

Highland Park Environmental Commission

Meeting of October 20, 2004

Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Gabor Grunstein, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld,

Mary Ellen Tuccillo, Councilman Gary Minkoff

Absent: Jonathan Abrahams, Loren Muldowney, Anthony Puniello

Guests: Holly Lewis and Erin Mannella of New Jersey Community Water Watch, Alan Williams

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.
2. The minutes of the September 22, 2004 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a letter from the Edison Wetlands Association regarding the borough landfill.
 - b) We received a program guide and application package from DEP for their matching grants program, which has a deadline of December 15, 2004. This program offers matching grants ranging from \$1,000-\$2,500. We will brainstorm possible ideas for a grant application.

4. Site Plans

- a) Keith Kline
215 Lawrence Avenue
Docket No.: # 166-62-04
Block and Lot: B-166, L-62

The applicant is seeking approval for demolition of a garage and an addition to the home, both of which are already done. He needs a variance for side yard setback. The application includes revised plans for the enclosed porch and carport.
No Comments.

5. Old Business

- a) Greenway Environmental Education Center. The designer is back at work on the project.
- b) Green Community Working Group. The group met yesterday and discussed where to put the trees the borough is getting through the Cool Cities program. They also want to work on ordinances. Mike told them we are interested in an ordinance on light pollution. Arnold recommended the group look at strengthening our tree ordinance. Gary said they are considering a stormwater ordinance.

Gary reported that the borough is buying a compressed natural gas garbage truck and is now advertising for bids. The truck will refuel at Rutgers. The Code Enforcement Department already has a compressed natural gas vehicle. In the future, several borough vehicles may need to be replaced, and to the extent that it is possible, the goal is to replace gasoline vehicles with natural gas vehicles.

Next on the Council's agenda is passing a resolution making Highland Park the lead entity in an environmentally friendly purchasing cooperative. The idea is to get the best up front prices while managing the sustainability issue.

Gary also reported that the borough will bring recycling in house, which will potentially bring economic savings. This year, we are spending \$175,000 for

MCIA to do our recycling; next year that cost is rising to \$250,000. We will need an extra garbage truck, which can be used for both trash collecting and recycling. DPW did research and found sources interested in buying our recyclables. The borough would also like to increase the categories of items we recycle.

Gary reported that the Bloustein School did a series of benchmarking audits for borough buildings and is now studying the building blocks of a green community master plan. They are developing a set of recommendations for areas such as public education and communication and a borough-wide eco-footprint program.

On October 19, the Council passed a resolution to install photovoltaics at Borough Hall and to retrofit HVAC and lighting in all municipal buildings.

Until the end of November, the BPU's Clean Energy program is offering large subsidies on energy efficient lighting fixtures, appliances, bulbs, etc. At <http://www.njcleanenergy.com>, there is a listing of places in each county that sells these products.

Gary informed us that the new salt dome is now being built. The borough is also constructing a calcium chloride tank and will be using decreasing amounts of sand in snow removal in favor of a calcium chloride spray.

- c) Raritan River New Brunswick Side—Various Proposed Docks/Piers. The dredging project is on hold because of a delay in DEP approval of the last two permits needed. Gabi reported that there are issues regarding the dredge spoils that were not taken into account. Arnold put copies of excerpted pages from the dredge spoils report, which is now available, in the environmental folder in the library. There were sediment characterizations done for this project; testing was done up and down the river in various locations. Arnold suggested we write to the engineers on the project requesting an environmental component be added to the permit process, especially regarding the issue of sandbars. We need to find out who at DEP is reviewing what permits since we don't know if these appear in the bi-weekly catalogue of pending DEP permits the Commission receives. Laurel will contact Denise Nickel, the project manager, at MCIA and find out what the pending permits are and what input we can have on the process. She will then email this information to Commission members.
- d) Tree Replacement—Route 18 Extension. Arnold reported that so far, he has received no response from Frank Wong, Rutgers Director of Buildings and Grounds, regarding planting 25 of the trees at the Native Plant Reserve. There is some confusion because Wong apparently has another application from Highland Park from former Main Street Director Guil Vivas.
- e) Edison Wetlands Association. We received a letter from the EWA informing us that they want to meet with us to discuss the Brownfields to Greenfields opportunity at the borough landfill. Members of EWA toured the landfill, and the group believes it could be a model brownfields to greenfields conversion project since the area already provides significant habitat for a variety of wildlife. Arnold reported that Bob Spiegel of EWA is already applying for grants to convert several landfills, and he could possibly add ours to the list. There is a federal grant issued by the state, known as the Recreational Trails Grant, which we could apply for on our own. Gary noted that Recreational Trails Grants could be matched in kind. Arnold has a map of existing trails at the site. We noted that parts of the landfill are still zoned residential and that the end sections should be rezoned for conservation. An advantage of working with EWA is that they have

access to both expertise and grant funding. We agreed that Mike would contact Bob to set up a joint meeting.

6. New Business

- a) Gabi went to the ANJEC Congress, which had a session on greenways and bike trails. Towns doing these reported that they get most of their money from DOT. The East Coast Greenway Alliance prefers biking be on a separate bikeway, not on the streets. One idea for Highland Park is to put a bikeway near the river.
- b) Erin and Holly from New Jersey Community Water Watch want to have a cleanup of Valley Place Ravine on Sunday, November 14. Ideally about 15-20 Rutgers students and 15-20 community members will participate. Last Sunday, they did a large cleanup at Johnson Park and pulled over a ton of garbage from the Raritan River. Mike noted that he participated in a surface cleanup at Valley Place Ravine last summer and said there is more debris closer to the river and trash on both sides of the water. Erin will contact the Raritan Riverkeeper to find out if they can lend us volunteers and a boat to take away the trash.

Holly noted that she is an Education Intern at Water Watch and said the group is trying to get into the schools to do a program on water quality and conservation. She is now teaching this program in the New Brunswick schools. Water Watch wants to try doing all its activities in Highland Park and establish a Water Watch club in the high school. She said she has sample lesson plans that she is presenting at Yellow Brick Road and Over the Rainbow nursery schools and that there are programs available for grades K-12. Mary Ellen will find out if there is a science coordinator for all the schools and who that person is. We will then give the contact information to Water Watch.

- c) On Thursday, October 21, there will be a Town Meeting on Garden Space to discuss creation of a centennial garden in the area between Borough Hall and the Senior/Youth Center. There is already a raised bed in front of the Center. We could put in a path that is wide enough for a wheelchair. We could get money to keep it up or have the work done by senior volunteers. The Shade Tree Advisory Committee is involved with this project. Anyone interested should contact Councilwoman Fern Walter Goodhart.
- d) Gary reported that the Planning Board will continue its public hearing on the Determination of Needs study for potential redevelopment on Thursday, October 28 at 7:30 PM in the Senior/Youth Center.
- e) Gabi noted that the new stormwater management permit process is a five-year project aimed at new rather than existing development. It involves a series of regulations, some of which may still change. This is one of the items being addressed by the Green Communities Working Group. Gabi suggested an initiative urging people to disconnect their down spouts. The borough could buy and sell flexible down spouts that can be redirected from the streets to vegetated areas. This could be one element of the borough's stormwater plan.
- f) Under the new "Fast Track" law, there is a category for historically and environmentally sensitive areas. We need to send information noting that Livingston Manor is a historic district and identifying privately owned environmentally sensitive areas, such as the upper part of Buck Woods.

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