

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of May 16, 2012
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, Council liaison Jon Erickson

Guest: Lola Bobowski, AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassador Program, local ambassador for Watershed Area #9—Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset Counties

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:15 PM.
2. The minutes of the April 18, 2012 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a Freshwater Wetlands Permit Notification and Permit Application Letter for 433 River Road, known as “The Castle”. They are applying for a letter of interpretation to see if any wetlands are present.
 - b) We received a letter from the New York-New Jersey Harbor and Estuary Program about a project they are launching in Middlesex County to study the impacts of sea level rise and storm surge at publicly accessible boat launch sites. They plan to conduct visits in May and will contact us to offer further briefings on the project. Middlesex County officials were copied on this.
4. Site Plans
 - a) Proposed 7-11 at Sunoco Site. We reviewed the site plan. The Planning Board hearing is tomorrow. The developer is Continental Global Ventures. They need a Remediation Action Letter from the DEP as well as approvals from the Redevelopment Agency and the Planning Board. We already submitted comments on this plan. Our comments dealt with three topics: site remediation, stormwater runoff, and pervious surfaces. They are also seeking several variances. The question is whether a 7-11 is an appropriate use for this location. The Redevelopment Plan says to reduce or eliminate curb cuts, and this site has two curb cuts. Also, this site is listed in the ERI as a contaminated site. The Planning Board can deny approval because it violates the Redevelopment Plan. We suggested dry wells for the runoff from the building and putting a rain garden at the site.
5. We discussed sending a memo asking that the Environmental Commission receive a copy of site plan applications at the same time as borough professionals receive them. This (the 7-11 site plan) is the second time we received a site plan too late for members to review it and comment before the Planning Board meeting. Last month, the hearing for the Y site proposal was held three days before the Environmental Commission meeting. Now, we received the plan one day before the Planning Board hearing. This does not give enough time for the Planning Board to read and review our comments. We also noted that borough professionals had a copy of the 7-11 site plan a long time before they deemed it complete. Mike and Allan will send a memo to Kathy Kovach, cc it to Scott Luthman, Jon Erickson, Pdraic Millet, Diane Reh, and the mayor requesting we get copies of site plans earlier in the process so we have sufficient time to review them and make comments, even if this means the applications we get are not yet fully complete.

6. Old Business

- a) Lola Bobowski introduced herself to the Commission. She took part in the Earth/Health Fair. As part of her position as local ambassador for our watershed area, she has to attend three local meetings.
- b) ERI. On April 21, we received a letter to the mayor from ANJEC with the check for \$7,600, their matching part of the grant. The Commission commends Allan and other members for spending many hours working on the ERI. Allan drafted an article, "Lessons Learned from the ERI," which will be published in the Summer 2012 issue of ANJEC magazine.
- c) Y Property. The Zoning Board is holding a hearing on the proposal this coming Monday, May 21. Several important variances are being sought by the developer.
- d) Cenacle Historic Documentation. Pulte sent Allan the Photo Documentation Report on the Cenacle house and property. There are a total of 38 photos, which were supposed to be printed on high quality photo paper. This was not done. The pictures were supposed to be taken in 10 megapixels; the memorialization stated the project had to meet the standards of the borough. However, these pictures were taken before the memorialization was made public. Councilman Padraic Millet will contact Pulte about this. One copy of the report will go to the library. We can print more; if we do, we may send them to the Alexander Library at Rutgers and to the Middlesex County Historical Society.
- e) Meadows Trail. There is no need for a cleanup at this time. Work is needed at the Native Plant Reserve and Valley Place Ravine. Jon Abrahams will schedule a cleanup of the Native Plant Reserve for the Ahavas Achim Environmental Club at 10 AM on Sunday, June 10.
- f) Proposed Developments on Cleveland Avenue. The mayor signed an agreement with River Road, LLC, which starts the 60-day period the company has to resolve issues such as changing the zoning for the site. While the previous plan called for over 300 apartments, the current plan calls for 94. The units will not be all rentals, as in the original plan. We are concerned whether the owner will sell the property now that approval has been given to the plan. The borough has no agreement on the other Cleveland site, still owned by Illuminating Experiences.
- g) Earth Day. The Environmental Commission had a table at this year's Earth and Health Fair. The fair drew about 60 percent fewer people than did last year's, mostly because of the heavy rain that day. Some of the vendors were disappointed in the turnout.
- h) Lower Raritan River Access Project. The Borough Council passed a resolution supporting this initiative. We are waiting to hear whether we will receive money for signage. If we do, it may be several hundred dollars at most. ANJEC will decide where to put the signs.
- i) Pumphouse Upgrade. Jon Erickson reported that the cost estimate for upgrading the pumphouse is less than half of the bid threshold, which is \$17,500. The council will now pursue quotes for this work; however, they feel we should have some criteria established for how we use the money from the Pulte development. Allan will email the council information on the historic significance of the pumphouse.

7. New Business

- a) Buck Woods. We will send the mayor and council a letter recommending acquisition of Buck Woods for open space and also recommending changing the zoning of the two adjoining properties to conservation. Allan will present a draft of this letter at our next meeting. We discussed the option of writing two separate

letters—one in favor of rezoning the two adjacent properties, and the other recommending the purchase of Buck Woods for open space.

- b) Steve and Allan will buy safety equipment for use with the chainsaw using the grant money.
- c) Steve and Allan will sign a waiver, which will then require approval from the Borough Attorney and borough insurance company, so they can work on the roof of the Environmental Education Center.
- d) Thanks to Councilman Jon Erickson, we now have keys to the Environmental Education Center. He obtained one copy for us and another for STAC.

8. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, June 20 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.