

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of January 4, 2023
Minutes

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

Guests: Lois Lebbing, Mark Lesko

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:02 PM.
2. The minutes of the December 7, 2022, meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Site Plans: None
4. Correspondence: None
5. New Council Liaison. Phil reported that once a new mayor is appointed, Councilman Matt Hersh is likely to become our Council liaison though this is not definite.
6. Question from the Public. Borough resident Lois Lebbing asked us three questions. These are: does the borough have a list of invasive plants; who in town collects dead birds, and whether anyone is keeping track of coyote sightings.

Karen noted that the Shade Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) several years ago put out information about invasive bamboo. This information is still on the borough website. STAC also has a list of invasive plants for this area. There is a bill in the state legislature that would ban the sale of invasive plants by nurseries. Karen advised Lois to call the NJ Audubon Society to find out if anyone picks up dead birds to test them for diseases, such as Avian Flu. While coyote sightings have been reported in town, we don't know whether anyone is keeping records of them.

7. Old Business

- a) Meadows Update. Craig reported there are around six invasive species in the Meadows. The volunteers plan to construct the foundation of the boardwalk this winter. The Meadows area is currently open to the public. Rutgers is holding its Scarlet Day of Service on March 25, and we can apply online for volunteers but need a plan for work we want them to do. Phil recommended we write to Borough Administrator Teri Jover telling her the Commission will be sponsoring this event and will have the volunteers do work in the Meadows. We will also copy Matt Hersh on the request. Craig will fill out the online application.
- b) Website. The minutes of the Commission's November 2022 meeting have been posted. Allan will put up a short blog entry on the presence of peregrine falcons in Johnson Park within the next few days.
- c) Meadows Cleanup Protocol. Mark reported that Sustainable Highland Park (SHP) agreed to do two cleanups in town per month; the dates have already been set. The first will be an in-town cleanup on January 7. Phil recommended he send the schedule to Teri Jover and to our council liaison, so the dates can be put on DPW's agenda. While the cleanups will start in the downtown, the goal is to expand them to the parks and the woods along the river bank when the weather gets warmer. We noted that there is a separate layer of government approval needed for cleanups at county owned sites. We need to publicize these cleanups as much as possible; Phil recommended we send the cleanup dates to Harry Glazer to put on the borough website and Facebook group. Mark also puts cleanup notices on his own website. Since he won the Park

Partners grant, he has cleanup supplies, including gloves and bags. Karen recommended we have volunteers clean up the rain gardens in town.

d) Trail Cameras. No new information until February.

e) Leaf Blowers. We will discuss this at our next meeting once Laurel finds out where the Board of Health stands on this topic.

f) Feasibility Study for Walking Path Along the River. The borough received proposals from four different companies for the study and is going with ETM Associates, which is located in Highland Park and specializes in public space design. We were awarded a grant of \$250,000, and the company is charging us \$100,000. Phil will find out whether the completed study has been posted on the borough website and will also circulate it to Commission members.

8. New Business

a) Environmental Education Center. The cultural group RAICES sent a proposal to the borough requesting use of the center for their events. To facilitate this, they will clean it up. The borough will retain control of the site and needs to be made aware of any public or private events happening there. Therefore, the borough has proposed an operating agreement, not a lease or a sale, with RAICES. The center will continue to be named the Eugene Young Environmental Education Center. The building sign needs to be put back up and the site cleaned up. We may want to replace the current blue sign with one that is more rustic.

b) Light Pollution. Residents are putting up LED lights that are too bright and go past the borders of their properties. This is harmful to insects and birds. We discussed the option of an ordinance establishing an upper limit on outdoor light brightness. The borough already has an ordinance, but it may need to be revised due to new technologies. Karen noted lights should shine downward and that yellow light is much healthier for birds and plants than white light is. Phil suggested the Commission refer this issue to the Borough Council's Public Works Committee.

c) Sustainable Jersey Certification. Allan will work on this. There are sections in the certification application about the Environmental Commission. Mark pointed out there is a separate Sustainable Schools designation that we might want to encourage the school district to pursue.

d) State Bill Prohibiting the Sale of Invasive Species. This bill is currently before the state Assembly and Senate. Its purpose is to stop nurseries from selling invasive plants and educate the public about how invasives are harmful to the environment. Allan will write up a letter from the Commission to the Borough Council requesting the Council pass a resolution supporting the state bill. Craige will send everyone a link on the bill's progress. If the borough adopts such a resolution, it could also be sent to the state Agriculture and Food Security Committee in addition to the legislature.

e) Climate Action Plan. The Borough Council referred this to DPW and to the borough administrator for discussion in 2023. It will be on DPW's agenda. We need to look at downtown heat sink temperatures during the summer. Volunteers can do this around town. Phil will find out if Climate Action Plans are supposed to do this survey once or every year.

9. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:16 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, at 8 PM on Zoom.