

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of October 12, 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 8:01 PM.
2. The minutes of the September 7, 2022, meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Correspondence
 - a) We received a notification that Middlesex County has applied to NJDEP for a permit to do work in Johnson Park. The project involves replacing a downstream section of the culvert and replacing the six-foot-wide pedestrian bridge near L' Ambiance Court with one that is eight feet wide. The complete application package is available in the Borough Clerk's office.
4. Site Plans: None
5. Climate Action Plan. NJDEP is encouraging municipalities to come up with their own climate action plans. They are asking municipalities to do assessments of local greenhouse gas emissions and set up initiatives to reduce emissions. Some towns measured local hot spots during the summer. The plan also asks towns to consider how they will develop more sustainability and resiliency. The borough is circulating this request to the Environmental Commission, Sustainable Highland Park, and DPW to find out if we have sufficient volunteers and resources to do this.
6. The Meadow Volunteers has already instituted an equipment replacement plan to replace equipment being retired with equipment that runs on lithium batteries. The Borough has two hybrid police vehicles and two EVs for local inspectors.

Phil noted that some parts of the state's request are highly engineering-based, and it will be difficult for the borough to fund them, as this request does not come with grant money. We need to focus on what we can do, including recommendations to increase tree cover and preserve carbon sinks. We can also incorporate our new stormwater management plan into this. Rain gardens may need to be re-engineered, as some of the trees in the ones in town have died. Phil will present the Commission's recommendations to DPW.

7. Old Business
 - a) ANJEC Municipal Leadership Award. After being nominated by the Commission, Phil was awarded the ANJEC Municipal Leadership Award for his actions as an elected official on behalf of environmental actions. He thanked the Commission for the nomination, and we congratulated him on the award.
 - b) Steve Barnes. We noted Steve is in rehab for medical issues and doing well in his recovery. He will return when we conduct in-person meetings or possibly take part in Zoom meetings with another Commission member.

- c) 130-134 Raritan Avenue—Tract B. The applicant did not go through the appropriate redevelopment process and will therefore have to resubmit the application, which has been deemed incomplete.
- d) RFP for Proposed Greenway. The borough's proposal request breaks the greenway up into multiple parts. According to Borough Administrator Teri Jover, the target date for putting a proposal together is March. We have a grant for this. The final document can be shared with the county. When completed, the proposal will lay out the impediments to completing the greenway and contain a map showing what needs to be done. Phil noted this is a request for landscape architects to lay out plans. NJDEP, NJDOT, the county, the state, and the borough will need to be involved. The major impediment is how to get over the bridge and through the Dorchester Apartments parking lot. This greenway does not go into the Meadows. Phil will suggest having an Environmental Commission delegate on the RFP review committee.
- e) 2023 Environmental Commission Meeting Calendar. We will continue to meet on the first Wednesday of every month. Due to Passover, we will hold our April meeting on March 29, which is four weeks after the March meeting.
- f) Meadows Update. Phil donated a lithium battery powered mower, for which we thanked him. The DPW will replace machines with rechargeable ones. Craige priced out the type of wood we can purchase for the boardwalks. We will get a specific price list from Home Depot for a spring project. Karen requested we look into purchasing from Lowe's instead. Phil recommended that while the borough currently has an account with Home Depot, that can be changed for economic reasons, if Lowe's offers lower prices. Allan will start a purchase order with Home Depot meanwhile to lock up our funding for the year.
- g) Rutgers did a tick survey in the Meadows and found that the ticks present are mostly species that do not carry specific pathogens. Compared to other areas in the county, the Meadows are not heavily infested with ticks.
- h) Sustainable Jersey Nature Conservancy Tree Survey. Allan and Craige conducted this survey and found that only about 10 trees planted this year have died due to drought.
- i) Demolition Checklist. Teri is working on this with Scott. They agree on the steps that will happen when a demolition occurs.
- j) Path through Barwood Marsh. The Commission has seen a proposed path through the marsh area, but it is not in the plan, as this has yet to be negotiated with the property owner. The path will fit into the greenway project, so the Commission and the Planning Board will push to make sure it happens. Allan noted that going through the marsh will be a major expense that requires permits.
- k) ANJEC Congress. Allan plans to attend the in-person portion and will also listen to the recorded sessions.
- l) Zoom vs. In-Person Meetings. The borough has authorized boards, commissions, and committees to resume in-person meetings starting November 1. Our meetings through the end of the year are scheduled to be on Zoom. We discussed the possibility of doing hybrid meetings. These would have to be done from Borough Hall, as the Environmental Education Center does not have Internet access. Hybrid meetings would work best if those who want to attend in person bring their laptops. We decided to continue meeting on Zoom through all of 2023. People can go to Borough Hall to peruse extensive site plans.

- m) Budget. Craige will spend the rest of our 2022 money on Meadows equipment. We need to prepare a budget for 2023 and submit it to Teri.
- n) Website. Allan put up a note that the July meeting had no quorum, so no action was taken. The September minutes are now up.
- o) Trail Cameras. Nothing new.
- p) Leaf Blowers. Sustainable Highland Park and the Board of Health want to meet with Phil about what he thinks is possible in terms of limiting the use of leaf blowers. Jon contacted Lois Kraus of Westfield, who is part of a statewide organization focusing mostly on leaf blowers. She has a sample ordinance we can utilize and also came up with recommendations that fit with the state's Climate Action Plan request. Jon will send Laurel these suggestions to present to the Board of Health.
- q) PSE&G Donations. PSE&G has donated a large supply of energy efficient light bulbs, surge protectors, and shower heads to the borough for distribution to residents.

8. New Business

- a) Upcoming Environmental Cleanups. Mark noted that the Highland Park Ecology and Environmental Group has a list of upcoming cleanups in town. The next one will take place this coming Sunday in Johnson Park.
- b) PSE&G is trimming trees near power lines. They have been instructed to remove anything within 10 feet of a power line but have cut down some trees beyond 10 feet and trimmed others significantly.

9. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:42 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, November 2, at 8 PM on Zoom.