

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of February 20, 2008
Minutes

Present: Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Michael Rosenberg, Allan Williams,
Councilman Jon Erickson

Absent: Joan Ehrenfeld, Gabor Grunstein, Arnold Henderson Anthony Puniello

Guests: Borough Administrator Karen Waldron, Susan Edmonds

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM., in the Environmental Education Center with the inside temperature at 53°. Note the thermostat normally set at 50 during the winter months was raised to 70° at approximately 6:30 PM. Either there is a problem with the system or it just heats very slowly.
2. The minutes of the January 20, 2008 meeting were reviewed and approved.
3. Correspondence:

We received a letter from ANJEC with an application for Smart Growth Planning Grant Program in 2008. The grants will be for new projects only and will focus on items such as open space preservation, master plan conservation elements, land use ordinances, and brownfields revitalization plans. We may be able to use this for an environmental component of our master plan update which is scheduled for this year. Deadline for the application is March 31.

We received a Flood Hazard Area Permit Application Notification Letter from Menlo Engineering Associates. The applicant is Middlesex County and the project is described as River Road Improvements. This may be the widening of the River Road/Cedar Lane intersection that was discussed several years ago.

4. Susan Edmonds attended the meeting to update the Commission on the Mill Brook stream bank erosion situation. She received a proposal from the Water Resources Program at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service. They have an initiative that works with municipalities to solve water resource related issues. The Environmental Commission is supportive of this project. Susan to distribute the project cost estimate. Jon Erickson will see if the Borough can match with in-kind services using DPW labor.
5. Site Plans:

No new site plans.

We received an Environmental Impact Statement prepared by Maser Consulting for Avalon Bay Communities Inc. This for the proposed development on Cleveland Avenue (Block 170, Lots 5 and 6) and is 7.53 acres.

The applicant is requesting a use-variance approval from the Zoning Board. The property (currently Illuminating Experiences) is now zoned Light Industrial. The applicant's request would allow for construction of 178 rental dwelling units including one 4-story multi-family building containing 102 units, four 3-story 10-plex buildings each containing 10 units, 36 townhouses, clubhouse/lease office and swimming pool. The applicant is not currently seeking site plan approval, just rezoning and the plans submitted are concept plans only.

Comments: The proposed density is too high. Need a greater decrease of impervious coverage. Traffic issues and associated air pollution may pose a problem. Storm water runoff from the site, where will it go? Are any storm water retention basins proposed? What is the status of a new access road running through the Honeywell property to alleviate traffic from Cleveland Avenue? There are still residual soil contamination issues on the property. Honeywell must remediate the soil to residential standards before any development is allowed to proceed.

6. Old Business Items

- a) Environmental Education Center – Signage to identify the building is a priority. The Police Department is currently the keeper of the building's key and they have a list of names of people authorized to have the key. The key may be signed out by going to the Police Department and presenting identification. Need to decide on programming for the center. What types of groups will we allow to use it?
- b) Recreational Trail Grant Meadows – Steve Barnes and Allan Williams put together a detailed report on the Meadows Trail and presented it to the Commission. The lower meadows trail restoration project was initiated by a 2004 grant from the Federal Highway Administration under the National Recreation and Trails Program which is administered by the NJDEP. The grant was for \$10,000 and designated for restoring and enhancing a loop walking trail. The required completion date for the project is August 31, 2008. Some public outreach or comment period should be arranged prior to completion. There has already been some publicity for the trail including signage. Equipment needs to be purchased and the trail still needs to be widened and partially buried debris removed. Integrated pest management is being used by the US Fish and Wildlife Service for invasive species removal. These invasive plants are capable of overgrowing the trail and blotting out desirable native species. The Commission felt that we should continue with the project and meet the August deadline for completion.
- c) Highland Park Community Wildlife Habitat Program – Steve Barnes announce that the Highland Park Mirror will have an article on the program. A new web site is up and running and is linked to the Environmental Commission web site. Steve Barnes will present a series of three workshops. The first one was held on January 30 and was about invasive species. The second will be on February 27th and is called How's Your Habitat? A third workshop about stream restoration is planned for the last Wednesday in March.

7. The meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, March 19, 2008 at 8 PM.