

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of March 2, 2022
Minutes

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

Guest: Mark Lesko

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 PM.
2. The minutes of the February 2, 2022, meeting were approved.
3. Correspondence: None
4. Site Plans

a) JSM at Highland Park, LLC

We received a site plan application from JSM for the Buck Woods property, proposing to build 75 apartment units. All will be rentals, and 20 percent will be affordable units.

Several reports are attached, including traffic study, steep slopes, sanitary sewer, and stormwater management. The applicant wants to remove some more trees but provides no plan indicating how many or from where. The development will have EV charging stations in the basement. Two years ago, the applicant did an EIS in which they mentioned that some domestic waste contamination was found at the site. The Environmental Commission wants to know what they found and have the applicant's LSRP do a presentation to the Planning Board. A decision on whether this application is complete has not yet been made. The Planning Board is likely to hear it in April or May.

The applicant is requesting several waivers, including one for disturbing steep slopes, one for a 76-square-foot sign as opposed to the ordinance maximum of 42 square feet, and one for a buffer of 8 feet to the property boundary as opposed to the required 20 feet.

The site's traffic study concludes that 29 cars would be going in and out of the development twice a day and that this will not have an impact on traffic in this part of the borough. The plan provides parking for 161 cars, mostly in the basement.

While the applicant responded to comments by various boards, they ignored the Environmental Commission request asking them to provide the protocols and reports on soil sampling and test results to substantiate the claim in the EIS that only domestic waste was found.

Phil noted that litigation related to environmental issues on this property remains ongoing.

The Commission is most interested in learning about the findings from the test pits.

Phil reported there is evidence of some long-term drainage of low levels of benzene in groundwater from this site but most of the contamination is construction waste, such as creosote beams and concrete.

The site will have a paved surface surrounding the building so firetrucks can enter and exit.

The landscape report contains several invasive species as well as some natives. STAC will review it. It calls for planting only 23 deciduous trees. We noted replacement trees or money paid into the tree fund should be based on whatever ordinance was in place when the trees on the site were removed.

Allan will submit Environmental Commission comments in response to the application.

5. Old Business

- a) Meadows Update. The purchase order has been submitted, and the equipment, purchased from Home Depot, has been delivered. Funding came from our 2021 budget. Craige reported no trees have come down due to wind. The volunteers now have the materials to build the foundation for the large boardwalk. Weather needs to be dry for the work to start. There are one-year, five-year, and 10-year plans, which the volunteers plan to revisit.
- b) 238 Cleveland Avenue. There is a realtor sign on the site and a dumpster in the driveway. Landscaping work has not yet begun. There have been three LSRP reports, all of which are unsatisfactory. The latest one is 1,019 pages. It has conflicting information about whether the site was tested with ground penetrating radar. Some of the dates in the report are wrong.
- c) Checklist for Demolition. Teri is working on changes to this and will get back to us about it in mid-March.
- d) Lead in Drinking Water. The borough does yearly monitoring of its 47 known lead lines, conducts testing every year, and reports the results to the DEP. There haven't been any abnormalities, and there is no detectable lead in our water (> 1 part per billion, Middlesex Water). The DEP recently changed its policy on testing and replacement of lead lines and is now requiring replacement of all lead lines within 10 years. The borough is looking at possible funding sources to replace the lead lines and testing for possible replacements.
- e) Light Pollution. There is a problem with light pollution from industrial facilities on Cleveland Avenue. Scott Brescher of Code Enforcement sent letters to all businesses on that street that have light spilling over their property lines informing them they need to fix this problem.
- f) Leaf Blowers. There are concerns among Council members that electric leaf blowers are too expensive and therefore should not be mandated. Other towns have ordinances limiting use of leaf blowers to certain days or times of day. We will look into this option.

- g) Earth Day. Sustainable Highland Park's Earth Day event will be held on North Third Avenue, not at the Environmental Education Center, on Sunday, May 1. This is because it is being merged with the Street Fair.
- h) Artists' Collective. Meetings will not be held at the Environmental Education Center until June, so the Artists' Collective can continue to display their art there. Phil reported they asked if we could set up a time for them to remove the art that is currently there and replace it with new art sometime in April.
- i) Website. The Commission's most recent minutes are up. Allan noted in the blog section that he participated in the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, in which 41 eagles were observed.
- j) Trail Cameras. Allan has many pictures of animals other than deer in the Meadows.
- k) Greenway Study. Teri is scanning the study and will integrate it into a grant application for \$250,000 to be used over three years to plan access to the greenway. This is a planning grant and is not for acquisition of riparian rights or easements.
- l) Grants. ANJEC is making grants available this year, and the applications are due in May. We need to propose something unique that can be done in one year. The borough is also funding its Park Partners program again and will roll out the program at the end of March. Presentations will be done online. Submissions will be on a rolling basis. An online vote will be held in April.

6. New Business

- a) April 24 Cleanup. Mark reported that Sustainable Highland Park is holding a cleanup of the trail between South Adelaide Avenue and the river and of Valley Place Ravine on Sunday, April 24 from 10 AM-12 PM. SHP chair Tina Weishaus is informing the police about this.
- b) ANJEC Native Plants NJ Conference. Craig attended ANJEC's Native Plants NJ Conference and reported that discussion centered on creating parks in communities that are highly developed. Towns are buying up properties that are falling apart, tearing down buildings on these, and creating community gardens. This is something we could do in Highland Park. Many properties in town are double lots; one suggestion raised is to give tax breaks to the owners in exchange for them creating parks instead of buildings on one of the lots. Mark noted that SHP is running Everyone's Farm, a community garden project. They are also working on rain gardens, butterfly gardens, and planting deer-resistant plants and plan to hold a workshop on building one's own rain garden. Craig also plans to attend ANJEC's Environmental Commissioners' course.

7. The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, April 6, 2022, at 8 PM on Zoom.