

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of March 29, 2023 (April 2023 Meeting)
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Laurel Kornfeld, Ethan Schoolman, Karen Swaine, Allan Williams, Council liaison Matt Hersh

Guest: Mark Lesko, Craige Ambroch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:06 PM.
2. The minutes of the March 1, 2023 meeting were approved with one correction: The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 PM.
3. We formally welcomed Matt Hersh as our new Council liaison.
4. Site Plans: None
5. Correspondence: None
6. Old Business
 - a) Buck Woods. On March 14, there was a meeting of the Borough Planner, the Planning Board chair, and JSM to address reduction of the number of variances required and to discuss litigation issues. The discussion over remediation will not be done by the Planning Board given the ongoing litigation between JSM and the Borough. Successful remediation will be a condition of site plan approval. The application, now considered complete, will come before the Planning Board in either April or May. The approval is good for five years.
 - b) Meadows Update. Seven Rutgers students showed up on Saturday in the rain for the Rutgers Day of Service. They clipped invasives and lined the trail with logs. Craige and Allan ordered the next set of materials to build the 20-foot-long boardwalk. This is a donation from our former Council liaison Philip George, so we will put a commemorative nameplate there when the work is completed. Allan is working on an ANJEC grant application for the second observation deck and a replacement for the boardwalk near the entrance to Meadows Trail. Jennifer Santiago is working on a resolution supporting the grant application, which will be submitted before the April 17 deadline. The trail crew will start working in two or three weeks with the goal of doing a spring walk through open to the public before the trees leaf out.
 - c) The Borough Council is interested in asking the county to purchase two lots on Skyview Terrace for open space. The borough administrator spoke to property owner James Polos about the Barwood marsh, which has been added to his lot on Skyview Terrace. Polos is willing to transfer ownership of this area to the county if the county is willing to purchase it along with the two other lots, which are currently zoned for single-family homes. The subdivision of the site was approved before the pandemic. Matt will obtain a map of this area from Jennifer. Only the third of the three lots is marsh. Karen noted the marsh could contain a trail or boardwalk. Matt Hersh noted this would be the connector trail.
 - d) Earth Day Participation. The Earth Day event at the Street Fair on Sunday, May 7, will be located on North 3rd Avenue between Raritan Avenue and Dennison Street. Sustainable Highland Park is coordinating this. We could incorporate the Environmental Commission into this, but we need to let them know if we want a table. The Board of Health will also be there demonstrating electric-powered leaf blowers. Mark will have his own table under SHP. Electric

vehicles will block off the Dennison end. In the event of rain, the Community Center will be the back-up site for the Earth Day events and displays. If we want a table, we should email Tina Weishaus of SHP.

e) Invasive Plants. We discussed proposing a resolution supporting bills in the state Senate and Assembly (S22186 and A3677) prohibiting nurseries from selling certain invasive plants. Matt noted our Assemblyperson Sterley Stanley sponsored this bill and recommended we write up a resolution, share it with the Council's Public Works Committee, and ask the Borough Council to adopt it. We are interested in finding out whether other groups also support this legislation. Karen will ask the Native Plant Society about it. Craige noted there have been some readings of the bill in front of the state Senate and will send a copy of the bills to Commission members.

f) Website. Our February 2023 minutes are up. Allan wrote a short blog entry about invasive plants along with a PDF that lists them. He also wrote a blog entry about the Rutgers volunteers who worked at the Meadows last Saturday.

g) Trail Cameras. Allan has not yet gotten them up and running.

h) Leaf Blowers. Jon wants to attend a Board of Health meeting to discuss a possible ordinance regulating the use of leaf blowers. He recommended the Environmental Commission and Board of Health partner in adopting a statement on the impacts of gas-powered leaf blowers. He plans to attend a Board of Health meeting in May and provide information on this topic from ANJEC to create a flier on the hazards of gas-powered leaf blowers. Craige can bring a battery-powered weed-wacker and lawn mower to the Earth Day event. There is a question of how these batteries can be recycled, as well as labor and mining practices that go into producing them. We discussed producing a separate flier on lawn care, alternatives to lawns, and measures for cost-effective, environmentally healthy yards.

i) ANJEC Grant. The grant requires a description of the work, a budget, and a letter of support from the borough administrator. We are requesting \$1,050.

j) Rezoning of Solar Farm Area and Parts of the Meadows. The Solar Farm is currently zoned residential. Parts of the Meadows area are zoned residential, The Solar Farm and some areas by the Southside Bicycle path should to be re-zoned Sustainable Resources. Parts of the Meadows area should be re-zoned Conservation. The majority of the Meadows is zoned Conservation. Matt said the first step toward doing this is discussing it with the zoning officer and noted the solar farm should be zoned Sustainable Resources. The borough needs to investigate what has to be done for rezoning, as this is not clear. Matt will discuss this with Teri Jover and then communicate it to us.

7. New Business

a) Recycling. There is a lot of misinformation on this subject, Matt is looking into doing an educational workshop about recycling. One idea is to sponsor a trip to the recycling center so people can see where their recycled items go and how they are recycled. When we visit, we should take a lot of pictures for publicity.

b) Food Waste. ANJEC has an educational program about food waste. Some towns collect food waste for composting. All of our waste goes to the county. If we adopt composting, that would also go to the county. Mark reported that SHP looked into dry composting and found it isn't feasible. Backyard composting could save the borough money and reduce garbage waste. The borough would have to obtain permits from DEP to set up a composting facility. One option is to get grants to fund composting education and distribution of compost bins. Since composting would be more effective at the state level, we should raise the issue with our state legislators. We noted that Sterley Stanley cares about this issue and may be willing to work on it.

c) Thomas Edison Park. Mark noted there is a proposal to convert the county Thomas Edison State Park into recreational fields. The park is located off of Mill Road adjacent to Middlesex County College. The comment period runs through April 12. We should look into this further.

8. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:25 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, May 3, 2023, at 8 PM on Zoom.