

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of October 15, 2003
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld,
Loren Muldowney, Councilman Gary Minkoff
Absent: Gabor Grunstein, Anthony Puniello
Guest: Mary Ellen Tuccillo

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:25 PM.
2. In Memoriam: Gene Young. We noted that Gene Young died on Sunday, October 12. There will be a memorial service for him on Saturday, October 18 at 3 PM at the Jacqui Kuhn Funeral Home. Gene was a former Councilman, longtime member of the Environmental Commission, and member of the Working Group on the Environmental Education Center. Mike recommended the Commission pass a resolution supporting naming the Environmental Education Center after Gene, which the Commission unanimously approved. Mike will prepare the resolution.
3. The minutes of the September 17, 2003 meeting were approved with one correction: Item 5b) should read (regarding the Trail Grant) "the materials have been specified and will be ordered."
4. Correspondence. There was no correspondence.

5. Site Plans

a) Elsie Foster Dublin
408 South 9th Avenue
Docket No.: #59-9-03
Block and Lot: B-59, L-9

The applicant proposes to add a dormer and a deck to a home on a 55.16 X 100-foot lot. She is seeking two variances for minimum side yard setback and one variance for minimum front yard setback. No Comments.

b) Westminster Management
2 Woodbridge Avenue
Docket No.: 44-1-9, 35-03
Block and Lot: B-44, L-1-9, 35

The applicant is applying to the Planning Board to replace an apartment identification sign. No Comments.

c) Westminster Management
401 South First Avenue
Docket No.: # 17-29, 30, 31-03
Block and Lot: B-17, L-29, 30, 31

The applicant seeks to modify two of its identification signs. The type of sign proposed is not permitted in the RA zone, so they are seeking a use variance. No Comments.

d) Jana Varlejs
612 South 1st Avenue

Docket No.: #10-22-03
Block and Lot: B-10, L-22

The applicant proposes to convert an existing enclosed porch to a breakfast area, add a second floor over the breakfast area and kitchen, add a rear third-floor attic dormer, and add steps and a platform from the breakfast area. The house is on a 50 X 100-foot lot. Variances are being sought for two pre-existing side-yard setbacks and for maximum building height. No Comments.

e) Park Development Group
513-515 Raritan Avenue
Docket No.: #142-5,6-03
Block and Lot: B-142, L-5, 6

This building currently has dental offices on the first floor and residential apartments on the second floor. The applicant seeks to convert a storage area to professional offices and is requesting an extension of a prior approval. This project will demolish and reconstruct only on the existing foundation of the building. No Comments.

f) Keming Zhu
39 South 5th Avenue
Docket No.: #40-16-03
Block and Lot: B-40, L-16

The applicant seeks to convert a second floor attic to a bedroom. He needs a use variance because the house is in a professional office zone. No Comments.

g) Christopher Hagin
69 South Adelaide Avenue
Docket No.: #5-16.01-03
Block and Lot: B-5, L-16.01

The applicant proposes to add a three-floor addition off the right side of the house on a 68 X 150-foot lot. The first floor addition is to be a larger family room, the second floor addition a bedroom and closets in the master bedroom, and the third floor addition a half bath and larger bedroom. He is seeking two variances for side yard setback.

Comments: Clarify the impervious coverage. The drawing does not show this clearly. The drawing does not support the data provided in the table.

Note: Commission members agreed that we will write a letter to the Zoning Board, Zoning Officer, and Planning Board requesting that applicants provide better drawings with their applications.

h) RLG, LLC, Dr. Ronald Lau
37 South 5th Avenue
Docket No.: #36-9-03
Block and Lot: B-36, L-9

The applicant proposes a two-story addition to an existing dwelling in the professional office zone. He plans to live in the top-floor apartment. He is seeking variances for side yard setback and parking. His proposal includes paving of a gravel parking lot.

Comments: Have the lot stay gravel or another pervious material. Add landscaping to offset losses. We welcome the idea of a seepage pit. Retaining runoff on site is a good idea.

Note: Gary will contact Kevin Lyons at Rutgers for more information on pervious pavers.

