

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of November 21, 2012
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Allan Williams, Council liaison Padraic Millet

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.
2. The minutes of the October 17, 2012 meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans
 - a) Zev and Rachelle Stern
27 Brookdale Court
Docket No.: #212-07
Block and Lot: B-147, L-19-20

The applicant wants to tear down a 2,000-square-foot house and build an over 6,000-square-foot house on the site. The backyard area contains steep slopes leading down to Mill Brook. A small part of the property is also on the opposite side of Mill Brook. The applicant proposes to remove a shed, a swimming pool and a retaining wall. This would expose the steep slopes to erosion. The proposal also calls for removing 36 trees, which could destabilize the slope. Three of those trees came down during Hurricane Sandy. There is a sanitary sewer easement in the backyard. The application is before the Zoning Board, as the applicant is seeking variances for tree removal, flood plain, riparian zone, steep slopes, stream corridor protection, maximum building height, and maximum stories. The proposal calls for a maximum disturbance of 70 percent on the steepest slopes.

Mike and Allan reviewed the application and put together a set of comments, which were submitted last Friday. The hearing on the application was postponed to the next Zoning Board meeting on December 17. We need more details about construction planned for the steep slopes area. The application does not have a grading plan. We need to ask why they are proposing to remove the trees behind the house. The applicant needs to provide a definition of "natural condition" plus delineate the area to be restored to "natural condition." We also need to know why the retaining wall is being removed. Allan will email Commission members a copy of the comments he and Mike submitted.

5. Hurricane Sandy Damage Report. The October 29 storm left many large trees down all over town. Many leaves and branches came down and are now impacting the streams; this could lead to flooding. Some stream clearing should be done to prevent future problems. Padraic report that there is one concrete culvert that has exposed rebar. According to Allan, the bridge at Lincoln Avenue sustained significant erosion. The property owners along the stream own everything under water while the waters themselves are federally owned. The responsibility to clean these areas is not clearly defined. Mike suggested we inform homeowners not to dump anything into the streams. The Environmental Education Center suffered some damage, including broken glass doors. The doors have since been repaired.

There was no apparent damage to Buck Woods. Padraic noted the beach area at Donaldson Park is closed due to potential biological contamination resulting from the storm.

6. Old Business

- a) Timing for receiving new site plan applications. We are concerned because the Commission has been receiving copies of site plan applications too late for us to review them. Padraic said he would like developers to set aside a copy of their plans for the Environmental Commission and we would receive a copy any time an application is deemed complete. Even in the case of a plan not deemed complete, we would now receive a copy at the same time as the borough planner does. Our copies will be put in the Environmental Commission mailbox at Borough Hall.
- b) Pulte Property and Historic Monument. There is some question as to whether the Council has discussed the site of the historic monument. The Environmental Commission plans to recommend a site for it.
- c) Meadows Trail Update. We have done due diligence on this project and now have two estimates plus record of communication with a third possible vendor. We will submit the two estimates and find out from Borough Administrator Kathy Kovach whether we need a third estimate. We would like to get the work done before a major frost. The area will have to be mowed in March or April, and we will schedule a work day in the spring.

Post Meeting Note: A third quote was obtained for the proposed work in the Meadows. The vendor with the lowest quote was selected.

- d) Meadows Property Rezoning. A concept to rezone the Meadows from residential (townhouses) to conservation was introduced at the August Planning Board meeting. We need to develop a zoning ordinance and have the Planning Board pass it. The planner and borough attorney will write it up and then present it to the Planning Board for approval.
- e) Signage for Environmental Education Center. There may be a detailed signage plan for the EEC in Borough Hall. Allan has offered to help Joan Hullings look for the document.
- f) Raritan River Access Signage. The sign has arrived; Kerry Miller of ANJEC is now waiting for the sign legs. When these arrive, DPW will install the sign.
- g) Proposed 7-11 Convenience Store. At the last Planning Board meeting, the group Highland Park Future, which has hired an attorney, presented an alternate concept for the site with two buildings and parking in the rear. Remediation will be complete before any construction begins. The applicant agreed to do air monitoring and will write up the results in a report as a condition for approval.
- h) Bee Hives at Native Plant Reserve. Allan has not heard from the owners. They are supposed to send us detailed plans, including plans for an enclosure. Steve noted we now have an idea of the project cost and now need a plan to work with.
- i) Green Roots Film Festival. Sustainable Highland Park and the Environmental Commission sponsored this series of films. The last in the series, "Wangari Maathai," had to be postponed due to Hurricane Sandy and is now scheduled for December 6.

- j) Y Property. The developer submitted a bifurcated application—a concept plan that was approved. For the second part, the developer has committed to doing a Phase 1 archeological study. The results of the study will be submitted with the site plan.
 - k) Buck Woods. Owner Jack Morris submitted an application for a tree removal plan seeking to remove 175 trees from the site in order to dig 80 test pits on the property. We have submitted comments on this application to Tim Coyle, who also sent a copy to the applicant's lawyer.
7. New Business
- a) Impacts from Hurricane Sandy. Steve suggested the Commission put together a memo to the borough discussing our observations, advice regarding future events, possible connection between the storm and climate change, and steps the borough can take to mitigate storm impacts. We would also like to find out if STAC has a plan to replace the many fallen street trees. The plan should include recommendations for types of trees homeowners are encouraged to plant on their properties to replace those that came down.
 - b) Meeting of Middlesex County Water Resources Association. The meeting will take place on December 3, at the Elks Club in New Brunswick. There will be a presentation of case studies regarding rising sea level at three sites, plus a discussion of the Sustainable River Initiative.
 - c) The mayor plans to do an in-depth review of the borough's response to Hurricane Sandy, including preparing for the storm, review of procedures used, the effectiveness of borough publicity, and areas where we can do better. Allan recommended that the results of this review be publicized when it is complete.
8. The meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, December 19 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.