

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of January 7, 2015
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Allan Williams, Council liaison
Susie Welkovits

Guest: Irene Reigner

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. The minutes of the December 3, 2014 meeting were approved with one minor correction.
3. A list of our meeting dates for 2015 was distributed. We will continue to meet the first Wednesday of every month except for March, when we will have a joint meeting with STAC on the second Wednesday of the month. No meeting in August.
4. Correspondence
 - a) We received a copy of an application by Middlesex County to NJDEP seeking permission to replace a culvert for Mill Brook, which goes under North 8th Avenue in Edison. No impact to Highland Park, as this project is entirely in Edison.
 - b) We received our annual ANJEC bill for 2015 dues at \$290 a year. We agreed to renew our membership and add their workshop plan for an additional \$60, as we did last year, for a total of \$350. The Commission is receiving \$750 from the borough, the same amount as we did last year.
 - c) We received notice from PSE&G informing us of removal of an abandoned natural gas pipeline under the Raritan River. Part of the pipeline goes under Johnson Park in the borough. We noted that for the sake of emergency preparedness, there should be redundancy for gas service and all utilities. We questioned how many gas lines come into the borough and whether such redundancy exists. Susie will ask Scott Luthman about this.
5. Site Plan
 - a) Zoltan Kemeny
35 North Sixth Avenue
Block 138, Lots 40 and 41
Docket No.: #Z14-06
The applicant proposes to build a second floor including closets and a master bathroom and is seeking bulk variances. There is no change to the maximum impervious coverage. No Comments.
6. Old Business
 - a) Kaplan Castle Application Update. The application was approved by the Planning Board. The disagreement between Kaplan and STAC regarding the borough's tree ordinance will be resolved in a developer's agreement with the borough. Kaplan wants credit for meeting the ordinance requirements through planting fewer trees than required but bigger ones. The development's connections to borough sewers and the question of responsibility for their maintenance will be negotiated.
 - b) Illuminating Experiences Litigation. Both the Planning Board and the Borough Council signed off on the new Planned Unit Residential 2 zoning. The next step is a fairness hearing in New Brunswick, which will address the issue of whether this project really helps low income people. The court will likely approve the settlement. The final site plan for this will go to the Planning Board and follow the normal process. The proposal calls for 110 units, of which six will be

affordable. Approximately 70 trees on the property fall within the borough tree ordinance. The developer has agreed to comply with the ordinance.

7. New Business

- a) 2015 Budget. We spent our leftover 2014 money on necessary items including safety equipment for volunteers working on the Meadows trail.
- b) Updating Environmental Commission Website. We now have our own URL and need to pay Leora Wenger \$100 to work on the site and take out old information that is no longer relevant. The site also needs to be made more user friendly. We will ask Leora for a work proposal.
- c) Resolution Supporting Lower Raritan River Watershed Partnership. We passed this in November, and former Council liaison Padraic Millet said he would review it with the Council. We want a Council resolution supporting the partnership; passing it could make us eligible for grants once we set up a 501 C3. Allan will give Susie a copy of the resolution the Commission passed.
- d) Goals for the Year. Allan and Steve wrote up and distributed a list of Commission goals for the year titled "Potential Environmental Goals for 2015." Steve recommended we ask the borough to apply for a Natural Resources Recreational Trails grant of up to \$25,000 from NJDEP. We need to determine exactly what we need, such as native plants, equipment, and supplies. We will then give Susie a write up. We also want to apply for a DEP Community Forestry Program grant. Susie has a copy of a letter to STAC co-chair Carol Avelsgaard noting our community forestry plan meets DEP standards. DEP's approval of the plan is a pre-requisite for grant eligibility. The Commission needs to get a copy of this plan. Steve reported he received notice from the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRSC) informing us they will provide several pounds of milkweed seed for planting in the Meadows. We had requested enough for about 3,500 square feet. NRSC will also look into providing us with shrubs for the Meadows. We agreed to use recommendations in the Thonet study and updates to that plan. Meadows volunteers have not yet decided whether or not to form a 501 C3. They will meet later this month to discuss projects for the year. We would like the Council to pass a resolution recognizing the volunteers' work. At Susie's request, we will write up a draft resolution. We also noted people are visiting the Meadows regularly.
- e) Weed removal at the Meadows will be done in either late May or early June.
- f) We need a conservation management plan that details how the borough will support the volunteers' effort, including in-kind services. Volunteer hours are valued at \$15 per hour; so far, volunteers have contributed \$60,000 of in-kind services. We can use the Thonet study to put together management plans for one year, three years, and five years. Borough support can include water by DPW, equipment storage in winter, maintenance, and use of small DPW equipment as needed. Laurel suggested we write an article about the volunteers and their work for the borough newspaper.
- g) The borough's Park It program wants commissions to come up with ideas for events in April and October. Steve suggested a cross-country jog along the Meadows Trail. We could ask the Road Runners to participate and have a walk through with Council members. The Board of Health could co-sponsor this as a fitness event.
- h) We discussed putting blurbs in the borough e-newsletter with links to the trail map asking people to visit the Meadows. Laurel will ask Stacy if she can get the map and information from Steve Barnes and put it in the e-news.
- i) Our open space inventory needs updating. It's on our website in PDF form.

- j) We want to see zoning on lots on the north side of the bike path changed from residential/multi-family to conservation.
 - k) We get a recycling grant every year for tonnage. Frank Troy of DPW is the borough's Recycling Coordinator and Clean Communities Coordinator. In the past, DPW has given us gloves and other equipment for cleanups.
 - l) Steve suggested we compost leaves and woodchips and put them over broken concrete in the Meadows next fall. Piles of woodchips are located in the upper Meadows, unused. Susie recommended we note on our website that these are available for taking.
 - m) Susie reported that students from RPRY will join Bartle students in the same grade in a two-part program by Raritan Riverkeeper Bill Schultz. Organized by Councilman Joshua Fine, the program will involve teaching and a film followed by either a nature walk or scavenger hunt in either the Meadows or the Native Plant Reserve. Approximately 150 children will participate
 - n) The Raritan River Festival is held every September. In past years, we had a table there. We need to consider whether we want to participate again this year.
 - o) We should consider a cleanup project at Valley Place Ravine.
 - p) Allan noted deer hunting in the Rutgers Ecological Preserve is permitted from December 24 through sometime in January and questioned whether Rutgers notified the borough about this. The region designated as Area C for hunting is past the apartments on the right side of Cedar Lane. We should put this information on the borough's website and Facebook page.
8. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, February 4 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.