

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of November 3, 2021
Minutes

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

Guest: Craige Ambroch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 PM.
2. The minutes of the September 1, 2021, meeting and of the October 6, 2021, meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business
 - a) 238 Cleveland Avenue. Bruce Koch is doing a compliance review; the applicant cannot get more permits until his review is completed. Teri Jover is putting together a more complete checklist. The Planning Board will see the new checklist in a week or two. Adopting this checklist should prevent the types of problems we've had with this site. There is still the question of where the dust sample from the site came from because the reports the applicant submitted were not complete. The frame for one of the new houses on the site is up, including all the roofing. No foundation has been dug for the second house. All additional construction will be based on what the Borough Engineer, Borough Planner, and construction official decide. The borough planner has said that STAC will be involved in choosing what to plant at the site.
 - b) Middlesex Water Company. There was a reported exceeding of levels of PFOA/PFAS in some groundwater wells. Highland Park is not affected. Our water comes from the Delaware and Raritan Canal. Mike said we need to consider how we would handle a situation where our water is affected. One possibility is to tell people to use bottled water. For the towns that have increased levels of these chemicals, the water companies are trying to find better methods of filtration. Standards for PFOA are very low; even the levels in towns that exceed the standards are very miniscule. Phil noted borough officials meet monthly with representatives of Middlesex Water Company. He will get more information on what the borough would do if our water became contaminated with anything.
 - c) Borough Meeting of Board, Commission, and Committee Chairs. Allan and Mike took part in this recent meeting. There was a presentation showing the process municipal meetings should use. We are in compliance with all requirements. They also said meetings should last 60-90 minutes and discussed finance issues.
 - d) Meadows Update. The volunteers have completed the process of designing the repair of the boardwalk in the flood plain, which was inundated with seven feet of water. The new foundations are much larger, so they can better hold down the wooden structure. The wooden structure itself was not damaged, but the foundation needs to be re-built. Craige, Allan, and a DPW representative will go to Home Depot to order supplies, which will be delivered to DPW. The borough is trying to get FEMA funds to repair damage caused by Tropical Storm Ida. Craige and Allan gave the borough

administrator information on plans to repair the boardwalk to use in the borough's FEMA application. Additional Meadows goals are to scrape spotted lantern fly egg masses off trees. Birds of the thrush family have been observed eating spotted lantern flies.

- e) 2022 Environmental Commission Budget. Our budget for next year will be \$1,050, the same as it was for 2021. We will use it to pay our annual ANJEC dues and for Meadows equipment. We may get a new borough open space list done, in which case, we will need to print two copies. Commission members were asked to think about possible projects for next year. Karen suggested replanting the roof of the Environmental Education Center, but the borough's insurance won't let volunteers go on the roof. Therefore, DPW has to do the work. Phil asked Karen to put together a replanting plan. Karen recommended that at least one DPW worker get training in how to maintain plants.
- f) Artists' Collective Exhibit. The art is still at the Environmental Education Center. Phil said the Artists' Collective want to know whether they rotate between different exhibits there. This is not a problem as long as we are not using the Center.
- g) Roots for River. Of the 200 trees volunteers planted in the Meadows, around 10 were lost to Tropical Storm Ida. Over the next several weeks, the volunteers need to do an inventory of the specific number of trees lost. We are in compliance with the requirements of the grant, which include maintaining these trees for five years.
- h) Environmental Commission Website. The latest meeting minutes will be put up tomorrow.
- i) Electric Vehicle Charging Stations. The two stations at the Community Center are used very frequently. Phil said he wants to get more charging stations next year under the optional section of the state mandatory ordinance. Some funding may be available for this. We need to coordinate with Main Street and with the state Department of Transportation. Money might be available through the state program. If private businesses that do any work on their sites going forward, they will be required to install EV charging stations. Rite Aid and Stop and Shop will have to add two. They don't actually have to put in the stations, just build the infrastructure for them. Most businesses that put in the infrastructure do put the stations in. A lot of planning goes into this process.
- j) Trail Cameras. They last 3 to 4 months after being charged. Allan wants to get them out this Friday after charging them.
- k) Greenway Study. Highland Park just received a \$250,000 grant to conduct a new study. This may be federal funding that is distributed by the states. Phil has a copy of our 1995 feasibility study on a greenway that would connect Donaldson and Johnson Parks, which we should put up on our website. Edison just adopted a Green Acres plan. The borough will probably have the study done through our engineer and planner. Some portions of the proposed trail would be on the easement for the Middlesex County Utility Authority sewer trunk line. There are many moving parts, all of which will need to be organized. It is important that this project have input from the Environmental Commission and borough residents. The Commission should be part of a regular working group on the project.

6. New Business

- a) 2022 Environmental Commission Meetings. We will continue to meet the first Wednesday of every month except for October, which conflicts with a Jewish holiday, and August when there is no meeting. Our October 2022 meeting will be on the second Wednesday of the month, which is also STAC's meeting day, and we hope to have a joint meeting with them. Karen will ask STAC if they support this. We need to legally notice our meetings.
 - b) Leaf Blowers. We discussed the idea of establishing some restrictions on the use of leaf blowers, especially for lawn services. We would like them to switch to electric blowers. Other towns have passed such restrictions limiting their use to certain times of the day and year. The problem with gas-powered leaf blowers is not just noise pollution but also the spread of pollutants, pollen, dust, pesticides and herbicides everywhere and the blowing of soil into gutters. Maplewood tried to ban gas-powered leaf blowers several years ago but was sued over it. A criticism of leaf blower restrictions is that it targets commercial landscapers, who are mainly Hispanic. Phil said if the Commission wants to establish restrictions, he will recommend that the Council's Public Works Committee and Administration Committee consider this in January. Craige noted several towns have ordinances restricting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers without outlawing them. Phil recommended the Commission find 5-6 different ordinances enacted by NJ towns and make a recommendation to the Council. We will find out whether ANJEC has any sample ordinances. Laurel will raise the issue with the Board of Health and research ordinances enacted by other towns.
 - c) Stormwater Management. The borough website has a new page about stormwater that can be accessed from the main site. It was developed by the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership.
7. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:42 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, December 1, 2021, at 8 PM on Zoom.