

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of July 5, 2023
Minutes

Present: Michael Rosenberg, Jonathan Abrahams, Laurel Kornfeld, Mark Lesko, Karen Swaine,
Council liaison Matt Hersh

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 PM.
2. The minutes of the June 7, 2023, meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Site Plans: None
4. Correspondence: None
5. Old Business
 - a) Meadows Update. The volunteers have been doing maintenance and working on the boardwalk.
 - b) Skyview Terrace. A request to consider purchasing these two lots for open space was made to the county, which plans to survey them and do a cost appraisal. The conservation easement runs through the Polos yard, so that property cannot be included. We are questioning whether a trail can be constructed through the easement. Matt will check with Teri for updates on this.
 - c) Website. The site is up to date, and all minutes are posted. We need to think about new article topics, such as information about the cleanups happening around town. Mark is working on a grant report for the Park Partners grant he received. He can send this to us for placement on the website.
 - d) Spotted Lantern Flies. Not many have been seen around town, so we can take this off the agenda. Matt noted that Assemblyman Sterley Stanley is co-sponsoring legislation to establish a \$5 million Department of Agriculture grant program that will give municipalities money to control the spotted lantern fly population.
 - e) Trail Cameras. Nothing new.
 - f) Leaf Blowers. Mark is setting up a meeting with the Edison Environmental Commission, which wants to conduct a public demonstration on the use of battery-powered leaf blowers.
 - g) Environmental Education Center Status. RAICES is now the steward of the building. A calendar listing who is using the building and when will be established. The scheduling goes through Teri. RAICES' stewardship does not cover the bee hives. Both STAC and the Commission have supplies in the storage room. We need to take a look at what is there.
 - h) Budget. We spent money on ANJEC annual dues and added Matt to our list for receiving ANJEC reports. Matt will look into the option of the borough paying our ANJEC dues rather than the Commission doing it with money from our budget. We will spend the rest of our money for this year on trail maintenance supplies.
 - i) ANJEC Grant. We were supposed to receive a check for \$750 last week. This is for specific projects in the Meadows. Matt will look into this. We will receive another check for \$300 after the final grant report is submitted next year.

j) Trip to MCUA Recycling Center. Matt discussed this with Mike at DPW. The county recycling center is not visitor friendly, and Matt needs to find out why. The purpose of this visit is to track the pathway on which our recyclables go. Matt will work on setting up dates for the trip.

k) Rezoning of Meadows and Solar Farm. The Borough Council and administrator are talking about making several zoning changes to these sites in the fall. Matt will follow up with Teri on this. The Commission could also send Teri a letter supporting the changes.

l) Riverfront Greenway. Matt reported some survey work is being done to assess where the relevant properties are and to outline possible problems. The first step was hiring the company to perform the study. So far, they have done some preliminary work.

m) Solar Panels at the Environmental Education Center. Nothing new. We could have RAICES explore how to move forward on this. The structure for the panels needs to be fixed. We could ask the Arts Commission to consider putting up art there. Matt will email RAICES and ask what we can do together to put the panels up.

n) Environmental Education Center Roof. Karen recommended planting native wildflowers on the roof and offered to teach and supervise volunteers to do this, but citizens are not allowed on the roof for insurance purposes. We could train a few people and give them approval to go there to plant wildflowers instead of the weeds that are there now. The only maintenance DPW does is weeding. We should train people in horticulture, including how to plant, pull weeds, and avoid pulling out native plants. Karen noted the borough has an arborist who determines which trees to plant on Woodbridge Avenue. This person could train borough staff to work on the roof.

o) EV Charging at the Community Center. We don't have statistics on how much the charging stations at the Community Center are used, but we know borough vehicles use them. The borough is looking into a grant program to pay for more charging stations in the downtown and in the parks. The Environmental Commission should look into current charging station requirements for new developments. This would have to be required by the Planning Board. Charging stations could also be installed at local gas stations, schools, and convenience stores like Quick Check. All municipal parking lots should have them. Owners of privately owned properties need to be directed to state funding sources for them.

p) Thomas Edison County Park. We can take this off of our agenda.

q) Donaldson Park Construction. The construction is in progress. The county is rebuilding the tennis courts and adding pickleball courts. They are also putting in new basketball courts. All courts are being completely resurfaced. Matt will ask the county about the materials being used for the resurfacing and their ability to withstand flooding. Jon noted there is a controversy over the noise generated by people playing pickleball.

6. New Business

a) March Against Fossil Fuels. There is a national march against fossil fuel use on September 17 in New York City advocating a complete moratorium on new fossil fuel projects. Many groups are involved in planning it. The date was chosen to coincide with the UN climate summit starting on September 18.

b) Possible Art Exhibit at the Environmental Education Center. We received an email from a Rutgers graduate art student inquiring about possible art exhibits in the Environmental Education Center. Jon will forward this request to Matt.

7. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:16 PM. The Commission will not meet in August. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, September 6, 2023, at 8 PM on Zoom.