

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Joint Meeting with Shade Tree Advisory Committee, January 8, 2014  
Minutes

Present: Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Roseanne Baruh (STAC), Belinda Beetham (STAC), Harvey Klee (STAC), Mary Denver (STAC), Laurel Kornfeld, Michael Rosenberg, Karen Swaine (EC and STAC), Allan Williams, Council liaison Padraic Millet

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:09 PM.
2. The minutes of the December 4, 2013 Environmental Commission meeting and those of the December 11, 2013 STAC meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business
  - a) Pump House. The roofer has a purchase order and will begin working on the roof repairs when the weather breaks.
  - b) Tree City Application Form Status. STAC has to fill in a few figures on the application, which Roseanne will do. Then, the mayor has to sign the form, and it has to be submitted.
  - c) Tree Management Plan. Kevin Sebelius is supposed to get a copy of the plan to STAC co-chairs Karen and Carol by the end of February.
  - d) Main Street Dead Trees. New trees are available through the borough's Sidewalk Improvement Program. Three or four out of 40 trees planted died; these will be replaced in the spring.
  - e) Pulte Matters. Karen has not heard anything new from Alan Schechtel about plantings at the Crossing. Gus DiBlasio, Pulte's landscape architect, has not submitted a plan showing which trees will be cut down, and which/how many will be saved. Pulte has made several changes to the original plan. Padraic will reach out to Alan Schechtel and get back to us on this.

We are also waiting on the escrow account from Overlook for the plants and trees that died as well as for the historical marker, which we want Pulte to put in the park at the top of the site. Karen reported that trees and shrubs planted by Pulte died within a year of being planted. We don't know whether Pulte replaced the dead trees. This is an issue of enforcing conditions set by either the Planning or Zoning Boards for site plan approval. Padraic said we should find out if money from the escrow account can be used to replace the trees that died. The estimated cost of replacing more than 50 shrubs and 24 or more trees, including the labor, is \$20,000. The historical marker, which will be a bronze plaque on a boulder, will cost \$1,000-\$1,500. We need to talk to Alan Schechtel about this. Roseanne noted that the Planning Board should be the ones who reach out to Pulte. Mike said this is not a planning issue but an enforcement issue. Padraic will reach out to Borough Administrator Kathy Kovach for answers to these questions.

- f) Status of Problem Trees. Some street trees planted last spring have died. In some cases, this happened because they were planted improperly. Frank Troy of DPW has been informed about this, and as a result, some of the dead trees have been taken down. There is a hazardous dead tree on the Irving School property. Karen noted that reporting the hazardous tree is the school's responsibility. Padraic suggested informing the school about it and said he would discuss the issue with Susan Welkovits. Karen will email Frank Troy, asking him to look at the tree. To avoid the problem of improper plantings, Jonathan suggested requiring STAC approve all

plantings and make sure they are done correctly. Karen agreed STAC should have a very specific organized check for this.

- g) **Extraordinary Trees Designation.** STAC received a letter about a huge American elm on Central Avenue located on private property. It is therefore not a street tree. We are not sure if the property owner is aware of its importance. American elms are a rare species. Extraordinary trees are defined in our tree ordinance as those designated by the Borough Council. Once a tree is designated as extraordinary, it is unlawful to remove it without a permit. Padraic recommended STAC bring information about the tree and a picture of it to a Council meeting, so the Council can determine who the property owner is and contact them about a potential conservation management agreement. This is an agreement between the borough and a property owner to not cut down the tree. If it is designated as extraordinary, this tree will be the first in the borough to receive such designation. Jonathan suggested STAC pick out a few additional trees to designate so it does not appear that the owner of this property is being singled out. One idea is to designate an extraordinary tree in each area of town. If the borough does designate extraordinary trees, Steve questioned whether we could identify their coordinates with GPS and add them to the ERI. We also discussed the idea of putting a notice on the borough web site asking people to contact STAC if they think they have a special tree on their property. STAC would then look at the tree and make a decision.
- h) **Parker at Stonegate.** We sent our comments to the Zoning Board, which approved the application for additional parking spots, agreeing Parker demonstrated a definitive need for these. Parker moved some of the parking spots away from the cottage to avoid the problem of cars blocking the crosswalk. They agreed to comply with the tree ordinance and to replant a number of the trees. Regarding drainage, Parker's engineer said the system has enough capacity to take the additional load from the new parking spots. Drainage at the bottom of the hill is a county problem because River Road is a county road.
- i) **Redevelopment Plan for Buck Woods and the Meadows.** On December 17, the Council passed a resolution confirming that the sites meet the criteria for being areas in need of redevelopment. The Borough Attorney said the borough's planner for these sites is working on a proposal, but it may be four to six weeks before we see something. They are being asked to come up with a plan that makes the best use of these properties for the borough.
- j) **Signage for Environmental Education Center.** The borough is moving forward on this; the Communications Committee is working on a design that incorporates the borough logo. Harvey questioned whether we could create a footpath to the building. We are getting a motion detector light. Steve noted there is a path to the building, but it must be maintained. Allan reported that Sustainable Highland Park submitted an application for a Park Partners grant, to fund creation of a path from the Environmental Education Center to the brook at the border of Johnson Park. This program is offering grants of up to \$2,000 in several categories. Two applications have been submitted under the environment category. On February 9, there will be an event at Borough Hall where residents can vote for the proposals of their choice.
- k) **Wood Burning Smoke.** Steve pointed out that we don't know if this is a health issue until an EPA study is done. We are also uncertain as to whether this pertains to anything that burns wood. Laurel will raise the issue at the next Board of Health meeting.
- l) **Plastic Bags.** No town in New Jersey bans them. They are banned in LA; DC charges for their use. Stop and Shop used to give a five-cent discount to customers who brought their own bags, but they no longer do this. If we do ban plastic bags, Padraic suggested we give out free cloth

bags. He added that Sustainable Highland Park is working on a grant application for organic waste recycling in town. This would require about 200 households for the project to be viable. It could also be done as a joint contract with schools and restaurants.

m) Environmental Commission Mission Statement and Goals. Tabled to future meeting.

6. New Business

a) STAC launched a new web page, which is part of the borough web site.

b) Residents received notice of tonight's Environmental Commission meeting, but the STAC meeting was not mentioned. Harvey noted the Borough Clerk has a list of STAC meeting dates for the year. Karen reported she emailed Monica Jackson with the dates of the joint EC-STAC meetings. Allan suggested each group send its information separately to Monica.

7. The meeting adjourned at 9:17 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, February 5 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.