

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of July 5, 2017  
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Muriel Haber (pending appointment), Laurel Kornfeld, Christopher Satch, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, Council liaison Philip George

Guest: Mark Lesko of the Highland Park Ecology and Environmental Group

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:11 PM.
2. The minutes of the June 7, 2017 meeting were approved.
3. Mike notified us that Dan Larkins has resigned from the Commission, as he got a job in Philadelphia.
4. Correspondence
  - a) We received a copy of a PSE&G statewide general permit to work in wetlands.
  - b) The Freehold Soil Conservation District issued a letter to the borough noting they are seeking a permit for the disturbance of soil at the Upper Meadows site. This is for construction of the solar farm.
5. Site Plans: None
6. Old Business
  - a) ANJEC Birding Grant. Dan submitted a final report on the project to ANJEC. They will send us \$500 after all terms of the grant are completed. We have binoculars, a bird scope, and a field guide to area birds and need to consider holding future events. All the supplies are kept in the Environmental Education Center. Mark Lesko informed us he is a birder; he and Karen will work on a future project, possibly during the fall migration season. People on the email list for the birding events will be sent an email informing them of Dan's resignation.
  - b) PSE&G Solar Farm. Borough officials and representatives of PSE&G will meet the week after next to discuss various issues about this project, such as the possibility of adding more testing wells. The DEP wanted the existing monitoring wells to be resampled because of potential runoff. In 1994, there was runoff of benzene and septic; this may have been due to upgrades of septic systems done at the time on Valentine Street. There is still ongoing runoff to the Lower Meadows, and DEP sent the borough additional questions about this.
  - c) Meadows Trail Update. Steve reported he and Craig Ambrose mowed the trail today with the help of DPW. We thank DPW for fixing the mower. Who Is My Neighbor, Inc., is bringing kids on bikes for a tour tomorrow. The pump for watering the plants has been delivered. Wood has been delivered for the new entry point. Volunteers have dug trenches to set the 6 X 6 wood base. They are now waiting for the delivery of the 20-foot 2 X 10 beams that will support the walkway. These will be delivered to the work site; we need to find out the exact delivery time. Four sites in the Meadows were selected for major replantings. Two have had invasives mowed; the other two need heavy work. We may get inmates to remove weeds using the weed whackers. Two additional patches of milkweed are growing. Mary Denver and Craig are working on coordinating the plantings, which will be done this fall and next spring. Jon reported that the birdhouses put up by the Eagle Scout have nests in them. We need to put out a new call for volunteers. Steve will talk to Stacy Kaplan about this and about putting a notice on the borough website. The volunteer schedule needs to be changed, and more work days need to be added.

- d) Environmental Education Center Site. Steve said the Commission should take responsibility for invasives at the site. The EEC is also not well maintained. DPW mowed the roof at the beginning of the season and cut everything. It would be a good idea to have them do weeding at the site once a month, but they would have to know what the weeds are to remove them.
- e) Environmental Education Center Website. We're getting a new website, which Chris is working on. He needs some quality photography to put on the site. All the information from our old website is being transferred to the new site. Karen wants to take a picture of the Environmental Education Center but would prefer the weeds on the roof first be removed. Phil said he contacted the Arts Commission and the Highland Park Artists Collective about providing photos, as many in both groups shoot photos are around town. Pandora Scooter, chair of the Arts Commission, and John Marron of the HP Artists Collective will contact Chris about this. Chris will have to submit a receipt as the Commission is paying for these.
- f) American Properties/Heritage at Highland Park. This is the development on Cleveland Avenue at the site of the former Illuminating Experiences. Some old piles of concrete were removed.
- g) Rezoning of the Upper Meadows. Phil reported the Council is in the process of working on a comprehensive outline for the rezoning. The borough zoning ordinance will have to be amended for this. The rezoning does not have to be completed before PSE&G starts the work.
- h) Beehive Fence. The fence by the beehives at the Environmental Education Center was vandalized; parts of it were knocked down. Phil said he spoke with Frank and Don at DPW about this, and the subject may be on the agenda for next week's Council meeting. The borough is considering replacing the fence with an eight-foot chain link fence. Karen recommended using black chain link, which is not as obtrusive. We could plant Virginia Creeper, a native creeper vine, around it. The beehives need to be maintained as a permanent fixture. Today, Udi Shorr gave a talk to about 50 kids about the bees. We noted that the fence at the Native Plant Reserve is broken and needs new rails. Mike believes a six-foot fence around the beehives is tall enough. Phil suggested we recruit volunteers to work on repairing the NPR fence.
- i) New Walkway at the Environmental Education Center. We need a new walkway at the Environmental Education Center site in order for snow to be plowed there and would like to see the work done in the fall. Frank at DPW is researching large porous pavers for this. They can be placed from the curb cut to the Center doorway.

## 7. New Business

- a) Plastic Bag Reduction Campaign. Sustainable Highland Park received a \$10,000 grant to campaign for reduction of the use of plastic bags in town, especially at Stop and Shop and Rite Aid. This is an educational program to minimize their use. The Library will show the film "Bag It" tomorrow night at 7 PM; the movie will be shown at multiple times and at various locations in the borough. Sustainable Highland Park's website has a questionnaire for residents asking how they feel about plastic bags. Stop and Shop already has a program in place to reduce plastic bag use. The manager is willing to conduct training sessions for cashiers. The store will also distribute several hundred reusable bags for free to residents. Rite Aid has not been cooperative; the Mayor will contact higher level officials in the company about this. The initiative to reduce plastic bag use was announced at a press conference at last Friday's Farmers' Market. Laurel noted the Food Pantry might be a good place to distribute reusable bags. Outreach about this project will also be conducted in the schools, which will show students the "Bag It" trailer. The trailer will also be shown on HPTV. We noted the Commission supports Sustainable Highland Park's campaign.
- b) Flushing of Fire Hydrants. Mike questioned why the borough keeps flushing fire hydrants, which sometimes are left running for days. Phil said this is required by state law. According to measurements conducted by Middlesex Water, the borough's water loss is 37 percent from all systems. A 15 percent loss is considered a good system. A lot of our water mains are outdated. The borough is getting its utilities GIS mapped by Middlesex Water.

- c) Mill Brook and Borough Drainage System. Several organizations have done cleanups at Mill Brook. We are trying to inform the community about building better riparian buffers around streams. Many groups are interested in Mill Brook, which runs through the entire town. It's piped in some areas—underneath the railroad tracks and under Route 27, Lincoln Avenue, and North 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The brook contains a lot of garbage, and storm sewers near it are clogged with debris. Past cleanups have removed a lot of garbage. Jon noted many storm drains continue to become clogged after heavy rainstorms. Karen questioned whether mosquito dunks are being placed in the storm drains; Phil noted this would have to be done by the county. We need the cooperation of property owners adjacent to the brook to conduct cleanups. Laurel suggested we write up an article for the borough newspaper about this, and she will find out the deadline for the next issue. We noted the county is responsible for River Road, and the state for Route 27.
8. The meeting adjourned at 9:29 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, September 6 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center.