

Highland Park Environmental Commission

Meeting of May 1, 2013

Minutes

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

Guests: Barbara Hoskins Davis, vice president of programs for the Land Conservancy of New Jersey; Roseanne Baruh, STAC member; and Amy Sundquist, borough resident

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:08 PM.
2. The minutes of the April 6, 2013 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans: No new ones
5. Land Conservancy of NJ. Padraic invited Barbara of the Land Conservancy, who brought information packets about the group, a non-profit land trust that works with communities to preserve open space. She discussed the Conservancy's successes in purchasing property and preserving it and said the governor wants to direct buyout dollars to Middlesex County and communities outside the Jersey shore. The Conservancy works on a fee-based program, is 32 years old, and has preserved over 100,000 acres of open space. It has access to Green Acres, farmland funding, and foundation funding and is interested in seeing if there are ways it can help Highland Park. Conservancy representatives are willing to meet with county officials to discuss open space preservation because our open space areas are being rapidly developed. We expressed interest in preserving Buck Woods. Padraic noted the borough is in negotiations with the owner of Buck Woods to preserve this property and allow building on an adjacent municipally owned site. Mike told Barbara there are a number of borough-owned and privately owned parcels we would like to acquire to link Johnson Park and Donaldson Park. Padraic will share the information packets with Council members. Barbara recommended we start with a good map, identify areas that are potentially available, and what we need to move forward in acquiring them. Our easements should have planning and advising components, and we should look to easements or charitable donations as methods of completing our open space plan. She also noted there is funding available from Sustainable Jersey and said she is willing to come to a Council meeting for further discussion.
6. Old Business
 - a) ANJEC Open Space Grant. Steve and Allan submitted the application. Allan received a call from ANJEC yesterday informing him they received 60 applications, are asking applicants additional questions, and will make a decision by Friday. We applied for \$1,000 to fund brochures and signage for the Meadows.
 - b) 27 Brookdale Court. The applicant asked for a delay and may be rethinking their strategy. They had previously made concessions on many issues. The application will again be before the Zoning Board on May 20.
 - c) 133 North 10th Avenue. The application will be on the Zoning Board agenda on May 20. The owner wants to enlarge the home to accommodate senior relatives. Their proposed coverage by the building went way over the limit; they have to submit a revised plan by May 10.

- d) Pulte—The Crossing at Highland Park (Honeywell Property) Mike and Allan submitted a list of comments to the Planning Board and sent copies to all Commission members. Yesterday, the applicant submitted a Phase I Preliminary Environmental Assessment Report; they have also submitted a Classification Exception Area Report to DEP. Requesting a classification exception means the contamination at the site is not within acceptable DEP levels for a residential area. Remediation cannot be done practically, and will occur naturally within about 34 years. We want the applicant to be open and tell us what is on the site, and what they are doing. The next Planning Board meeting is May 9. Roseanne Baruh said several STAC members have a meeting planned with Pulte representatives on Friday to make sure the correct plantings are done at the site. STAC sent the Planning Board a memo expressing their concerns about landscaping. Pulte representatives indicated they are interested in working with STAC. Steve recommended Karen give us an updated on these talks at our next meeting. In our memo to the Planning Board, we recommended Pulte follow STAC's recommendations. Pulte and the borough are negotiating over many issues including a retention basin. Steve recommended we look back at our comments made in response to the first Pulte application and determine whether our recommendations were incorporated into the revised application.
- e) Proposed 7-11 at Sunoco Site: The Planning Board approved the site plan but rejected the three variances requested for curb cuts, lighting, and a monument sign. The Master Plan calls for a reduction of curb cuts on Raritan Avenue. We don't know what the applicant will do next.
- f) Signage for Environmental Education Center. Allan displayed a mockup of the sign. Padraic will make sure it meets our sign standards and bring it to the Council for approval.
- g) Bee Hives. We are getting two beehives placed in the Native Plant Reserve.
- h) JSM—Buck Woods. No change. The borough is looking into a swap with some of the adjacent municipally owned areas.
- i) Meadows Trail Update. We have \$1,955.70 left of the grant and want to use it to buy a metal storage shed to put on DPW property to store equipment used by Commission members. The shed is vinyl coated metal. We also want to buy a high wheel lawnmower for \$400 and a tank for water to put on the back of the gator. The remaining funds will be used to purchase new tools we need and wood for both the trellis structure and placement over the trail entrance. The landscape contractor will be here on Tuesday and will landscape the trail entrance according to our plan. We need to get the rest of the trail surfaced with wood chips. Amy Sundquist is creating a volunteer form seeking workers as an extension of the Earth Day event. We could set up a schedule for various groups to work in the trail area. Volunteers can be members of a trail team that will maintain the trail for hiking and restore trailside areas. We need to get Don Rish to use the front-end loader to dump the wood chips in the area. Once we have a list of volunteers, we can best determine what should be done and when. The remainder of the landscaping work will be completed by the July 1 deadline. We will submit a grant report to Borough Administrator Kathy Kovach so she can send it to the DEP. Steve said we can order the shed from Home Depot to be delivered for free and recommended we put together a detailed list of costs for our intended purchases.
- j) Earth Day. Approximately 300 people attended the event, which featured 22 tables of exhibits, Pakistani barbecue food, and six musical groups. Sustainable Highland Park

wants to do the event again next year. DPW weeded the courtyard, mowed the lawns, and washed the windows of the Environmental Education Center.

- k) Sustainable Jersey Silver Certification. The borough is moving ahead on this. Padraic is meeting with Teri Jover of Sustainable Highland Park to discuss what we can do toward this goal and document what has already been done. We have a good chance of achieving the silver level.

7. New Business

- a) Steve recommended that we discuss long-term maintenance of the Meadows Trail at our next meeting. Padraic recommended the borough charge applicants a small development fee, thereby creating a funding source for maintaining open space areas and new trees planted through the tree fund. The Environmental Commission should decide whether we want to take responsibility for long-term management of the Meadows site. Padraic urged us to make recommendations for moving forward and structuring a maintenance plan. Steve suggested we create a quasi-public non-profit corporation to do this.

- 8. The meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, June 5 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.