

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of February 15, 2006
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Arnold Henderson, Laurel Kornfeld,
Mary Ellen Tuccillo

Absent: Gabor Greenstein, Loren Muldowney, Anthony Puniello

Guests: Emilie Rabbitt and Holly Lewis of NJ Community Water Watch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:25 PM.
2. The minutes of the January 18, 2006 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans
 - a) MEG Enterprises
1610 Parker Road
Docket No.: #116-11-05
Block and Lot: B-116, L-11, 12, 13

This is a minor subdivision in which three lots are being combined into two. The applicant proposes to construct a dwelling on one of the new lots.
Comments: Because garden areas are being lost, we recommend a high proportion of native species in the landscaping area. The applicant should look into a dry well or some other mechanism for introducing stormwater into the ground and minimizing runoff to storm sewers.

- b) Riki Kreitman
34 South Fourth Avenue
Docket No.: #31-14-06-1
Block and Lot: B-31, L-14

The applicant is proposing a one-story, 20-foot addition at the rear of a two-story building. The second floor of this commercial building is being converted to residential apartments. There are already nine parking spaces in the back of the building. There are two drains in the center of the parking lot with a seepage pit for stormwater. The maximum impervious coverage allowed is 80%. The existing impervious coverage is 17.4%, and this proposal would raise it to 77.5%.
No Comments.

5. Old Business
 - a) Environmental Education Center. Construction is expected to start in March. The plan is to cover the contaminated soils below with geotextile. Then clean soil will be placed on top of the geotextile. This work is being done in the area where the fence is. There are no Native Plant Reserve plantings there to be disturbed.

- b) Raritan River Dredging. Articles in The Home News Tribune and The Star Ledger stated that the dredging will resume shortly. DEP and Middlesex County have come to an agreement in which the county will be permitted to resume the dredging with a DEP inspector overseeing the project full time. The channel dredged in violation of the permit will have to be filled in, but the county will need an additional permit for this.

- c) New Jersey Community Water Watch Valley Place Ravine Restoration. Emily Rabbitt and Holly Lewis, two new Water Watch representatives, attended the meeting and discussed several projects the group is planning. On Sunday, April 2, they will hold a cleanup at Valley Place Ravine extending into the Ayres Beach natural area. Arnold suggested working in the area to the right of the ravine. We have discussed putting up benches along the trail, and a sign is currently being designed by a volunteer who lives near the site. We would like to see a trash can placed at the entrance to the ravine, but DPW is concerned that kids might roll it down the ravine. We might be able to lock a can with chains or posts in a way where it still can be lifted by DPW for emptying. Arnold questioned whether we should seek plant donations for this area. If we do, someone would have to water the plants regularly. Water Watch is also holding several river cleanups on Earth Day, Saturday, April 22. One will take place in Johnson Park and have a festival-like atmosphere. There will be a meeting area in Johnson Park for volunteers taking part in five separate cleanups; at this site, there will be food and entertainment. Mike suggested doing a stream walk at Mill Brook. Emily and Holly said Water Watch is also looking to work on trail building in the Meadows but has not yet scheduled a date. They noted that there will be a new summer organizer for these projects.

- d) Recreational Trail Grant. Arnold and Ruth Bowers of the Shade Tree Advisory Committee are discussing this with Don Rish of DPW. Don feels that a brush cutter could be useful and has no objection if it is bought with grant money. Arnold and Don will walk the area. It's an open trail, and some sections may need log steps.

- e) Rezoning of the Y Property. The YMHA requested that their property be rezoned to riverfront residential. The Borough Council referred study of this proposal to the Planning Board, which was asked to make a recommendation. Jon noted that the Environmental Commission should have a role in this process. We are unsure as to whether the Planning Board will hire a firm to do the study. If they do, we could then get environmental information to that firm. We need to request the Planning Board to direct our documents to whoever is doing the study. Mike will inform the Planning Board that the Commission wants to be involved in this process. Laurel will contact Joan Hullings to see if she can locate the 1987 memorialization resolution for River Ridge, the Planning Board minutes, and the actual testimony on that application.

- f) Rezoning of Areas Near Bikeway. Mike made copies of the maps Arnold prepared proposing rezoning of both ends of the landfill for conservation. One idea proposed is to include the borough-owned area at the bottom of Buck Woods in a conservation zone. Overall, we discussed the possibility of conservation zoning of municipal land near the bikeway and near the Crowells Road stream.
- g) Joint Forum with the Board of Health. Laurel reported that the Board of Health has not yet selected a new date for the forum. She will keep the Commission informed on this.

6. New Business

- a) Buck Woods. Arnold reported that Jack Morris has been acquitted of wrongdoing in the cutting down of approximately 40 trees in Buck Woods last June, and therefore, the borough will not receive any compensation for the trees cut. The presence of a vehicle and activity in Buck Woods recently was reported, and when asked, the Borough Clerk attributed this to environmental testing being done there.
- b) Review of Centennial Park Plans. Plans call for a natural park, and all the plantings are perennials. There will be a wet meadow, street trees, a forest of ginkos and crabapples, and a fence and trellis with vines. We don't have a drawing of the shape of the lighting fixtures for the site though we know the lighting will be minimal. The list of plantings contains largely native species, but some are problematic. We hope to have further opportunity to comment on lighting and other issues.
- c) Improvements to Schools. Mike spoke to Board of Education member Joyce Leslie and told her we are interested in having a representative from the Board do a presentation for us on the planned school improvements. Board members Christine Perney and David Copperman are involved with this project, and one of them will get back to Mike on this. There have been a number of public hearings on the plans, and there might be more sessions.

7. The meeting adjourned at 10:53 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, March 15 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.