

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of September 2, 2015
Minutes

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

Guests: Jacob Kleinmann of Boy Scout Troop 55; Richard Kleinmann, assistant troop leader for Troop 55; Christina Petagna; Ann-Sheryl White, assistant troop leader for Troop 55.

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. The minutes of the July 1, 2015 meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) The Kaplan organization at the Castle sent notification that they applied to the DEP for a freshwater wetlands permit.
 - b) We received a notice from Remington and Vernick Engineers informing us they are applying to the DEP for a freshwater wetlands permit as part of their project installing new lighting at the Donaldson Park tennis courts.
4. Site Plans
 - a) Fox and Foxx Development, LLC
425 Donaldson Street
Block 83, Lots 41, 42, 43, and 44
P2015-02
This application is for a minor subdivision. The applicant proposes to build two single family homes on four lots. The plan meets lot coverage requirements. Impervious coverage will increase from 24 to 35 percent of the property, still within borough ordinance. There are many old trees on the property; about 40 will have to be removed. The applicant can pay into the borough tree fund if they cannot replace all the trees on the site. Susie suggested STAC look at this application before their meeting next week. The property is on a slope, with the street in front lower than the rear of the site, meaning everything will flow toward the front. Comments: Retain storm water on site as much as possible to compensate for increasing impervious coverage. Evaluate permeable surfaces for the driveways.
 - b) Rite Aid Application. When the store recently renovated the interior, nine windows facing South Fourth Avenue were closed off. This violated the Planning Board requirements which were part of an agreement with Rite Aid in 2007. Rite Aid is now proposing the windows be an art gallery where artists can place paintings on the exteriors. They will have awnings and temperature control to protect the art; the artwork will be curated by Mason Gross School of the Arts. They also committed to putting in additional LED lights because the area is very dark at night. It is unclear why the Department of Code Enforcement approved Rite Aid's plan and did not seem to know about the 2007 requirements. Susie said the purpose of the current redesign is a decision by corporate headquarters to move in a new direction. Rite Aid plans to have nurses on staff and turn the place into a type of medical clinic to provide a service to borough residents. The borough wants to work with them to make that happen. The Arts Commission is willing to take on the art issue. As for the lighting, Allan noted they hadn't done the necessary calculations.

5. Old Business

- a) Buck Woods Update. The Borough Council adopted a resolution to change an open bond ordinance, which could be used for purchasing Buck Woods. Susie also reported the borough is looking at a property on the corner of Benner and South Sixth Avenue to use as a Teen Center.
- b) Meadows Trail. Steve reported that the volunteers worked very diligently on the trail in July and August. They put in two hours every weekend to keep the trail in good shape. DEP had three questions about our recreational trails grant proposal. Steve answered the questions and expects a decision on the grant this month. The volunteers will need some tools for autumn and winter, which will be purchased with the Commission's remaining funds. There is no need for a huge cleanup. Mike reported that the split rail fence at the bike path needs to be repaired. This costs \$800; we may put it in our budget for next year. Jon will schedule a Meadows work day in either October or November.
- c) Pulte II. There have been lighting issues. Karen told Scott Luthman the situation has improved. The problem now is not the street lights but the porch lights of the new residents.
- d) Borough's Tear-Down Ordinance. It was defeated 8-0 by the Planning Board, and the Borough Council concurred with their decision. Susie explained the intent was to allow people with smaller houses on smaller lots to renovate to meet more modern needs. However, the calculations proposed did the opposite, making it actually more difficult for a homeowner to renovate.

6. New Business

- a) New Eagle Scout Project. Jacob Kleinmann wants to construct bat houses for his Eagle Scout project, possibly in the Meadows. He plans to submit a proposal, and the Environmental Commission will be his sponsor. This is the first time a Boy Scout is coming to the Commission at such an early stage in their project, and it will allow us to be more involved in the planning process. Jacob will build the bat houses, but we noted that they will have to be cleaned out from time to time. Ann-Sheryl said Eagle Scout projects have to have a beginning, middle, and end, meaning ongoing maintenance cannot be part of this project. She also suggested Jacob work with a Commission member who would give him guidance. Steve noted there are several bat conservation organizations Jacob could contact for assistance. Jacob has to complete the project by the time he turns 18 and has already started his research. Steve recommended his proposal address the issues of who, what, when, where, and why, plus include a selection of sites where the bat houses are most likely to be successful. The project also has to have an educational component. This could be a sign on the bat house. The sponsoring agency has to have authority over the project, meaning the bat houses have to be placed in a location where the Commission has authority, such as the Meadows or Environmental Education Center. We will advise Jacob as he puts his proposal together. He asked to attend our next meeting to present his proposal, but Anne-Sheryl recommended he work with one point person, who the Commission will choose as most appropriate for this, and only come back to us once he has a final plan. She asked us to copy her informing her who that person will be. Jacob left us his email address and said his goal is to complete the project by early summer next year or sooner. We agreed Jon would be Jacob's point person. Mike said Valley Place Ravine is another potential site for bat houses. Jon's son also did an Eagle Scout project, for which he installed bird houses in the Meadows and along the bike path.
- b) Solar Farm at Upper Meadows. Because power goes in and out of the borough through one connection, as explained by PSE&G, parts of the town lose power during events like Hurricane Sandy or the Edison fire. Mayor Gayle Mittler and Susie met with BPU officials and asked for a micro-grid. BPU officials said they would help the borough analyze a solar backup plan. We received a \$10,000 grant from Sustainable New Jersey. A template for this

- devised by Rutgers indicated solar would not be enough to provide backup power during an outage. PSE&G is required to produce a certain amount of solar power every year. They are trying to use underutilized municipal land to generate this solar power, and Highland Park has land that could be suitable for this. They looked at the Meadows and provided us with an outline for a proposal. PSE&G would put solar arrays there, or possibly on top of the DPW building. Susie said she will also ask PSE&G for solar panels for the Environmental Education Center.
- c) Native Plant Reserve Parking Lot. Susie reported the borough is analyzing all public-parking throughout the town. Construction will soon start on the former Y property, where many people currently park. The idea of using the lot at the Native Plant Reserve for commuter parking was discussed by the Borough Council. Engineers drew up a draft of 37 spots they believe they can fit at the NPR lot. Mike noted this property is all Green Acres, and putting parking there would violate their terms. Susie said more research has to be done regarding Green Acres and added there is a perceived need for parking in town. She said any parking lot at the NPR would be required to use permeable asphalt.
 - d) Budget. We have \$330 left in our annual budget, which we can spend on items such as supplies and pamphlets. Steve will draw up a list of supplies needed for the Meadows Trail. Jon recommended we promote the murals at the Environmental Education Center.
 - e) Leaf Blowers. Some complaints were received about people using leaf blowers to blow grass and leaves into the street. We have an ordinance prohibiting raking or blowing anything into the street because it gets into the storm drains and clogs them. Since this was done at a professional building, code enforcement will call the business manager and tell them not to do it again.
 - f) Social Media Policy. The Borough Council passed a social media policy for boards, commissions, and committees. Allan sent copies of it to all Commission members. Any comments should be sent to Susie.
7. The meeting adjourned at 10 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, October 7 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.