

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of February 15, 2012  
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams

Guests: Nellie Tsipoura, Director of NJ Audubon Citizen Science Program, and program volunteers Mary Denver, Belinda Beetham, John Beetham, Joanne Williams, Richard Dawson, George Pitcher

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. The January 18, 2012 minutes were approved with a few minor corrections.
3. Nellie Tsipoura, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist (Biologist), NJ Audubon talked about Citizen Scientist projects: 2012 Lower Raritan Bird Surveys. These projects are a NJ Audubon effort, funded through National Audubon's and Toyota's TogetherGreen program. This effort will obtain baseline information on abundance and distribution of bird species in important wildlife habitats that remain undeveloped along the heavily industrialized and urbanized Raritan River and its watershed. Results of this study will be used to guide conservation efforts in the area. She proposed two projects: a breeding season survey and a migration season survey  
The Citizen Scientists will be following a defined protocol and will be spending 5-10 minutes at each of several locations along the Raritan River. They will visit their survey sites three times – once to scout their assigned points and determine access, and two times for each bird surveys (once between May 26-June 15 and again between June 15-30). The latter two visits will be between sunrise and 10:30 AM. There will be a training session to understand the study protocols, bird recognition, etc. The session will take place in late March or early April.  
Because of the rigorous way these studies are being performed, the results of these studies are suitable for scientific publication and for regulatory purposes with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection.
4. Correspondence: None
5. Site Plans: None
6. Old Business
  - a) ERI Project Update. The ERI is complete. Tomorrow, February 16, at 7:30 PM, the HP Planning Board will consider whether to add the ERI to the Master Plan. All appropriate legal announcements have been made, and all Planning Board members were sent copies of the ERI. If they approve it, we will add a preface to the ERI noting this. We may need to wait for them to memorialize it officially at their next meeting. ANJEC is satisfied we've completed the work

and praised the ERI as having “exceeded our expectations.” We encourage Allan and Kerry Miller of ANJEC to write an article on our ERI process for the *ANJEC Report*. The Environmental Commission congratulates Allan for the excellent work he did on this project.

- b) Meadows Trails. Water Watch is interested in doing a cleanup of the Meadows, and the only day they are available to do it is Saturday, April 7. We can get about 75 Rutgers students to clean up along the river and help with trail maintenance. Steve noted that the trail needs to be resurfaced with wood chips and have a general cleanup after the winter is over. He inspected the trail about three weeks ago and said it is fine; the lower trail section we opened is still open. The upper boardwalk is solid, but the lower boardwalk needs some repair work. Specifically, it needs to be re-graded, repositioned and fastened down. The Commission received an email from someone who noted that a deciduous tree along the trail has had pine cones tied to it. This is often done to create bird feeders. We still have no final design for the trail head entrance. Steve tried to contact the landscape designer but so far has not heard back from him.
- c) Cleveland Avenue Proposed Developments. The latest plans discuss making developments at both sites all rentals. Allan noted that the Borough Council held a special executive session meeting to deal with this litigation. The developers for both sites did their own traffic studies, which Cleveland Avenue residents, who conducted their own, separate traffic study, see as inaccurate because those studies do not count traffic on Cleveland during the middle of the day. Between 2-3 PM, many cars go up Cleveland Avenue; residents in their survey counted 2,000 cars on the street during this time period. Both developers’ studies are on the borough’s web site. Information about the development can also be found on a citizens’ Facebook page titled “I’m from Highland Park.”
- d) Environmental Film Festival. Approximately 60 people attended the January showing of the film “Bag It” at the public library. The film festival will be done in the fall; the library and Rutgers students will organize it, and we will support it. A Rutgers student who is a member of Sustainable Highland Park is interested in getting churches and synagogues to also participate in hosting films. The NJ Environmental Lobby expressed interest in promoting the festival, but they want \$3,000 to do this.
- e) Riparian Buffer Conservation Zone Ordinance. The ordinance was approved by the Borough Council on first reading and will likely be adopted at their next meeting. Once the ordinance is passed, we will send a data package about it to CME Associates, the borough’s engineering firm, so they can approve the map. The ordinance requires a 50-foot buffer from steep slopes and a 150-foot buffer on either side of streams. Allan noted that the ordinance does include

tidal waterways. However, Steve added, intermittent streams are not considered US waterways.

- f) Buck Woods. The Shade Tree Advisory Committee is submitting a report to the Code Enforcement Department via Borough Administrator Kathy Kovach; this should be sufficient to stop the developer, JSM, from cutting down trees at the site, which they have been doing. The STAC letter is cc'd to the Borough Attorney, Borough Engineer, STAC members, and the Environmental Commission. STAC is also requesting documents on Buck Woods from the DEP. Mike and Allan have drafted a separate letter from the Environmental Commission. JSM wants to dig test pits and wants to take down 157 trees to put in 60 test pits. We do not know the purpose of these test pits; however, our tree ordinance makes it impossible for them to cut these trees down. On behalf of STAC, Karen contacted the New Jersey Conservation Foundation to find out if they would be interested in helping the borough purchase Buck Woods, as they have access to funding. Mike suggested that the county might be interested in purchasing it as open space. Council liaison Jon Erickson mentioned JSM wants \$3 million for the property, but they could be negotiated down. Current thought is JSM wants to sell Buck Woods to the borough because it is un-developable. We need to find out if the DEP was ever requested to do an on-site study. Our priority should be having the DEP send all data they have on Buck Woods to us. In the ERI, Buck Woods is listed as privately owned open space

7. New Business: None

- 8. The meeting adjourned at 10:05 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, March 21 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center on River Road.