

Highland Park Environmental Commission
Meeting of December 6, 2023
Minutes

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

Guest: Craige Ambroch

1. The meeting was called to order at 8:03 PM.
2. The minutes of the November 1, 2023, meeting were approved with minor corrections.
3. Site Plans: None
4. Correspondence: None
5. Old Business
 - a) Meadows Update. The Meadows volunteer crew completed the first half of the grant. They replaced the old boards on the first boardwalk and hope to construct the new observation deck over the winter. Councilperson Philip George purchased a lithium powered lawnmower for the Meadows Trail Crew.
 - b) Skyview Terrace/Open Space. Allan spoke with Teri Jover about this. There were surveys of the area done, but the county has not responded on whether it is interested in purchasing these properties.
 - c) Greenway Meeting. ETM Associates, the consulting firm hired by the borough to prepare a greenway feasibility study, will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, December 13 at 6:30 PM in the Community Center to present their concept plan. This plan includes a boardwalk adjacent to the wetlands area.
 - d) Website. The minutes of the Commission's October meeting are now up on the site. We discussed putting the digital copy of the greenway presentation on our website. The report will be released several weeks after the meeting.
 - e) Trail Cameras. Nothing new.
 - f) Leaf Blower Ordinance. Mark and Jon attended the regional meeting of the group known as the Middlesex Initiative for Zero Emission Landscape Alternatives. They will do a demonstration of electric lawn equipment in the spring. The group is in touch with a Princeton landscaper who converted to all electric equipment and reported that it doesn't cost him any more money than gas-powered equipment. He said that within three years, landscapers can turn over all their equipment. They can share batteries between individual items. We can use this as a talking point in public outreach. Beth Stephens, the Board of Health representative to this group, wants to push for a Highland Park ordinance limiting the times of day and year for the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. Matt spoke with Tina Weishaus of Sustainable Highland Park about enacting an ordinance and said the Council's Public Works Committee supports it. We could ask the Borough Council to seek support at the state level for transitioning to electric lawn equipment. The group will next meet in early January.
 - g) ANJEC Grant. Craige provided Allan with pictures of work done in the Meadows. These will be put together and submitted with the final grant report in June.
 - h) Rezoning of the Meadows and Solar Farm. Nothing new. Matt will follow up on this.

- i) Recycling Center Trip. Allan will write up a blog entry and add pictures to be placed on the borough website and on our Facebook page. Matt said we could work with Harry Glazer on getting this entry into the borough's quarterly newsletter.
 - j) Healthy Communities Planning Report. This report (https://www.nj.gov/health/hcpnj/documents/county-reports/HCPNJ_fullreports/MIDDLESEX_HIGHLAND%20PARK%20BORO.pdf) was put out by the state Department of Health in conjunction with the CDC and NJ DEP. Craige noted that the report covers many topics related to the environment. A section titled Resilient New Jersey has a Local Planning for Climate Change Toolkit with links to additional information. We could develop a team to discuss this. The report also has an open space section with maps of open space in Highland Park. Those open spaces are all along the river. Much of the borough is not within one-quarter of a mile from an open space area. Towns can become certified by the state for urban and community forests; there is a brochure that provides information on this.
 - k) Community Solar. Matt noted this is a state program that provides solar energy into the grid. The goal of the initiative is to give lower income residents the opportunity to participate in using solar energy. We can aggregate solar energy town wide. The borough will install solar panels on municipal buildings. The state still has to approve Highland Park's eligibility into the program.
 - l) 2024 Environmental Commission Budget. We submitted a request for \$1,075, the same amount we received in 2023. Matt suggested we put together a proposal for equipment needs.
 - m) 2024 Meeting Dates. We will continue to meet on Zoom the first Wednesday of every month at 8 PM with the exception of October due to a Jewish holiday. Because there are not enough borough Zoom slots to hold the October meeting on the 9th, the second Wednesday of the month, we will hold our October meeting on Wednesday, September 25.
6. New Business
- a) Gabrielle Estates. One condition of approval for the site plan was that the applicant provide two reports to the Environmental Commission. They sent these on a USB stick to Borough Hall, but it wasn't accepted, so they sent the USB stick to Allan. The reports specify the contaminants, concentrations, and locations in Buck Woods and how the applicant plans to address it. It is our understanding that the borough wants to cap the contaminated areas. It should be noted that how the site will be remediated is dependent on the litigation between the Borough and JSM.
 - b) Additions to Tract C Redevelopment Area. Five new properties have been suggested for this redevelopment area. The borough planner will have to justify why they should or should not be added to Tract C. Allan has a listing of these properties, which he will send to Commission members.
 - c) Arts Commission Bench. The bench is still in the DPW garage. No decision has been made on where to place it on the Environmental Education Center property. Allan and Mike will visit the area, so we can make a site recommendation.
 - d) Mary Denver Memorial Tree. Many people want to plant one or more trees in memory of Mary Denver. The mayor wants to do a dedication in the spring. Karen

suggested we plant a grove of three to five trees, all native species, appropriately spaced from one another, with a memorial plaque on the ground. Matt said the borough will fund the planting. STAC will discuss this at its next meeting. The cost is \$1,000 for three trees. The Native Plant Sanctuary has been dedicated to Mary, and a corrected sign is needed for that site.

e) Appreciation for Phil George's Donation. Mike suggested we give Phil one of the new sweatshirts made for The Meadows Trail Crew. Craige suggested we all go to a Council meeting to express our gratitude to him. No meeting date has yet been selected.

f) Meadows Trail Sweatshirts. Allan will pick them up tomorrow morning.

7. Adjournment. The meeting adjourned at 9:43 PM. The next meeting of the Environmental Commission will take place on Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at 8 PM on Zoom.