

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of April 1, 2015
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Jim Walsh, Allan Williams, Council liaison Susie Welkovits

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. We welcomed new Commission member Jim Walsh, who works for Food & Water Watch.
3. The minutes of the March 11, 2015 joint meeting with STAC were approved with minor corrections.
4. Correspondence: None
5. Site Plans: None
6. Old Business
 - a) Buck Woods Tree Removal Application. There was a meeting with Borough Engineer Bruce Koch, Borough Planner Alan Schechtel, Code Enforcement Officer Scott Luthman, Rosanne Baruh, Karen Swaine of STAC, and Allan Williams of the Environmental Commission in response to Jack Morris's application to remove 159 trees in Buck Woods. The group reviewed the major points of our tree ordinance to determine whether a permit is required for this. They noted some trees are marked with ribbons. STAC has not looked at the trees because that may be considered trespassing, but Scott Luthman, who has until April 15 to respond to the request, was at the site today. There are some discrepancies in the application. According to the borough, certain issues were not addressed, such as providing a plan for the area where the trees will be taken down. There are steep slopes greater than 25 percent that cannot be disturbed according to our steep slopes ordinance. The application notes the trees would be removed to enable the digging of test pits, as the developer claims that in 2012, DEP said more test pits are needed at the site. We requested that the applicant submit to the borough a document from DEP verifying this and a case manager's name. Scott Luthman is writing up a summary of the deficiencies in Morris's application, which he will submit to the borough attorney.
 - b) Pulte II. The developer is seeking a variance for one house with a non-conforming porch, which would slightly increase impervious coverage. The property is non-conforming because it does not meet front and rear yard setback requirements. Allan noted Pulte did not provide this information in time for the application to go before the Zoning Board and noted that Alan Schechtel said it would be almost impossible for the Zoning Board to approve this. Notably, the structure has not yet been built, but the unit has been sold, with inclusion of this porch.
 - c) ANJEC Grant Application. Steve and Alan worked on and submitted a grant application to ANJEC for \$1,500 to do work on the Meadows trail. It requires we provide 80 hours of in-kind labor. Parts of the trail area have been damaged by deer. Needed are invasive species management, replanting of native species, habitat enhancement, outreach via publication of trail images, and interpretive activities that draw attention to the Environmental Commission and our activities.

- d) National Recreational Trails Grant. Steve and Allan wrote up an application focusing on trail maintenance and management, additional work on trailside areas, and improving trail facilities. The grant provides up to \$24,000 with a 20 percent match that can be met via approximately 300 hours of in-kind labor. The application deadline is April 30. Mike recommended we prioritize signage and trail markers. The budget Steve and Allan are working on includes provision for renting an electric jackhammer. Susie suggested we add repair of the fences along the bike path and at the Native Plant Reserve. Allan drafted a resolution approving the application, which we need the Borough Council to adopt at its April 14 meeting. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the draft resolution.
- e) Highland Cliffs/Former Y Property. The developer submitted the final site plan and got half way through the process of reviewing it with the appropriate engineers. The NJDOT rejected the borough's idea of painting the borough logo on the retaining wall.
- f) Meadows Trail Upcoming Events. Susie reported that at the May 5 Borough Council meeting, each volunteer who has worked at the Meadows will be awarded a proclamation. They will all be invited to the meeting to receive the proclamations. Steve noted we want the resolution to commend the group as a whole, not separate resolutions for each individual. The resolution will acknowledge their work over the past year. Steve will write up key focal points, using the name "Meadows Volunteers" for the group. The 14 volunteers could each be given individual certificates. This event is separate from the borough's planned Volunteer Appreciation Night, which will take place in late April. At that event, one volunteer from each commission will receive a commendation for exceptional contribution. Steve recommended we invite the Council to come to the Meadows for a walk and photo op.

Additional volunteers will be recruited to work on the Meadows Trail, and an event will be held on June 7, which is National Trails Day. Jon suggested we conduct guided walks of the Meadows Trail that day; we will put this on the agenda for our next meeting. If we send notice by April 25, we can get the event into the newsletter of the National Recreational Trails Group. Susie recommended we do events on both Saturdays and Sundays, so more people can participate. We will also hold a cleanup of the Meadows, but the date has not yet been selected. We are thinking about holding another weed busters event at the Meadows Trail. Mary Denver of STAC wants a work day at the Native Plant Reserve. Commission members will brainstorm about possible additional Meadows events. Some ideas discussed are a cross country run/walk with the mayor. Jon will schedule work days for Ahavas Achim Environmental Committee volunteers.

- g) Earth Day. The Earth Day celebration will take place on Sunday, April 19 from 11 AM-3 PM at the Environmental Education Center and will include three bands and many exhibits. Kerry Miller of ANJEC will be there and exhibit her new electric car. The Commission will participate at the event.

7. New Business

- a) Highland Park Street Fair - Sunday, May 3 from 11:30 AM-4:30 PM. The 5K run on the same day starts at 9 AM, with the kids' race beginning at 10 AM.
- b) The question arose as to whether we can supervise the trimming of trees along utility lines in Highland Park. Trees may often have been cut more than is necessary. The trimming is performed by private contractors working for PSE&G. Jon recommended STAC supervise all tree trimming if possible. We would like PSE&G to consult with us before they do any trimming,

as some of the trees we have been trying to save have been damaged by their work. We need to discuss this issue with STAC.

- c) Representatives of the Lower Raritan Watershed came to the borough and discussed work they want to do on several streams in the lower Raritan. They will be present at the borough's Earth Day event. On behalf of the Environmental Commission, Steve will set up a restoration workshop with them.
8. The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, May 6 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center at River Road.