5) Old Business

- a) Trail Grant Status Report. Loren has estimates from two landscapers and expects a third by Friday. The estimates are in line with what we can afford to pay. She would like the landscapers to make several changes in their proposals, for example, put the drain in the corner in a large concrete receptacle. The next step is to present Council with the three estimates. If Council approves, we can choose one. Then Loren can request an extension on the project from DEP. Gary will put this item on the agenda of the Council's Standing Committee on Public Works. If DPW does their portion of the work on schedule, they should be done by the end of October.
- b) Raritan River Dredging Project. An article appeared in The Home News Tribune last week about proposed development of the old New Brunswick police station. Mike, Arnold, and Gene attended a meeting of the New Brunswick Environmental Commission where Denise Nickel of MCIA gave a presentation on what is being considered regarding the dredging. She said there are no plans to dredge upstream of the Albany Street Bridge. The area the county is looking at dredging is the existing channel between Highland Park and New Brunswick. Not much sediment would have to be removed from there. The only concern regarding contamination is cadmium. At the meeting, there was also talk of moving the Rutgers crew team boathouse to the location of the old police station. Gary noted that Richard Marx has raised concern regarding a no wake zone and said Borough Planner Susan Blickstein recommended having canoeing or kayaking to East Jersey Olde Towne and back. This would provide another access point to our downtown. Arnold reported that the Edison Wetlands Association is opposed to heavy use of the river corridor because this would destroy open space.
- c) Greenway Environmental Education Center. The mayor wants to go for a larger vision, more than the current budget allows, and raise the money. She is talking with MKW about expanding the scope of the work and about contract revisions. There are potentially other sources of funding to expand this project.
- d) Francis Parker Memorial Home
443 River Road
Docket No. 189-3-03
Block and Lot: B-189, L-3
We received a new Stormwater Management Report, Phase I Environmental Impact Assessment, Potable Water Service Engineer's Report, and Sanitary Sewer Engineer's Report for this application. The applicant lists 22 changes made to address issues brought up at meetings. The number of trees to be removed is now 461; the number to be replaced is 367. Parker plans to put an underground detention basin beneath the parking lot; however, this is in an area full of trees. There is no real overlay of the parking area showing before and after. They still have lanterns on 14-foot poles with only the tops of the lights covered and only the house side shielded. They now also propose a road to the Kaplan property. Loren noted that there is a 3-foot diameter tree, probably a mulberry, on the site, which is not shown on the plan at all. We are concerned whether Parker has actually mapped what is on the site. Gary will look into this. We will consult with the Borough Planner regarding the proposed road to the Kaplan property. Loren recommended we present the Zoning Board with a hard copy of our comments as well as read them aloud at the meeting. The next Zoning Board meeting dealing with Parker will be on October 20.
Comments: Use light fixtures that are already well shielded to conform to Highland Park's ordinance. Some non-native trees and shrubs could be potentially invasive and risk destroying the integrity of the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. We are concerned about the road to the Kaplan property. We would like clarification on the drainage structure.

- e) Buck Woods. Gary is corresponding with Anne Barron on grant possibilities. We will ask the Fund for Highland Park if they would be interested in soliciting donations to purchase the Woods and/or in jointly applying for a grant.
- f) Environmentally Preferred Purchasing. This will now be a focus of the Green Community Working Group, which will have its first meeting soon. The group's chair, Mike Ambrosio, and Gary are involving Rutgers in a research partnership and should soon come back with a proposal. Gary noted that Montclair passed a sustainability resolution and said he will propose this to the Council's Standing Committee on Public Works. Kevin Lyons at Rutgers has his own database system for purchasing, which has pricing data for any product consumed at Rutgers. All products are put through a "green screen" and scored. Highland Park has informed Kevin that we are interested in participating in this project. Eventually, we would like to have information about products on the Internet. The borough will also consider the concept of ecological footprint regarding the origin of products including supplies, input, and vendors. Kevin will work with the borough on an evaluation of what we can do, where we can raise awareness of these issues, and where other communities have had success in this area.

6. New Business

- a) The Residents' Handbook is being revised. Arnold submitted a revised text on nature in Highland Park and a schedule of our meeting dates.
- b) We discussed how to get action on items in the Master Plan, such as rezoning the Rutgers Ecological Preserve for conservation. Gary said the next step is for committees of Council to decide which ordinances need priority as soon as possible. The first of these meetings will happen shortly.

7. The meeting adjourned at 11:15 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, November 19, 2003 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.