

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of June 2, 2021
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Laurel Kornfeld, Ethan Schoolman, Allan Williams, Council liaison Philip George

Guest: Craige Ambroch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:04 PM.
2. The minutes of the May 5, 2021, meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received an email from ANJEC thanking us for renewing our membership for 2021.
 - b) We received a notice from ANJEC that we did not get the grant for which we applied. They asked if we want feedback from them. We would like to receive it.
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business
 - a) The Borough Council passed the stormwater ordinance last night. It will now go to the county for approval. Once the county approves it, it will become law.
 - b) 238 Cleveland Avenue. We received two reports in response to our concern about potential contamination at the site. Four soil borings were done to approximately 10 feet. Low levels of petroleum hydrocarbons were found, but these levels are below the threshold for which remediation is required. No groundwater was found at this level. The final site application shows what the houses will look like. The developer is waiting for the future residents to choose what they want and then build it. The homes will have attached garages but will be set back. A variance will be required for unattached garages. Demolition of the buildings on the site has begun.
 - c) ANJEC Grant. We did not receive the ANJEC grant for additional work at the Meadows Trail.
 - d) Redevelopment. This was on the Planning Board agenda at its May 13 meeting. The Planning Board had many questions and concerns. The meeting was carried over to the next month, on Thursday, June 10, because it went late, and there were still nine people waiting to speak. Since the meeting, Planning Board members have received several reports on this issue. Many residents suggest developing only Tracts A and B and then deciding whether a parking deck is needed. There is an RFP for a parking management study for the area from Benner to Montgomery Streets and from River Road to North and South Fifth Avenues. Phil reported this is a basic survey of general need. Each development would need its own parking plan and traffic study. He also noted the borough needs to add handicapped parking and electric vehicle charging stations on Raritan Avenue. Main Street has concerns about losing the municipal parking lot by the Reformed Church, where the Farmers' Market is held and specifically note that the proposed festival street on North Third Avenue is much smaller than the current Farmers' Market site.

Ethan questioned where the entrance and exit to the parking deck would be, to which

Allan responded, off North Third Avenue, not off Raritan. The DOT would have to approve putting the deck there because it intersects a state highway. Ethan asked how the deck would be accessible if an event was occurring on North Third Avenue. Phil suggested he look at the overhead view of the theoretical development in the redevelopment plan.

Post Meeting Note: The Planner/Borough is proposing that the festival street be S. 3rd Avenue. N. 3rd Avenue would remain as a functioning street.

- e) The Meadows. Craige reported that more people in the community are visiting the Meadows. Those who do praise it as a great place and are very thankful for it. There are between eight and 10 volunteers who regularly work at the Meadows, plus some who come less frequently. They planted over 200 trees there in the last year, and only three of those did not survive the winter. Reforestation of the flood plain is coming along beautifully. The gator starter was repaired over the winter by DPW, and the volunteers now have enough equipment. The plan for this year is to continue improving the flood plain loop, do regular trail maintenance, improve the trail by the river, and put up signage, including tree ID tags. Two boardwalks were installed, and other boardwalk sections will be raised in the smaller flood areas. Craige said there are ways to add sections to the boardwalk piece by piece depending on how much funding the Environmental Commission can give for the project. There is an issue with poison ivy, which is flourishing in the Meadows and becoming more abundant and more toxic due to climate change. Phil donated the funds (\$109) for purchase of a battery-powered weed wacker.

Phil suggested the Meadows volunteers meet with the Artists Collective, who want to place more benches in the Meadows. Allan reported a large fish kill of bunker at the Meadows. He contacted the Raritan Riverkeeper, who attributed the cause to Vibrio bacteria and that storms and high tides pushed up river. Craige reported some volunteers want to remove the dead fish, but the weather this weekend will likely be too hot for that. Allan picked up one of the trail cameras after two weeks but has not yet looked at the footage.

- f) Website. Nicole made some changes so Allan can fill in the list of all the birds. The minutes are up, and the volunteers' names are acknowledged. Craige will provide us with names of new volunteers, so we can add them to the site.
- g) Removing Wood from Borough Property. Phil stated that wood that falls on streets or sidewalks can be removed, but brush and downed trees cannot be dragged from forested areas like the Meadows.
- h) Native Plant Sanctuary. Phil reported that wisteria needs to be removed from the site.
- i) In-Person Meetings. Phil said he and the mayor discussed the issue of returning to in-person meetings. The borough does not plan on doing this before the end of the summer.

6. New Business
 - a) Open Space Tax. We discussed the issue of the borough enacting an open space tax to maintain its open space areas. We already pay an open space tax to the county but haven't purchased any open space with them for a while. Mike questioned whether we can get money from the county open space tax to use in the Meadows. It is possible that the county money is only for the purchase of open space and not for its maintenance. Allan will research the requirements for a municipal open space tax. It may have to be put on the ballot as a public referendum.
 - b) 31 River Road. The developer agreed to do some improvements to the Native Plant Sanctuary parking lot and fence. We would like to know when this work will be done. Phil reported the developer has been using the Native Plant Sanctuary parking lot as a staging ground, and there is still heavy construction going on at the site.
 - c) Raritan Avenue Planting Days. Main Street held two planting days on Raritan Avenue this past week, in which Mike participated.
 - d) Dorchester Arms Apartments and Affordable Housing. Dorchester Arms is the apartment building at the intersection of Raritan Avenue and River Road. We discussed the theoretical idea leveling the Dorchester Arms building in order to connect the greenway path. To date, there has been no serious consideration of moving that building or property into the public sector.
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, July 7, 2021, at 8 PM on Zoom.