

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of February 21, 2007
Minutes

Present: Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Joan Ehrenfeld, Arnold Henderson, Anthony Puniello, Michael Rosenberg

Absent: Gabor Grunstein, Mary Ellen Tuccillo

Guests: Allan Williams, Debra Crovicz, Matt MacDonald, Noreen Ciaston

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.
2. The minutes of the January 17, 2007 meeting were reviewed and approved.
3. Correspondence:
 - a) We received a notice from Icon Engineering that Middlesex County applied for a stream encroachment permit for activities at the Former Red's Marina Site. They plan to excavate historic fill materials exceeding the NJDEP Residential Direct Contact Cleanup Criteria to be placed within the onsite flood fringe area of the Raritan River with a cap of clean fill. The excavated areas will be replaced with 24 inches of clean fill to existing grade.
 - b) We received a notice from Menlo Engineering that James & Rita Polos have applied to NJDEP for a Letter of Interpretation for property located at 250 South. Adelaide Avenue.
4. Rutgers Ecological Preserve – Three members of Friends of the Rutgers Ecological Preserve (FREP) spoke to the Commission about the need to protect the Ecological Preserve. The Preserve is approximately 400 acres and is located in Highland Park, Piscataway, and Edison. A large part of the Preserve was lost due to the route 18 extension project last year, and a smaller part of the preserve was recently taken by Rutgers for use as a residence for the Rutgers football coach. Land surveyors have been recently seen working in the preserve and there is great fear that Rutgers is seeking to develop the entire preserve. The Highland Park portion of the preserve is currently zoned as Open Space/Recreation but Rutgers may claim to be exempt from local zoning regulations. The Environmental Commission lends its continued support to FREP and will support future efforts to keep the preserve in a natural state. The website for more information is www.frep.org.
5. Site Plans: - The Commission discussed preparing a handout (Tips for Applicants) similar to what we did in the past, and include green design, what types of plants to use for landscaping, etc. Joan and Steve will work on this project. If applicants receive this type of information before they begin preparing their application, rather than after the application and plan are already submitted, the likelihood is greater that they will take the advice.
 - a) Dan Vickery
70 Lawrence Avenue
Block 175 Lot 4
The applicant is requesting approval for a height variance for a recently constructed residential garage.
No Comments.

- b) Vincent Dinicola
257-261 Karsey Street
Block 71 Lots 53-60
The property currently contains 2 existing two-family residences fronting on Karsey Street. The Applicant is seeking to construct 2 additional single family residences that will front on Hilton Street. The current 8 lots would be converted to 4 new lots.
Comments: The proposed use of property is too dense for the small lot sizes. Increase of impervious coverage is also a concern.

6. Old Business Items

- a) Environmental Education Center Construction Update. The Environmental Education Centers Working Group met to discuss outstanding issues regarding the Center. The Borough will donate furniture (table and chairs) for the building. Storage cabinets will be purchased. New plantings will take place in the spring. In some areas, we may be limited to shallow-rooted plants because of compacted soil conditions. Edison Wetlands Association has a source of good fill that we may be able to use as a cap for portions of the site. Plans are in the works for an Earth Day (April 22) Grand Opening of both the Environmental Education Center and Centennial Park.
- b) New Jersey Community Water Watch – A cleanup at The Meadows is scheduled for Sunday March 4. More stream and trail cleanups will be held in April prior to Earth Day.
- c) A landscape design class of Professor Seiko Goto at Rutgers is looking at several places in Highland Park for student design projects. These locations include the Environmental Education Center on River Road and a proposed international garden on South 7th Avenue. This will be discussed at a class on March 7, at 12:30.
- d) Rezoning of YM-YWHA Property. The Environmental Commission received a response from the YMHA in response to the letter we sent to the YMHA expressing support of Freeholder James Polos’ proposal which offered Middlesex County assistance in purchasing a portion of the Y property as open space. The Planning Board will continue discussion of the Y property on February 22.
- e) Environmental Film Series – The Environmental Commission is hosting a series of films about current environmental topics. The first film, shown on February 10, was “An Inconvenient Truth” a film by Al Gore, about global warming. Approximately 85 people attended the two screenings. The second film will be Winged Migration on February 24, at 8:00 PM in Borough Hall. Steve Barnes will lead a group discussion after the movie. At least 2 additional environmental films are planned with a group discussion after each. Dates and movies still need to be finalized.

7. New Business Items

- a) The National Wildlife Federation has a program for communities to get certified as a Community Wildlife Habitat. We can start by encouraging backyard wildlife habitats. Highland Park would need at least 2 schools, 3 workplaces and 100 private back yards to become certified.

- b) The Highland Park Street Fair is scheduled for May 20th. The Commission will have a table display again.
 - c) The Borough will host an Environmental Summit on March 5. Various environmental groups in town including the Environmental Commission will be presenting information about projects they are working on.
8. The meeting adjourned at 10:20 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, March 21, 2007 at 8 PM in Borough Hall.