

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of June 6, 2018
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Steve Barnes, Laurel Kornfeld, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, Council liaison Phillip George

Guests: Marsha Goldberg, Marion Sackrowitz, Harold Sackrowitz, Lower Raritan Watershed Ambassador Rob Hughes

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 PM.
2. The minutes of the May 2, 2018 meeting were approved with one correction. Item 5c should say that the concept plan came from the Borough Planner, not from the developer.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans
 - a) Hatzalah Chevrah of Middlesex County
1131 Raritan Avenue
Block 124, L 12
P 2018-04
Hatzalah is a group of emergency medical first responders formed in 2014. They purchased a second ambulance and want to park it in the parking lot of Congregation Agudath Israel. The congregation was approved with 73 parking spaces. This will bring them down to 71. No Comments.
5. Old Business
 - a) PSE&G Solar Farm in Upper Meadows. Phil reported that the DEP withdrew most of its objections after a meeting between high level DEP officials, the Mayor, and Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin at the site. The plan has been revised back to the original proposal. The cleanup has been limited to 16-18 locations identified, and the revised plan has now been approved by the borough and submitted to the DEP for final approval, which is anticipated in July.
 - b) Environmental Commission Website. Jon sent Nicole a message asking her to look at our new website. We received a bill from the provider and need to follow up on this. Allan expects we will have some progress on the site by our next meeting.
 - c) Buck Woods. Residents Marsha Goldberg, Marion Sackrowitz, and Harold Sackrowitz, whose properties on South 5th Avenue adjoin the site, expressed several concerns about the proposed development. Specifically, they are concerned about removal of trees near their properties and the resulting effect on the watershed, environment, and residents. Properties on South 7th Avenue are also at risk from loss of trees, and some of them already flood. Some of the South 5th residents have retained their own attorney to question the proposed additional tree removal. Marsha reported that after 72 trees were removed from the site, other trees were destabilized and fell during winter storms. She also added that the copy of the sampling plan does

not resemble the tree removal plan. Marion said residents are fearful the developer will leave an environmental mess after cutting down the trees, causing contaminants to leach into the Raritan River.

The Fairness Hearing took place, and the court approved the fair share housing deal to develop up to 75 units for sale or rental, with 20 percent affordable units for rentals and 15 percent affordable units for condos at the Buck Woods site. We are concerned about the developer's expansion of proposed tree removal for the purpose of environmental testing. A compromise was reached in which the public right of way will be cleared and tested. If pollution is found beyond the 50-foot right of way, the developer can expand the area of testing. The developer hired an LSRP, who added around 150 trees to the list to be removed after finding traces of pollution near these trees. Some of the trees are located very close to South Fifth Avenue residential properties, where the area becomes a steep slope. The attorneys and planners are discussing a compromise to reduce the approach to the residential property lines because of the slope and the risk of destabilizing the slope by removing the trees. Phil noted that a lot of debris on the site is close to the surface. Further testing will depend on what is found by the LSRP.

Steve noted the bottom of the stream is a stream channel, and the stream has been placed into a culvert. The old culvert leaks, which is why we get areas of intermittent wetlands at the bottom of the ravine. Mike noted that the two southernmost corners of the property have the most proposed cutting, yet the testing shows the contamination is at the northern end of the property. Allan recommended the Commission write a memo to the Mayor and Borough Council reporting that private property owners came to our meeting requesting the Borough Attorney and Planner respond to their concerns. We voted 6-0 to send a memo to the Mayor and Council in time for their June 12 meeting. Allan will write it and send it to Mike. Steve also advised the residents to get more people in the area to send letters to DEP requesting an extension and saying residents' concerns were not taken into consideration before the tree removal permit was granted. Letters should be addressed to the DEP Commissioner and copied to Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin.

- d) Meadows Update. Because of the delay in building the solar farm and work that needs to be done for it, we need to ask DEP for an extension of the grant period for the Meadows trails. The current deadline is August, but the DEP itself delayed us regarding the solar farm, so asking for an extension is reasonable. Steve and the trail crew will build an additional entrance to the trail subject to the placement of the solar farm, likely toward the northwest corner on South 7th Avenue. Once PSE&G puts their fence in, we can determine exactly where the new entrance will go. Several trees came down during this year's February through April snowstorms. We would like to see the two lots adjacent to the bike path and to Buck Woods and opposite the Meadows rezoned from residential to conservation.
- e) Cleveland Avenue. Additional work has begun on the site, including soil remediation. Some trees along Cleveland Avenue have already been removed.

6. New Business
 - a) Sidewalk leading to EEC. We need some sort of paving of the sidewalk leading to the Environmental Education Center, as people have complained about it getting muddy. Karen questioned whether we can use something permeable about five feet wide. Phil will ask DPW to look into this. The Commission can say the borough requires a walkway, and we recommend it be permeable. We will also ask DPW and the Borough Council to inform us about any plans before work on them begins.
 - b) Green Structure. This was originally a location to place solar panels that would power the Environmental Education Center. Plastic fish made up of garbage were hung up there for Earth Day and are still there. We request Sustainable Highland Park remove them. Phil reported there has been discussion of moving the structure to the area between the EEC and the apartments at the intersection of Raritan Avenue and River Road. Karen recommended putting it in front of the EEC or leaving it where it is. Jon said we should not move the structure unless we have the funding for the solar panels.
 - c) Testing of Lawn between EEC and Apartments. We discussed the idea of putting flower or vegetable gardens in this area. Phil said we can get the area tested for free by an organization that does this. The question is, what to do if they find contamination. Karen recommended we make it a meadow for butterflies and bees.
 - d) Eagle Scout Program. Currently tied up in Boy Scout bureaucracy, the project is supposed to be done in July.
 - e) Rob Hughes introduced himself as the Watershed Ambassador for the Lower Raritan Watershed. Laurel recorded his contact information so we can stay in touch with him.
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:34 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, July 11 at 8 PM in the Environmental Education Center, 20 River Road, Highland Park.