

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of June 18, 2003  
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld,  
Loren Muldowney, Councilman Gary Minkoff  
Absent: Anthony Puniello  
Guests: Gabor Grunstein, Leora Wenger, Eugene Young

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:30 PM.
2. The minutes of the May 21, 2003 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
  - a) We received a copy of a letter from Middlesex County Engineer John Reiser to David Samuel of CME Associates inviting Samuel to attend a meeting on proposed improvements to the intersection of River Road and Cedar Lane. This meeting already took place on June 12.
  - b) We received a copy of a letter from Chris Jones at DEP to Schoor DiPalma regarding a Letter of Interpretation for the presence or absence of wetlands at the property of Parker Nursing Home. DEP determined that freshwater wetlands are not present on this property.
  - c) We received a copy of a permit from DEP to the Middlesex Water Company authorizing the placement of a new water line that will go across Johnson Park to Cedar Lane. Middlesex Water Company also sent along a list of conditions they agreed to meet, which includes the use of native vegetation. In connection with this project, a question was raised as to whether the county did a feasibility study about dredging the river. Laurel will contact county officials to find out if there is such a study and if there is, how we can get a copy of it.
4. Site Plans
  - a) Sarah Theresa Vitale  
111 Barnard Street  
Docket No.: #101-4-03  
Block and Lot: B-101, L-4

The applicant proposes to screen in an existing deck and create a gazebo at a residence on a 70 X100-foot lot. She is seeking a C variance because the lot has a pre-existing condition in that it is less than minimum lot depth. She is also seeking a new variance for minimum distance between buildings. Although this will increase impervious coverage from 32-35%, it is still below the maximum 40% allowed. No Comments.

- b) Margaret Lambert  
232 Raritan Avenue  
Docket No.: #22-7-03  
Block and Lot: B-22, L-7

The applicant is seeking a use variance to use the ground floor of a two-family residential building in the Central Business District for offices. No Comments.

- c) Margaret Lambert  
120 South Ninth Avenue  
Docket No.: #56-9-03  
Block and Lot: B-56, L-9

The applicant seeks to finish the attic of a two-family residence to create a living space and bedroom loft for a second-floor apartment. She is seeking a D variance due to a pre-existing non-conforming use in that it is a two-family residence in a single-family zone. No Comments.

d) Francis Parker Nursing Home (Addendum)  
443 River Road  
Docket No.: #189-3-03  
B-189, L-3

We received two addendums to the Parker Nursing Home application. The first one is a letter in which Parker is requesting that the fiscal impact analysis be waived, as the fiscal impact on the borough from this project will be diminutive. The second is a supplemental layout and landscaping plan, which shows the pond and the retaining walls.

Parker is asking for a height variance for one of the buildings and for a setback variance. On June 16, the programming expert and the engineer for Parker testified before the Zoning Board. The Master Plan discusses this property and suggests leaving the trees on it. The borough also has an ordinance on preserving stands of mature trees. Parker has agreed to do a survey of existing trees on the property. Tim Coyle will request a complete tree survey of the whole property at the next Zoning Board meeting. Additionally, though Parker is required by the state to have 30 parking stalls for this facility, they are adding 78 because the borough requires more. One possible option is that the borough allow them to build with fewer parking spaces. That could save trees along the property line with the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. We would like to work with the applicant toward saving trees and adjusting the parking configurations.

Comments: The paved connector road to the Castle property in the southeast corner of the Parker property should be permanently closed, thereby minimizing habitat loss and disturbance to the adjacent Rutgers Ecological Preserve. We would be happy to join with Parker in surveying trees and considering alternatives for saving them, particularly along the border with the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. We also want to explore the possibility of saving trees in the area below the detention basin. A lower number of parking stalls would facilitate saving trees and would avoid too close an approach to the site boundaries.

## 5. Old Business

- a) Trail Grant Status Report. Loren informed us that we have the report and a preliminary drawing. We may want to extend the path somewhat further than originally planned. Next week, an architect from Schlesinger Associates will visit and walk the site before making the final drawing. We are emphasizing that we want the plantings to be native species.
- b) Environmental Education Center. Currently at issue is how much of an enclosed space we can get in the pavilion. The borough can put \$50,000 more of the grant into the building. This money was previously reserved for signage and maps in other areas of the greenway. Although the borough is still using the concept of working in multiple spaces around the borough, we will use other grants for the other places. Gary emphasized that we need to create access to the broadest spectrum of spaces. The working group for the center needs to create a comprehensive game plan for what they want where. This will help frame concepts for the landscape architect. The next step will be for the architect to get back to the working group with a revised concept for the River Road site that will include an enclosed space. They have already drawn demonstrations of three different types of roofs. Loren suggested we have solar panels on the roof to demonstrate their use and to power the tools at the site. Gary noted that this site will require an ongoing maintenance program.
- c) Buck Woods. DEP never mentioned the water feature on this site. We will send them a letter with photos directing them to the specific spot. Arnold will supply Mike with the photos and a topographic map. Hopefully, we will get DEP to come back to the site.

- d) County Plans for the Intersection of River Road and Cedar Lane. No Commission members were able to attend the meeting on this, so we need to contact those who held it. Mike will contact Bruce Koch for more information. We would like to see the current plans and comment on them. There are several environmental issues with this project. Some of the alternatives add lanes that cut into the Rutgers Ecological Preserve, the Cenacle, or Johnson Park. This corner is the access point to the Preserve. One option is to put up a sign and create an attractive entranceway to the Preserve that would serve to attract people.
- e) Salt/Sand Containment. Gary met with Bruce Koch, David Samuel of CME and Assistant DPW Superintendent Don Riche about this. Lloyd Young visited several neighboring communities and came up with a structure he believes is most suitable for Highland Park. It will be A-shaped with concrete walls and will not have a dome. The structure will be put in the DPW yard where the salt pile is now. DPW will auction off surplus equipment to free up space for the structure.
- f) Environmental Commission Web Site. The borough site is now up, and our site is linked to the borough site. Leora will meet with borough CFO Nick Trasente to discuss what we have on our site and where to go from here.

6. New Business

- a) Borough Open Space List. Arnold recommended we discuss what properties are going on the borough's open space list (as opposed to ours). Green Acres says we should list all municipally-owned open spaces on the borough list.
- b) Arnold provided information regarding an upcoming meeting on the Endangered and Non-Game Species Program.
- c) We noted that ANJEC is having a workshop on June 25 on the subject of monitoring municipal open space through the use of conservation easements.
- d) Arnold spoke with a pilot who is doing aerial photos of Highland Park and showed him open space areas to photograph. We may get these photos showing our open space areas and issues. Gabor said DEP's 2000 fly-over photos for Highland Park should be available in the coming year.

7. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 16, 2003 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.