salt Runoff From Public Works Yard. Gary reported that the borough has requested that DPW purchase a salt containment structure since there currently are problems with leakage. He will move this issue to the Council's priority list. Arnold suggested he look into a large sand pile at DPW, where salt is mixed in with sand.
- c) New Grants. The borough has applied for a \$200,000 Livable Communities Grant to beautify the limousine lot on River Road. We discussed whether the Commission should apply for a DEP grant this year and what project the grant should fund. Gary said he was contacted by a former teacher in New Brunswick who is interested in doing an educational program on recycling. This type of project would be best for a targeted population, such as fifth graders. Arnold suggested we pursue a grant to design the Meadows trail. We will all think of grant ideas and bring those we come up with to our next meeting. Gary will invite the teacher to our next meeting to discuss long-term projects she might do with us.

d) Clean Communities Bill/Litter Issues. Laurel will forward everyone an alert from the League of Municipalities urging legislators to renew funding for the Clean Communities program. Gary said the borough received a nominal amount of Clean Communities funding this year. He suggested the idea of "deputizing" citizens to clean up litter. He added that there is a problem in that our trash receptacles on Raritan Ave. are identical to our recycling bins. Additionally, some people are using the planters on Raritan as trash receptacles. He also said Council is studying the idea of creating a Special Improvement District, in which property owners would be assessed a special tax which would go towards sanitation. Arnold recommended we tell business owners to not put trash on the curbs because it then spills directly into storm drains. We discussed the idea of stenciling "no trash" on storm drains. Laurel will write an article for the next borough newsletter requesting people not put trash in storm drains or curbs. She will also contact ANJEC to see if they have information on trash and storm drains. Jesse reported that Water Watch is having its conference this weekend and that volunteers will go house to house in Highland Park on Saturday informing people about the Clean Water Act.

7. The meeting adjourned at 10:55 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, November 20, 2002 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.