

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of July 6, 2016
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Dan Larkins, Christina Patagna, Karen Swaine, Council liaison Susie Welkovits

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:10 PM.
2. Minutes from June deferred to next meeting.
3. Correspondence:
 - a) We received a copy of an application by Middlesex County to DEP, for a permit to upgrade the floating dock at Donaldson Park and replace pilings there.
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business:
 - a) American Properties. Nothing new. Karen noted piles of soil have been brought to the site.
 - b) ANJEC Grant. We received the grant for birding. The check was sent to Dan at the wrong address, so ANJEC had to re-send it to Borough Hall, where it arrived on June 30. Ten pairs of binoculars of various powers have been ordered for bird watching. Dan will buy about 20 bird feeders, which he will put up around the Environmental Education Center and the Meadows. Karen said we should put feeders that attract native bird species. She will write an article informing people not to feed house sparrows, which are not native. Susie asked us to do a publicity piece about this project to put on the borough's web site. She will email all of us so we can help craft the tone of the public notice. According to the terms of the grant, we have to report everything we do with the funds, keep accurate records, and take a lot of pictures. We noted the seeds for bird feed need to be in metal cans. Karen suggested we buy two galvanized garbage pails and 10 bird feeders instead of 20 bird feeders. Susie said DPW may be willing to store them. She will contact Stacy Kaplan in the borough's Communications Department to speak with Dan about publicity for the project. Steve noted we need to show that this project fits with everything else the borough is doing in terms of being green. The kickoff event, Introduction to Birding for children and adults, will take place on Saturday, August 13 at 9 AM in the Environmental Education Center. Another event will be held in the Meadows in September, and monthly events will follow.
 - c) Upper Meadows Solar Farm. PSE&G did a presentation about their plans for the site at a recent Borough Council meeting. They said the panels will be weighted down, announced the number of panels they will use, and stated they will go through a formal application process before the Planning Board. There is a copy of their presentation on the borough's web site and on several Facebook sites. We sent a five-page memo to the Mayor and Council on June 9 that included our concerns about issues related to the bike path. The Council will vote next Tuesday to accept PSE&G's bid, and a memo of understanding stating that both parties want to move forward with the project will be drafted. PSE&G will also do a formal presentation to the Planning Board in September. This will be a low elevation solar field on top of gravel. PSE&G will maintain the gravel. A lot of the electricity it generates will be stored in batteries. PSE&G has to generate a certain amount of solar power by requirement of the BPU, and we would be part of their fulfilling this. Susie noted there is an old circuit around South Seventh Avenue put up during the 1970s, which is a perfect place for them to see how the battery works with solar power. The project has a research aspect, as it is a pilot program to see if this solar technology is appropriate. It will

strengthen the circuitry in the South Seventh Avenue area, helping the garden apartments located there. There will also be an educational kiosk at the site and in Borough Hall. Mike asked PSE&G about solar panels for the Environmental Education Center, and they said they would look into this but cannot do it as part of this solar farm project. The installer, who has to come back to the solar farm site to study it, is advocating the borough commit to getting 80 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2050.

- d) National Recreational Trails Grant. Steve reported that the DEP said the agreements are being processed through their legal department. This process will take two to three months. Plantings will be done next spring.
 - e) Meadows Update. Volunteers are doing trail maintenance, and we thank DPW for fixing our lawn mower. Milkweed has bloomed, and bees are present. Monarch butterflies have not yet been seen at the site. More native wildflowers and grasses are coming up in areas thick with mugwort. The white snakeroot should be out in four weeks. Many people jog along the trail. When we get the grant money, we will put up signs saying, "Carry in, carry out" for garbage.
 - f) Sustainable New Jersey Recertification. The process is moving along though a new water conservation ordinance has not been done. The ordinance will have to focus on sensor sprinklers which are triggered when the ground is dry. The existing ordinance is worded very differently from what Sustainable Jersey wants and says nothing about sensor sprinkler systems. Susie said Allan will give our ordinance and the one Sustainable Jersey wants for comparison. Having a new ordinance will give us 20 more points. We also need to do a brownfields inventory. Christina has a list of 27 brownfield sites in town, of which only six or seven have not been developed. She will create maps from this information. The largest brownfields sites are the former Sunoco service station; Rainbow Cleaners; Geramatta's Auto Services at 605 Raritan Avenue; Lukoil Service Station, and Magnolia Garden apartments. DEP has no information on the apartments' site. The rest of the sites on the brownfields list are lower ranked.
6. New Business:
- a) A resolution committing New Jersey to 80 percent renewable energy by 2050 passed the State Senate. The borough wants to pass a similar resolution in support of the state law. We have two sample resolutions, one from South Orange, and one from Princeton. Passage of this resolution by the borough will include provisions to set up a program to achieve this goal. If we recommend it, the Council will pass the resolution. We voted unanimously to recommend its passage.
 - b) Community Garden. Jon met with Councilman Josh Fine and Jessica Hunsden of Good Earth Community Garden in Donaldson Park to discuss this. Good Earth Community Garden is no longer under the Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Middlesex County originally built the garden for the Co-op. People gardening there pay a nominal yearly fee of \$15 and used raised beds filled with soil. There is a common shed with tools. The gardeners get free water from the county, and the county maintains the fence. The project is now sponsored by Elijah's Promise Soup Kitchen. The role of Elijah's Promise in this is not clear. There are more than 20 people on the waiting list for plots. We have several options for a borough community garden. We could use the plot of land outside the Environmental Education Center next to the apartments. All gardening there would have to use raised beds; there can be no digging due to concerns about contamination, especially for plants with deep roots. A type of geotextile could be put below the raised beds. We could not use pressure-treated wood because it contains arsenic. Another potential site is a borough-owned plot on South Eighth Avenue, but there is no water access, and the site is too small. It is also unclear who would own the community garden and who would be responsible for it. One option is to create a sub-committee under the Mayor, the Environmental Commission, the Food Pantry Committee, Sustainable Highland Park, Main Street, or other interested parties. Steve said he would like to see a detailed proposal discussing funding sources and long-term management. Noting the idea for a community garden came from the Food Pantry Committee, Susie questioned whether certain plots around town would be set aside for the Food Pantry. If the

Pantry manages the program, they should have a drive for people to donate produce grown in town. She emphasized we need to deal with the group that wants to garden. It can be difficult to find people to tend to a garden that is not theirs. Steve noted this project needs a group of people willing to pay a nominal fee and do a certain level of garden work per year. Another possibility is to make ours an extension of the Good Earth Garden but under the jurisdiction of the borough. Since they already have an active membership, we could do this as an extension of their project. We could found a group called the Highland Park Community Garden to manage the project. We noted the library has a small raised bed but does not manage it. Funding and ongoing maintenance are the key issues. Susie suggested we reach out to people on the Good Earth Community Garden waiting list to find out whether they would be interested in a borough gardening project.

7. The meeting adjourned at 9:28 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will be on Wednesday, September 7 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.