

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of June 11, 2014 (Joint meeting with Shade Tree Advisory Committee)
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, STAC members

1. The meeting was called to order at 8 PM.
2. The minutes of the May 7, 2014 meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Correspondence: None

4. Site Plans

- a) Abraham and Bessie Hahn Charitable Fund, Inc.
114 Johnson Street
Block 16, Lots 5, 6, 7
Docket No.: # P2014-02

The applicant plans to subdivide the property, demolish the existing house, and build two new identical houses. The application is currently before the Planning Board. Dry wells will be placed on each lot. STAC will recommend that at least one tree be planted on each of the lots.

Comments: Follow STAC recommendations for planting new trees. Retain storm water on the site.

- b) Kaplan and Sons Construction Corp.
433 River Road
Block 189, Lot 4
Docket No.: # P2014-01

This is a second version of the development application for the Castle site, but it still has not been deemed complete. The plan includes floor plans for the various proposed buildings. The developer is requesting a variance for impacting the steep slopes beyond what the ordinance allows. They have not yet provided an easement for a path into the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. They also do not include a plan for maintaining a storm water basin.

Our comments on the first version were about trees, need for a storm water basin, and the issue of steep slopes. The developer proposes to take down 700 trees. The first version of application said they did not have to provide any tree replacements. This second version includes plans to replace 450 trees on the property plus 54 trees STAC requested. Noting that still leaves them 350 trees short; they say they will plant larger trees to make up the difference. However, the borough ordinance does not allow this. We need to ask the developer to follow the ordinance regarding the number of replacement trees required. Their other option is to pay the deficiency into the borough's Tree Fund. STAC will take a detailed look at the plan.

5. Old Business

- a) Information Pamphlet on Gardening. We discussed creating an information pamphlet about gardening that could be distributed to landscaping services hired by residents and businesses. Several communities have these. They would inform readers as to which plants are native and how to obtain these plants. The Commission has this information on a page on our website, but it is hard to find, and the information is not complete enough to be useful to people who do not have a lot of time to spend on this. STAC has three brochures at Borough Hall they wrote up dealing with trees. Their website also has links to brochures on invasive plants, native plants, etc. They

could put together a brochure on gardening. A STAC member proposed meeting with borough webmaster Monica Jackson to locate this information, re-word it, and put it on the borough website. We could also put it on a Facebook page on the borough's environment and landscape. The Commission already has its own website and Facebook page though we noted some information on these pages needs to be updated. Susan Edmunds wants to put together a more organized proposal for disseminating gardening information. We also noted that Councilwoman Welkovits requested a link from the borough website to a site about native plants.

- b) Proposed Mural Project. Organizers of the project want to paint the entire exterior surface of the Environmental Education Center in vivid colors. We noted the building is meant to blend in with the landscape rather than stand out. The mural project is moving forward without our input, as the organizers brought their proposal directly to the Borough Council. Jon suggested we send a memo to the Council from both the Commission and STAC. Allan reported that artist Jonathan Horowitz did a presentation to the Council in May, and they asked him to come up with a design that stakeholders and the Council can review. So far, no design has been proposed. The plan is to authorize money from the Pulte historic trust fund to pay for this. The Council had planned to pass a resolution authorizing the project last night, but that was postponed because of the mayor's sudden resignation. The Council is in favor of going ahead with murals depending on what they look like. Steve noted that in our recommendations, we should say we do not want any design and that this project is not in concert with the original plans for the Center. The Council needs to know the options we think are better for this site. Mike will draft a joint memo from the Commission and STAC. In the letter, he will recommend that the money set aside to pay the artist would be better used for the building, especially for purchasing solar panels.
- c) Pumphouse Repairs. The repairs have been completed, and the pumphouse has been washed and painted. There is still no electrical power there.
- d) Dumping in Valley Place Ravine. Several STAC members discovered people are dumping garden refuse in Valley Place Ravine. This site is public property, so this is a code enforcement issue. The property owner doing this should first be approached in a friendly manner and asked to stop.
- e) Tree Ordinance. We are uncertain as to whether the borough has been enforcing our tree ordinance since Tim Coyle retired. Trees are being taken down around town without permits. STAC members said they will call code enforcement to discuss this and raise the issue with the mayor and council. There should be open access to permits. Arborists who work in the borough need to know the provisions of the ordinance.
- f) New Environmental Education Center Sign. There was no input from stakeholders regarding the sign. None of us saw the sign before it was unveiled, and we never discussed the font, color, and orientation with the Council.
- g) Proposed Leaf Blower Ordinance. We noted professional landscapers who use these will not want a law prohibiting them, as requested by a resident who wrote a letter recommending this. One issue with leaf blowers is noise; however, there now are quieter models, such as electric leaf blowers. Another issue is that the speed at which the air is pushed drives dust into the air. Gas-powered blowers have a pollution issue. While the newer models reduce noise they do nothing to reduce the dust and mold spores kicked up and the soil that gets eroded from use of these machines. Allan suggested we form a sub-committee to work on this if we want to pursue an ordinance. The ordinance would have to be very specific regarding what people can and cannot do at particular times. We could either create a first draft of an ordinance and then approach the

Council with it or approach the Council with just the idea. Karen suggested restrictions on leaf blowers be limited to the fall season. Mike recommended amending our existing noise ordinance as an alternative to enacting a new law.

- h) Y Property. The applicant promised to prepare an easement for the greenway but has not yet submitted it to the Borough.
 - i) Reimbursement for Equipment Purchased. Steve needs to be reimbursed for equipment he purchased for trail maintenance.
 - j) Fence Repair at Native Plant Reserve. Nothing done yet.
6. New Business
- a) Website. We want our own domain name. Hpec.org is most effective. Leora would still host the site. It's not clear whether all parts of the current site are now accessible to us.
 - b) Stream Monitoring. The New Brunswick Environmental Commission wants to know if any of us want to be trained in stream habitat assessment. DEP will conduct a training session on Saturday, June 21 from 9 AM-12 PM in the Environmental Education Center. Part of the training will be in the field.
7. The meeting adjourned at 10:10 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, July 2 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.