

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of December 1, 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 8:02 PM.
2. The minutes of the November 3, 2021, meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans: None
5. Old Business:
 - a) 238 Cleveland Avenue. Bruce Koch wrote and sent a compliance document to the developer stating the LSRP has to write a complete report that includes all the required sub-reports before permits will be issued. The developer is completing work on the first house.
 - b) Middlesex Water Company. Phil reported that a meeting between borough officials and a representative of Middlesex Water Company was rescheduled for December. The reports of PFOA and PFAS in drinking water exceeded required limits for several Middlesex towns but not Highland Park. The borough did request Middlesex Water give us a more complete summary of this issue. We are also interested in finding out whether the company has contingency plans if the levels of these chemicals are exceeded in our water. Phil said that so far, there is no specific plan to deal with an exceedance of these substances. The company's contingency plan is to switch water sources. This is one reason the borough is looking at upgrading its connection on Woodbridge Avenue. This would give us an alternate water source, which may be a connection with New Jersey American Water.
 - c) Meadows Update. The volunteers have to go to Home Depot to purchase boardwalk supplies. A purchase order has been made; DPW now needs to come up with a date when one of their representatives can go to Home Depot. Craige reported that the volunteers will restore the boardwalk, which was shifted by Tropical Storm Ida, and it will be accessible and safe for the winter. They reached out to Mike at DPW because they will need assistance purchasing materials from Home Depot. Some space is needed in the DPW garage to store concrete. The volunteers are largely on hold for the winter though they are prepared to make emergency responses in the event trees fall over the trail.
 - d) Artists' Collective Art Show. The art is still at the Environmental Education Center. The Collective regularly rotates the art in and out. This works as long as the Commission continues to meet via Zoom. The Collective does not have the key to the building. Allan unlocks the door for them every Thursday.
 - e) Environmental Commission Budget. Our budget for 2022 will be \$1,050. Allan outlined our budget on an Excel spreadsheet. He put in a line item for an open space inventory. We now have a new system for designating blocks and lots.

- f) Website. The minutes on the website are up to date. Allan just uploaded information about observations of birds at the river and in Donaldson and Johnson Parks, including the fact that bald eagles were seen in Johnson Park.
- g) Trail Cameras. One of the cameras is up in the Meadows, and the other has a problem on which Allan is working. The current camera was put in last week. Allan has not yet retrieved the latest images.
- h) Leaf Blowers. Allan sent Commission members a Power Point presentation on leaf blowers he received several years ago. Laurel will share this with the Board of Health. The two cycle gasoline power leaf blowers are very bad in terms of noise and pollution. Princeton has just passed an ordinance defining the times when leaf blowers can be used to periods in the Spring and Fall. Princeton and Highland Park use the same law firm for ordinances. In Princeton, various organizations are willing to donate money to landscapers to replace gas-powered blowers with electric ones. We will interview some landscapers who remove tree leaves. After reviewing other municipalities' ordinances, gathering data on costs of electric blowers with lithium batteries, and gas powered leaf blowers, life times of gasoline powered leaf blowers, respective costs for gas powered and battery powered leaf blowers, and jobs, we will decide on a recommendation to the Borough Council. Another town conducted a pilot study limiting leaf blowers. We discussed several options, including a time period for landscapers to phase in use of battery-powered electric blowers. Karen noted that even electric blowers cause soil erosion.

We outlined two issues regarding leaf blowers. One is the question of whether they should be used at all. The other is the issue of their use encroaching on others' space, causing air and noise pollution. The Princeton ordinance also restricts the use of chainsaws and other loud equipment to certain days of the week and requires landscapers to register with the town. Registration could be free. Ethan recommended we focus on the environmental issues, such as air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and noise pollution. Craige noted there are riding tractors that are also leaf blowers, and these should be written into any ordinance we adopt. At our next meeting, Allan will have an outline on what needs to be done. We could establish a subcommittee to deal with this.

There is also the question as to whether an ordinance would apply to the borough, the county, DPW, and the Board of Education, all of which may need to use large equipment.

- i) Greenway Study. The borough received a \$250,000 grant from the state for this. The next step is for a consultant to prepare a report. Phil said no RFP has yet been issued. We can put our 1995 greenway study on our website. Phil has a copy, which he will scan at his home. He added it is uncertain whether the new grant addresses the issue of easement acquisition. We have not yet received a response from borough administrator Teri Jover regarding our questions about the greenway.
- j) Middlesex County Master Plan. The mayor, Teri Jover, and Allan received copies of the county open space plan, titled Middlesex County 2040. The document is 311 pages, and Allan has a link to it, which he will send to Commission members. An

advisory committee is needed to address the county parks. Frequent users of the parks notice many issues that the park staff appear to miss or prioritize,

- k) Zoom Issues. There was a Zoom bomb at the last Sustainable Highland Park meeting, which led the borough to change how it handles Zoom meetings. People who want to attend them now need to register in advance. They will then be sent a link to join the meeting for which they signed up.
 - l) Checklist for New Site Plan Applications. Teri Jover is creating a new checklist for new applicants.
6. New Business
- a) October 2022 Meeting Date. The Shade Tree Advisory Committee does not want to have a joint meeting with the Environmental Commission in October 2022 because October is their most active month. Due to the first Wednesday in October being a Jewish holiday, we decided to meet on our own on the second Wednesday in October, which will be October 12.
 - b) Borough Recycling. Jon questioned what happens to the borough's recycling. Phil said we have single system recycling. Items to be recycled go to a county facility, where they are sorted into items that are and are not recyclable. Mike asked whether we could send a representative to the county facility to observe the process. Phil will look into this. We could use such a visit as an educational outreach effort to inform people about what is and is not recyclable.
 - c) Replanting the Roof of the Environmental Education Center. Karen plans to put together a replanting plan for the Environmental Education Center roof. Phil does not know whether any plantings there are planned for the coming year. It would be ideal to have a list of plants appropriate for that site that do not need constant care and cutting.
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, January 5, 2022, on Zoom.