

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of October 5, 2016  
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jon Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Dan Larkins, Allan Williams, Council liaison Susie Welkovits

Guests: Thomas DiStefano, Craige Ambroch (Meadows volunteers)

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. The minutes of the September 7, 2016 meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans
  - a) "Highland Park Borough Landfill Solar Project Preliminary and Final Site Plan Application Package," Block: 49, Lots: 41-55. This is the PSE&G proposal to place a solar array on three acres of the borough-owned former landfill. This will generate about 0.5 megawatts of renewable electricity that will flow into the grid. The applicant moved the site of the support buildings at the borough's request. The plan shows the maximum number of solar panels that can fit on the site. We noted an overhang from trees along the southern edge of the property. These trees are needed because they stabilize the steep slope and should be thinned, not topped. There are huge American elms and black locusts there. The western edge is a major transition area from open space to mature hardwood forest. Steve emphasized we need to make a strong case for not cutting these trees to PSE&G's environmental person. PSE&G is proposing to put interpretive signage on the site for educational purposes. Trees and shrubs would be ideal to disguise the fence around the array, a requirement of the National Recreational Trails Grant. We would like to see trees and shrubs that would be environmentally and educationally beneficial spread evenly in the transition zone. It is uncertain whether the application will be on the Planning Board's November agenda. PSE&G spoke of building this next spring. A Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan is included with the application. Some of the slopes are very steep and subject to erosion, so they will have to be stabilized. The map does not show erosion protection on the northern side, which needs to be added. We also need vegetation to slow down runoff from the Upper Meadows. For any trees cut down, replacements should be of the same species as the ones removed. All trees should be native, and a mixture is better than one species. Grading plans for the property have not yet been defined, as PSE&G has to consult with the DEP. We will give PSE&G's environmental person a list of our comments regarding the application. We also noted the utility would pay a yearly rent of \$20,000 to the borough with increases of 2.5 percent each year. The Environmental Commission supports this application, but it needs some tweaking. We will also send a copy of our comments to the Borough Planner and Borough Engineer.
5. Old Business
  - a) Meadows Update. The nursery area has been prepared for new plants in the spring. The gator needs three tires, which DPW will need to purchase. We will continue to maintain the trail in a usable condition. A volunteer created 10 different T-shirt logo designs for the volunteers' T-shirt. The volunteers now call themselves the Meadows Trail Crew. We will review the designs and choose one. More volunteers will be needed next spring; we will try to recruit new people. Susie recommended we put a call for volunteers in the next borough newspaper. The deadline is late

December. Steve said the notice should include an announcement that we were awarded the National Recreational Trails Grant for the site.

- b) Buck Woods. An informational public forum on the proposal for this property was held on September 19. No action was taken. The concept drawing presented two five-story apartment buildings on the north end of the site. The south end could be either open space or recreational space. It could be put under a conservation easement. Property owner Jack Morris (JSM) wants to cut down 70 trees and dig test pits. He has combined his lawsuit to cut down the trees with the ongoing builders' remedy lawsuit, claiming he can satisfy Highland Park's affordable housing obligation. The court wants Highland Park to move ahead with the developer and said he may remove trees in a 30-foot wide area at the center of the property. The center area does not have steep slopes. JSM will have to pay to replace every tree cut down. The property is still zoned single-family residential; the borough may be required to rezone it. The borough has told the court we are looking at this plan.
- c) American Properties-Heritage at Highland Park. Work is expected to start the week of October 19. They will begin with asbestos abatement. The Environmental Commission will be asked to post air monitoring results.
- d) Mill Brook Disturbance at Lincoln Avenue. Susie reported there was discoloration of Mill Brook on Harrison Avenue that resulted from a resident of Lincoln Avenue putting up a retaining wall. No chemicals were used. The borough's Code Enforcement Department wrote to the contractor referring them to state and borough ordinances. We discussed how to stop this from happening at any body of water in town. Allan will write a letter that will be sent to residents of properties adjacent to streams, letting them know we have an ordinance regulating this. We will get the addresses from borough tax maps.
- e) ANJEC Grant. The next birding event will be on October 15, at 9 AM at the Environmental Education Center. It will be the first themed event and will center on woodpeckers. After that, the November event will focus on how birds survive the winter. Each event involves a walking tour with binoculars. We will host one event a month until May, when we will host three. Dan reported the project is going very well, and people are mailing him questions about birds. We will put photos from previous events on our website. Dan will also write a post for the Commission's blog. There are now six bird feeders at the site of the Environmental Education Center and four in the Meadows. The project is using a crowd-sourced map through Google's "My Maps" feature, where people can report bird sightings, including time, date, and location seen, and type of bird.
- f) National Recreational Trails Grant. This is in place, and we need more volunteers.
- g) Eagle Scout Projects. One project is dormant. The other, a proposal to put up five or six bat houses between the Environmental Education Center area and the Native Plant Reserve, has to be completed by January. Several potential sites have been identified. We need to make sure there are no problems with utility lines and also check with Mary Denver about the bat house locations. The project will be done in November.
- h) Proposed Community Garden. The location being suggested is between the Environmental Education Center and the apartment building and is about 50 by 50 feet. The proposed garden would be fenced in. Councilman Josh Fine asked for a rudimentary budget, which Jon created. There are about 12 people interested in a plot in the community garden, which can host up to 25 plots. All plantings will be in raised beds. We need to make sure there are no utility lines there. Dan noted that the Donaldson Park community garden area is 100 by 100 feet. He suggested we

ask students in the high school Environmental Club, the Food Pantry Committee, and Sustainable Highland Park whether they are interested in being a part of this. Having a percentage of food grown in the garden donated to the Food Pantry will add a sustainability component. The most expensive part of the project will be getting the fence built, which will cost less than \$10,000. Josh has ideas for possible funding sources.

- i) Remaining 2016 Budget. The Commission has \$700 left in its 2016 budget. We can get as many T-shirts as we want for \$250. Craig reported there are now between six and eight regular Meadows volunteers. We would get at least 20 T-shirts. We also can buy an eight-foot ladder for about \$100. Mike suggested we buy several dozen pairs of work gloves and safety goggles as well as power equipment, such as a brush-cutting head for the weed whacker. Allan will draw up a list of price quotes.

6. New Business

- a) US DOT Letter. US PIRG wants to add the parameter of CO<sub>2</sub> production for new trucks as well as new fuel efficiency standards. They are asking the mayor to write a letter of support for the new truck fuel efficiency standards to the US Department of Transportation (DOT) because DOT is considering a new rule that will evaluate the performance of new trucks. Allan will write a memo to the mayor from the Commission supporting this.

- 7. The meeting adjourned at 9:54 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, November 2 at 8 PM at the Environmental Education Center.