

**Highland Park Environmental Commission**  
Meeting of May 5, 2021  
Minutes

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

Guests: Mark Lesko, Leora Wenger

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:04 PM.
2. The minutes of the April 7, 2021, meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business
  - a) Stormwater Ordinance. The Borough Council approved working with the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership several weeks ago. The stormwater ordinance was approved on first reading at last night's Borough Council meeting. The second reading will take place at the Council's June 1 meeting.
  - b) 433 Cleveland Avenue. Karen submitted STAC's comments on the application. In its revised plan, Menlo Engineering is proposing an underground retention basin that will enable water to slowly go into the storm sewer system. The applicant is using regular asphalt for the parking lot. Karen questioned why we are not insisting they use permeable surfaces.
  - c) ANJEC Grant. We submitted the application, which seeks a total of \$1,483 for proposed Meadows Trail improvements, including extending the boardwalk to the river another 24 feet, placing gravel in parts of the trail where the wood chips washed away, and printing a brochure about the Meadows with a trail map and list of the wildlife that can be seen there. If we get the grant, we will have a year to complete the work. Grant winners will be announced by May 21.
  - d) Redevelopment. The Planning Board will discuss the redevelopment plan at its meeting on Thursday, May 13. Jonathan suggested the Commission review the plan and provide comments on it. From an environmental standpoint, we questioned whether a parking deck will increase traffic and create more problems in terms of water flowing into the streets. Another issue is whether this plan will make installation of bike lanes easier or harder. Phil noted the borough is considering amending the zoning code to make the town friendlier to electric vehicles. He also said the borough wants Raritan Avenue to be tree-lined and wants to make sure new trees planted are selected for resilience and sustainability. He noted the template of the redevelopment plan was changed to allow an option for parking without a deck. New buildings will be "green building" certified.
  - e) Environmental Commission Website. Nicole updated the form listing birds in the borough. Allan added the most recent minutes as well as information about the Meadows volunteers. He also updated the calendar of Commission meeting dates.
  - f) Wood on Borough Property. The borough prefers that dead wood on borough property not be removed until a policy is determined. Mark noted people are also trying to take home wood from the Meadows Trail. Karen emphasized people should

not be permitted to take wood from a natural area. They can take branches that fell from street trees.

- g) Environmental Justice Law. The state legislature passed an environmental justice law, which was signed by the governor. The DEP is now performing the rule-making process for this law, which will allow people in areas with oil refineries to have more influence than they had in the past.
- h) Environmental Commission Budget. Our annual budget is \$1,050 for the year. So far, we've paid for the trail cameras as well as \$107.40 for a year of hosting our website, and ANJEC membership for 2021. We have \$433.48 left in our budget. The Meadows Trail crew would like another electric powered trimmer for grass and mugwort. Home Depot has one for \$109. We will need to fund the purchase of lithium batteries for the trail cameras for the rest of the year. The Commission now has a weed wacker that the trail volunteers can use.
- i) Karen reported there is no hose to water the tree planted by Sheila Shukla near the Environmental Education Center. Allan said Sheila is providing a hose. He also noted the water fountain at the center has been turned on for the season. The borough could make improvements to the spigot at the site to connect the hose. Allan said there has been additional water damage to the Environmental Education Center. Phil will contact Frank at DPW and have him look into the problem.
- j) Meadows Trail. Mark reported on the volunteers' work at the Meadows, which included weed wacking, putting down gravel, and removing three of the plastic coverings around newly-planted trees. They would like to get more wood and supplies to cover areas that frequently get wet. The trail is mostly in good condition, but a few spots need to be cleaned up. Also, more benches need to be put in so people walking the trail can sit down along the way. The river loop needs to be added to the trail map. Phil questioned whether the volunteers might want to invest in a better commercial-grade trimmer. He reported the Arts Commission and Artists' Collective have proposed placement of artistic style benches in the Meadows and said he will contact both groups and ask them to put the benches in. DPW also has old cast iron benches that used to be on Raritan Avenue. Their wood needs to be replaced; Mike at DPW has the address for ordering the kit needed to refurbish them. Mark will contact Arts Commission chair John Marron about this. The trail volunteers are in the best position to find appropriate locations for the benches.

## 6. New Business

- a) Cleanup at Red's Marina. This past Sunday, a local Boy Scout troop did a cleanup by the river along Red's Marina all the way up to Valley Place Ravine. Jon noted Valley Place Ravine could use a cleanup of its own. We will put notices seeking volunteers on our website and Facebook page. Phil reported the borough is printing a quarterly newsletter and asked us to talk to Harry Glazer about putting a notice seeking volunteers in the next issue, which is scheduled to come out in June. Jon asked for pictures from the cleanup to be forwarded to him so he can put them on our Facebook page.
- b) Letter Thanking Trail Crew Members. Meadows volunteers have received the congratulatory letter from the mayor thanking them for their work.

- c) Sustainable Highland Park/Everyone's Farm. Sustainable Highland Park is working on a new project, Everyone's Farm, to determine where in town we can grow things and do a gardening demonstration. There is one site behind the Middle School, but it had to be scaled back. The open field near the Environmental Education Center has possible sources of pollution, so it is not a good site. An area near a large apartment complex is being considered, but use of it is up to the owners. Everyone's Farm is also concentrating on people's individual properties. Wendy Rosen is coordinating the planting and gardening. The group has also petitioned Middlesex County to expand its community growing space in Donaldson Park, but the county has been slow to respond.
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:11 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Education Center will take place on Wednesday, June 2, 2021, at 8 PM on Zoom.