

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of January 5, 2022
Minutes

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

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:06 PM.
2. The minutes of the December 1, 2021, meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a bill from ANJEC for our 2022 dues. The fee is \$375 for seven full members.
4. Site Plans
 - a) 141 Riverview Avenue, Block 2505, Lot 13, Z-2021-02
The applicant is seeking a variance to keep chicken coops in their front yard. It's a corner house, so they essentially have two front yards. They have several chicken coops on wheels that can be moved around, but the coops are always kept in the same location. According to zoning law, these structures cannot be placed on front yards and must be moved to the backyard. However, the backyard has a swale, doesn't get any sun, and is bad for the chickens. The owner says the property is considered part of an endangered plant and animal zone, and his attorney says this is sufficient for the borough to grant him a variance. The application contains 18-20 reasons the variance should be given, including mention of the ERI. The owners have signs on site saying they have fresh eggs for sale, and they also give people eggs for free. This raises the question of whether they are licensed to distribute food.

Comments: The location drains directly into the aquifer, meaning there is an environmental impact in terms of waste and smell. We are not against raising chickens, but it should be done in the backyard.

- b) 37 Cedar Avenue
Foxx and Foxx Development, LLC
Block 8, Lot 29
Z-2021-01
There are currently nine garages on this property, with the rest of the site being gravel. The applicant is seeking a variance because the lot size is less than the minimum requirement of 5,000 square feet, and the setbacks are not in compliance. They propose to tear down the garages and build a single-family home. It was thought that this application would require pre-wiring for an electric charging station. However, the DCA ordinance exempts single-family homes.

Comments: The developer should confirm there is no petroleum contamination at the site from prior vehicle maintenance.

5. Old Business

- a) Appointments. We noted that Ethan Schoolman was reappointed to the Environmental Commission, and Craige Ambroch was appointed as a regular member.
- b) Purchase Order for Meadows Equipment. Craige will contact Mike at DPW to see how he wants to approach the purchase order for Meadows equipment. Phil will also discuss this with Mike. The borough has an account at Home Depot.
- c) Charging Stations Ordinance/HP Addition. The DCA version of the ordinance deals mostly with businesses. The mandatory statute, which is now part of the borough's uniform construction code, requires businesses doing renovations make spaces for electric vehicle charging stations along public streets. It also includes a list of optional recommendations the borough needs to go through to decide which ones to implement on Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. The cost of putting the wiring in on a property ranges from \$600-\$800.
- d) 238 Cleveland Avenue. Borough engineer Bruce Koch sent the compliance document to the developer noting they cannot move further forward until they submit one large integrated report with all the required attachments. So far, they haven't responded. Several areas on the property have still not been tested. Work continues on the first house. At the next Planning Board meeting, Allan will discuss this with Bruce. We noted Teri Jover is creating a separate checklist for demolitions.
- e) Middlesex Water Company. The scheduled December meeting between company representatives and borough officials was canceled due to Covid. This was a normal meeting at which the borough gets updates on water quality assessment and improvements. Discussion of a meter replacement project was postponed to January. We also noted that New Jersey American Water, which is not our provider, is asking all its customers to reduce the amount of water they are using. We are uncertain as to the reason for this, but it could be a capacity issue.
- f) Light Pollution. Some of the companies on Cleveland Avenue have put up lights that shine far beyond their property lines and are blinding to people driving down the road. These are not according to code. Phil recommended the Commission write a letter to the borough administrator and code enforcement officer, noting we have received numerous complaints about these lights. Allan will draft the letter. We also noted many houses on Harrison Avenue have put in LEDs, and these produce too much light for the properties. To date, no one has explored regulating LEDs.
- g) Meadows Update. The volunteers are monitoring tree falls at least once per week.
- h) Leaf Blowers. The Board of Health also wants to pursue an ordinance restricting the use of leaf blowers to certain days and times of day. Allan has copies of around 12 different ordinances adopted elsewhere and generated a list of landscapers in town but has not yet contacted them.
- i) Earth Day. Sustainable Highland Park plans to hold a public Earth Day event on Sunday, May 1, subject to borough approval because of COVID-19. Allan sent a message to Bill Bonner of the Artists Collective noting the art might have to be removed from the Environmental Education Center for this event.
- j) Planning Board Membership Changes. There has been some major turnover on the Planning Board. Several people resigned, and two new people were appointed. Rebecca Hand is the new chair.
- k) Website. The November 2021 minutes have now been put up on the site.

- l) Trail Cameras. Allan diagnosed a problem one of them was having and will put it back in the Meadows.
 - m) Middlesex County Master Plan. Craige sent Commission members a link to the county's proposed Master Plan. The plan rated open space in each municipality. Highland Park got a low rating, yet the plan specifies that New Brunswick is in need of open space. This is likely because New Brunswick still has open space parcels that can be bought. The open spaces left in Highland Park are too small.
 - n) Last summer, the county planned to close the zoo in Johnson Park, but subsequently decided to bring in experts to evaluate whether to close it. To date, these experts have not made any recommendations.
 - o) Jon noted the plan also talks about extending off-road biking and walkways along the greenway. One option is to connect to the tow path, which was damaged by Tropical Storm Ida.
 - p) Greenway Study. Phil hopes this project can move forward this year.
6. New Business: None
7. The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, February 2, at 8 PM on Zoom.