

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of January 18, 2006
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld,
Anthony Puniello

Absent: Gabor Grunstein, Loren Muldowney, Mary Ellen Tuccillo

Guest: Allan Williams

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:20 PM.
2. The minutes of the December 21, 2005 meeting were approved.
3. 2006 Meeting Schedule. Mike distributed copies of the Environmental Commission's meeting schedule for 2006 and put a copy up on the bulletin board at Borough Hall. Copies have also been faxed to the local newspapers.
4. Correspondence
 - a) ANJEC sent information on its Smart Growth Planning Assistance Grants, which offer up to \$20,000 for municipalities and environmental commissions through the Geraldine Dodge Foundation. The contact for information on these grants is Kerry Miller at (973) 539-7547.
 - b) We received a brochure with the schedule of household hazardous waste collection days for 2006 from the Middlesex County Division of Solid Waste Management. Copies were placed in the Borough Hall display racks for the public to take.
5. Site Plans
 - a) E.V.S.&P.
327 Raritan Avenue
Docket No.: #158-38-06
Block and Lot: B-158, L-38

The applicant seeks to expand an existing restaurant into an adjacent vacant property.
No Comments.
 - b) M.E.G. Enterprises
1610 Parker Road
Docket No.: 116-11, 12, 13-05
Block and Lot: B-116, L-11, 12, 13

This is a minor subdivision in which the applicant proposes to combine three lots and put up a house where there is currently no existing dwelling. There is already a house on one of the lots. The applicant plans to remove sheds straddling lots 11 and 12.
Comments: Because garden areas are being lost, we recommend a high proportion of native species in landscaping the area.

6. Old Business

- a) Environmental Education Center. No new information.
- b) New Jersey Community Water Watch Valley Place Ravine Restoration. The spring semester at Rutgers just started this week. Arnold is waiting to hear from Water Watch on this project.
- c) Raritan River Dredging. The project continues to be on hold with no new information. The dredging equipment is still present in the New Brunswick side of the river.
- d) Recreational Trail Grant. We have the \$10,000 grant for the loop trail around the Meadows. Arnold said he recommends purchasing a brush cutter so Public Works employees can clear a path through the mugwort field. We are still unsure as to who is administering the grant. Mike suggested that if we form a sub-committee to work on the grant, that committee include a representative from the Department of Public Works. We need to assure that we have input so the project goes toward what we want. Arnold said the project could be overseen by the Environmental Education Center committee. He also said Carol Avelsgaard of the Shade Tree Advisory Committee would be an ideal person to work on this. We noted that cleanups by Water Watch do count toward the borough's match for this grant. Arnold said he is trying to keep track of the work hours put in by Water Watch volunteers for this purpose.
- e) Forum with the Board of Health on Keeping an Environmentally Healthy Home. The Board of Health is now looking to reschedule the forum for late March or early April. Laurel will keep the Commission informed on this issue.
- f) Donaldson Park Improvements. Laurel spoke to Ralph Albanir, who reported that the Phase 1 contract is scheduled to be awarded on February 2, and work is scheduled to begin in March and continue into the fall. This phase will include work on the entryway to the boat ramp, two ball fields in the middle of the park, some improvements to the pond, and some road improvements. The park will remain open during this time. Tony will find out if the borough has Phase 1 drawings. Phase 2 will involve the side of the park to the right of the entryway looking toward the river. Engineering drawings for phase 2 will be done in March, and the county hopes to complete that phase by the end of the year. Phase 3 involves everything to the left of the pond. Albanir also reported that the river in this area is defined as being under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers because it is defined as navigable all the way to the Landing Lane Bridge. The Army Corps has jurisdiction a certain amount of feet from the river, which in this case goes halfway into the park. This is why an Army Corps permit is needed for the park improvements. Albanir also noted that the improvements will not involve any soil disturbance.

7. New Business

- a) Rezoning the area around the bikeway for conservation. Arnold recommended we advocate the borough rezone the two ends of the Meadows for conservation. The Department of Public Works needs a location to store construction material from their projects. Everything below the Public Works building is already zoned conservation. At Mike's suggestion, Arnold will color up a map depicting the areas we would like to see rezoned. One possibility is to rezone the middle area as community services to accommodate the piles of DPW material. We could have that area screened with vegetation and a road leading to it. When that area is not needed by DPW, it can be restored to meadows.
- b) Y Proposal for Rezoning to Riverfront Residential. The YM-YWHA has sent a proposal to the borough seeking rezoning of its current location to riverfront residential. The

- Council is referring discussion on the potential zoning change to the Planning Board. The Planning Board is scheduled to meet on Thursday, February 9 and Thursday, February 23, although we don't know if this item is on the agenda for either meeting. Arnold reminded the Commission that our open space plan suggests an L-shaped conservation easement there to create a wooded buffer. We are also concerned about issues of public access, open space conservation and traffic.
- c) Improvements to the Highland Park Schools. Mike will ask a representative of the Board of Education to do the same presentation for us on the improvements that was done before the Planning Board.
 - d) Area at the End of South 5th Avenue. Arnold suggested that we should contact the owner of the home at the end of South Fifth Avenue near Valentine Street, about keeping a natural area behind their property. The borough's stream corridor protection ordinance requires a natural area there. Mike noted that the homeowner is already looking for ideas to accomplish this. Arnold reported that Public Works employees are placing dirt adjacent to this property. If we could combine the task of clearing out that area with creating an established place for Public Works storage of materials, we could permanently clear out the area behind this home and also possibly get a grant for planting vegetation there.
 - e) Laurel reported that she was appointed by Acting Governor Richard J. Codey to the state's Natural Areas Council. Arnold recommended she review the list of invasive species that should not be planted in natural areas, which is currently on the Environmental Commission's web site.
8. The meeting adjourned at 9:42 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, February 15 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.