

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of February 18, 2004
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Laurel Kornfeld, Loren Muldowney,
Councilman Gary Minkoff
Absent: Gabor Grunstein, Arnold Henderson, Anthony Puniello
Guests: Jesse Roerich of New Jersey Community Water Watch, Mary Ellen Tuccillo

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:20 PM.
2. The minutes of the January 21, 2004 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans
 - a) Saul Salkin
411 Becker Street
Docket No.: # 85-30, 31-04
Block and Lot: B-85, L-30, 31

The applicant seeks to build a 30 X 20-foot one-story addition to the back of the house and patio on a 150 X 46.5-foot lot. The application is before the Zoning Board because he needs a variance for two pre-existing side yard setbacks. No Comments.

5. Old Business
 - a) Trail Grant Status Report. Loren reported that the fence is almost completely installed, and the retaining wall is done and looks very good. She will send before and after photos to DEP. It will take only one or two days to complete the landscaping work. Once the fence and landscaping are completed, DPW can put capstones down at the top of the retaining wall.
 - b) Greenway Environmental Education Center. Laurel reported that the Council viewed computer generated photos of the design for the Center at a recent meeting. Gary said the Council would like to do a public presentation of plans for the Center in May.
 - c) Green Community Working Group. Mike has been unable to attend the Group's meetings because they are held during the day. Loren attends the meetings regularly. Laurel will contact chair Mike Ambrosio to inquire about opening these meetings to Environmental Commission members and to interested members of the public.
 - d) Francis Parker Memorial Home Expansion. We wrote a letter to the Zoning Board dated January 26, in which we requested they rehear the Parker Home application. We received a reply from Zoning Board attorney Benjamin Bucca saying that our comments were discussed and considered by the Board and that some plans were revised and certain conditions imposed as a result of our input. Bucca also says that the Board fully performed its statutory duties regarding this application and that as a general rule a case can be reopened only if there is an allegation of fraud, misrepresentation, or newly discovered evidence.
 - e) Endangered Species in Highland Park. Arnold has a report on endangered species in town that we will consider adopting as an amendment to the NRI. We are tabling this until the next meeting when Arnold will be present.
 - f) Web Site. Jon will put information on the community garden in Donaldson Park, which is operated by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension and/or Middlesex County (we will find out which one or both), on our web site.

6. New Business

- a) New Jersey Community Water Watch. Jesse Roehrich of New Jersey Community Water Watch, which is part of NJ PIRG and Americorps, reported that her group plans to do eight river cleanups along the Raritan River on the weekend before Earth Day and would like to do one in Highland Park on Sunday, April 18. Water Watch hopes to bring about 50 volunteers, both Rutgers students and community members. Jesse reported that she spoke to Arnold about possible locations for the cleanup, and he suggested the path in Donaldson Park, which has a lot of trash. This is the area near the WCTC tower. We suggested several possibilities, including the area along the creek by DPW that runs into the river, Red's Marina, Valley Place Ravine, the area behind the Y, the Native Plant Reserve, the east side of Donaldson Park, and the Barwood Conservation Easement. The Barwood area is environmentally sensitive, but it is private property, so it is not a good choice. Jesse asked the Commission to provide guidance in reaching out to the community to promote the cleanup. Laurel suggested putting flyers around town, putting a notice on HPTV, publicizing the information on various local web sites and in newspapers, and getting reporters to do an advance story. Mike suggested we put notice of the cleanup on the Commission's web site. Jesse has a copy of an endorsement letter for the cleanups that is currently being circulated and asked us to look for other groups that might want to sign on. Laurel will send Jesse contact information for The Chronicle and The Somerset Spectator. Jesse will forward information on the Water Watch cleanups to Gary for him to share with the Council's Public Works Committee.
- b) New Borough Land Use Ordinances. Mike distributed copies of the six new land use ordinances for which the borough held a first reading on February 17. These are now going to the Planning Board for comment and will then be sent back to the Council for adoption. They include a steep slopes ordinance, a stream corridor protection ordinance, rezoning of the Rutgers Ecological Preserve to conservation, extension of the Central Business District (CBD) to Woodbridge Avenue, rezoning of several Cleveland Avenue properties from Light Industrial to Professional Office, and allowing of single-family homes and apartments as accessory uses to buildings in the Professional Office districts. Gary reported that all these came out of the new Master Plan and said the borough is interested in timely enactment of them. He also reported that the Planning Board will review the ordinances next Thursday and submit comments on them. Mike said that Councilman Steve Nolan asked him to comment on the ordinances as soon as possible. The ordinances are currently on the agenda for final reading and adoption on March 2, so Gary would like to get our comments to the Borough Attorney by next Friday. Commission members will try to get comments to Mike by next Thursday. Loren noted that she believes there is a contradiction between items 1 and 2 of section d on Permitted Slope Activity of the steep slopes ordinance, as item 1 reads "to the greatest extent possible, any applications for subdivision or site plan approval, grading or clearing of any lot, conditional use or use variance approval, shall avoid disturbances of slopes 10% or greater" while item 2 allows disturbance of 60% of slopes of 10-14.99%. Gary said our Planner compared this with other towns' steep slopes ordinances. However, he added that regarding substantive changes to the ordinances, any well-reasoned input would be considered. Mike emphasized that the Commission generally supports all of these ordinances and said that if we have comments, they will be regarding the details.
- c) New Jersey Walks and Bikes Conference. Laurel reported that she attended the Voorhees Transportation Institute conference on February 6 titled "New Jersey Walks and Bikes" and that there was much information distributed on smart growth, environmental and health issues relating to transportation. She will bring this information to our next meeting, and we will decide which items to put in our library files and/or on our web site.

7. The meeting adjourned at 10:15 PM. The next meeting will be on Wednesday, March 17, 2004 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.