

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of April 18, 2012
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, Councilman Jon Erickson

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.
2. The minutes of the March 21, 2012 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans. We discussed the borough's planned sidewalk construction program, which includes work on the through paths from Cleveland Avenue to Harrison Avenue and from Harrison Avenue to Lawrence Avenue. The project also includes renovation of sidewalks between North Fifth and North Sixth Avenues by the library and at the triangular shaped area between North Fourth and Madison Avenues. The borough received a grant from DOT for these projects. Karen reported that she and STAC chair Carol Avelsgaard walked the first three paths, as STAC was asked to comment on the plan. She noted the footpaths need to be made wider to meet ADA standards. There is a large Canadian hemlock tree on private property along the walk between Harrison and Grant Avenues that hangs over some of the path. Depending on how big the borough's right of way is, it might be possible to locate the sidewalk around the tree.
Comments: Use permeable concrete. Dispose of concrete waste properly.
5. Old Business
 - a) ERI. All documentation has been submitted to ANJEC. We're waiting to receive the \$8,400 grant money. Mike called Debbie Kratzer thanking her for her work, saying we are very happy with the job she did.
 - b) Y Property. We received a site plan for a 23 townhouse development there. There wasn't enough time to wait for our April meeting to submit comments, so Allan and Mike prepared comments, which were submitted to the Zoning Board on April 16 on behalf of the Environmental Commission. Mike and Allan attended the Zoning Board meeting and reported the architect discussed traffic. Resident Jeffrey Aaron noted that variances are supposed to be given for hardships, and this developer does not have any hardships. The developer is seeking a conditional use variance and three D3 variances. Our steep slopes ordinance requires a 100-foot buffer, and the developer is proposing zero. Our open space requirement is 25 percent, and the developer is proposing 18.9 percent. Our density minimum is 8 percent, and the developer is proposing 11.2 percent, assuming the steep slopes variance is granted. We noted that even if the steep slopes variance is not granted, the developer can still build 19 houses on the site. The density would then be 16.2 percent. An EIS was done by a consultant the developer hired, and it mentions slopes greater than 10 percent. There is nothing incorrect in the EIS though it fails to mention the site was a Hessian encampment during the Revolutionary War. The next Zoning Board meeting is May 21.
 - c) Belleview/Cenacle House Historic Documentation. Ten months have passed since the Cenacle House was demolished, and the developer has still not submitted the historic

narrative to the borough. We need to pursue this with Pulte's lawyer. We also noted several healthy trees are being cut down on the Pulte property along River Road. We need to look at the site plan to see which trees they proposed cutting down and whether they proposed installing a sidewalk. There was a police car at the site when the trees were being cut down, so the Police Department may know more about this. Karen will obtain more information.

- d) Meadows Trail. A cleanup was done on March 31 though only 12 people showed up besides Allan and Steve. They put 10 loads of woodchips along the trail. The landscape architect revisited the site to plan the trail entrance. We want the sign at the entrance more rustic than the original plan called for. Also, the drainage pattern there has changed over the years. We now have a copy of the revised trail head entrance design. Boulders will be placed at the lower part of the ramp for better drainage and stability. Plantings will be put in between and the new lower trail that was re-routed will be re-graded. The cost estimate for the work is \$2,500-\$3,000, and we are seeking three quotes. We prefer plants that require minimal to no maintenance. Steve recommended we set up a group of volunteers to do trail maintenance, and Allan added that we could use teen volunteers from a youth council the mayor wants to establish. We would need a schedule where people could come 6-8 out of 10 work days in a work season. Volunteers have to be trained because this work involves use of sharp tools. We will try to have flyers seeking volunteers at the Earth and Health Fair.
- e) Cleveland Avenue. The court date has been put off to May 11. We do not have a No Further Action letter from DEP confirming these sites are clean and can be developed. We're not sure whether the cleanup is being supervised by the DEP or the EPA.
- f) Earth Day, April 22: The annual Earth and Health Fair will be at Highland Park High School from 1-4 PM on Sunday, April 22. Allan, Mike, Steve, and Karen will be there staffing our table, and they will have a copy of the ERI, river maps, and pamphlets from ANJEC about access to the river. We should have a sign up sheet for volunteers interested in Commission membership and/or in volunteering for cleanups.
- g) Street Fair. We will not have a table because we don't have enough volunteers to staff it.
- h) Lower Raritan River Access Project—Resolution and Pamphlets. We have a copy of the resolution supporting this project, which the Council will put on its Consent Agenda at its next meeting. We want to see any signs before we put them out. The pamphlets are about access to the Raritan.
- i) Riparian Buffer Conservation Zone Ordinance. The ordinance is in place, but it and the map need to be updated. A copy is currently in the hands of CME.
- j) Audubon Citizen Science Project. Nineteen people from all over the county, many from Highland Park, attended a training at the Environmental Education Center, and 6 people attended a second session. Audubon wants to hold another training at the site.
- k) Buck Woods. Zoning Officer Tim Coyle sent our response and STAC's response to CME. We want to ask the county to purchase this property as open space. Steve recommended we send a letter to the mayor noting we strongly support county purchase of Buck Woods for open space. Mike will first speak to the mayor before we write a

letter. We would like Buck Woods and two properties adjacent to it owned by the borough zoned for conservation.

- l) Police Station. Karen drew an alternate design for the police station that would keep the big tree. She sent this design to Kathy Kovach, Scott Luthman, and CME. We want to know if the police will agree to put in only one handicapped parking spot.
 - m) Use of Chain Saws (protocol, certification, insurance waiver). The Association of Arbor Culture offers a hands-on training in chain saw safety; Steve and Allan took the course and passed its two required tests. Their certificates of completion will be sent to Don Rishe. The Council is open to Steve and Allan working on sites with chain saws if they take the course, learn the protocol, and sign waivers. The borough's insurance company also has to agree. We want a chain saw of about 12 inches. The course provided handouts on protocols; we now have to write a protocol for Allan and Steve as chainsaw users.
 - n) Environmental Education Center. We noted the Center needs 3-4 more chairs as well as curtains because it is currently impossible to do a good audio-visual presentation during the daytime. We were told the Center cannot have more than 19 people at once. There is a water spigot, but it was never fixed, and there is also a water fountain that is not working. Jon Erickson suggested we get someone to design a sign for the Center. The sign could be a plaque mounted to concrete or be free standing. We could ask the county to make us a wooden sign. We would like the mayor to ask the county to make us a sign and show us what it would look like. Allan recommended it read "Eugene Young Environmental Education Center and River Park" and that we put the number 20 as its address, possibly on the low concrete wall.
6. New Business
- a) Jon Erickson said he is pursuing an electric facility for people to plug in electric cars. There is a company that does this in Avalon, and they would pay the borough for it. We could put it in a parking facility in the business district.
 - b) Jon Abrahams wants to set up a workday at the Meadows for the Ahavas Achim Environmental Committee. Because that area needs heavy work, we felt it would be better for them to do a cleanup at the Native Plant Reserve or the Valley Place Ravine. We will contact Jon about this and report back at our next meeting.
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, May 16, 2012 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.