

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Date/Time:

Monday, June 26, 2023 – 7:45pm

Meeting Location: Zoom and Borough Hall

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89940823161?pwd=Q0lCTnNueStObm83c2VkditUdzh3QT09>

Join by phone/Dial by your location

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Open Public Meeting Statement:

Adequate notice of this meeting was provided to the Bergen Record and/or The Ridgewood News, informing the public of the time and place according to the provision of the Open Public Meeting Law (Chapter 231, P.L. 1976)

Roll Call:

Members: Lou Baldanza(P), Lisa De Pellegrini(P), Chairman Robert Hanrahan(P), Mairead Jensen(P), Randall Preston(P), Lisa Skoglund(P), Antonio Vozzolo(P), Michelle Zink-Jojic(P), Planning Board Liaison/Member Robert Zitelli(P) & Council Liaison Christopher Roche(P)

Approval of Minutes – May 15, 2023 - A motion to approve was made by R. Preston and seconded by M. Jensen.

Meeting Opened to Public Agenda & Non – Agenda Items - A motion to open was made by R. Preston and seconded by M. Jensen.

Meeting Closed to Public - A motion to close was made by L. Baldanza and seconded by M. Jensen.

Communication/Correspondence:

- L. Baldanza was contacted by Jesse from the NY/NJ trail conference regarding an EC inquiry for consultation on building a trail on the Summit Avenue Property.
They walked the Summit Avenue property to investigate potential locations.
The trail conference is busy but would provide a proposal/quote for providing assistance with a trail.
- The Borough Administrator contacted the County of Bergen to obtain lantern fly traps.
The DPW will do pick up and installation for Montvale and Rivervale.
- R. Hanrahan filmed a new video highlighting EC current and future projects and work completed.
It can be viewed through access on the borough homepage quick link My Montvale TV.
- The EC received a donation of several books titles to include a Field Guide to Trees of North America, Garden Insects, Trees of the World, and Landscape Architectural Graphic Standards.

New Business:

- Tree Ordinance – update

- Over the past year there have been various requests for modifications to the ordinances with the intention of making the rules more impactful.
- The intent of the ordinance is the reduction of clearcutting (indiscriminate tree removal).
- A review of building department permits indicated 10 out of 13 incidents of clearcutting.
- We can make modification to the existing code or start over from the beginning. Starting over will take significantly longer than modification.
- Currently we have a clause that says you cannot receive a building department permit for 4 months after trees (that are within the restricted zone) are removed.
- The borough impose a fine of \$ 500.00 per tree for all trees (within the restricted zone) that have been removed without an approved permit.
- Suggestion to increase the lookback to 12 months from 4 month and to increase the fine from \$ 500.00 to \$ 1,000.00.
- Suggestion to protect certain trees over a specified age and/or species.
- Some EC members are in agreement with the longer lookback and increased fines but not all members agree with it. Some members feel the ordinance is currently restrictive enough.
- Suggested that 12 month lookback it too long for homeowners to wait to continue home updates. (This is only problematic if homeowner's do not follow the rules of the borough and cut without permits).
- Suggested that homeowners and contractors should have different sets of rules.
- Loophole in current ordinance. We included a clause that says you cannot get a building department permit for 4 months after trees are removed. There is a 4 month wait from tree removal to building event.
- This excludes any issue related to safety, and residents can take immediate action without a permit to remedy dangerous or diseased trees.
- Suggestion that exemption for affordable housing should be removed.
- Suggestion that there is an annual allowance (maximum allowed per year) for tree removal.
- Suggestion that homeowners and builder have different regulations.

R. Hanrahan states that it is important to keep the ordinance simple. We will invite Chris Gruber, borough Construction and Zoning Officer to our next meeting to give us more insight. Requests the EC members to come to the next meeting prepared to make a proposal.

- Boulder donation for Huff Pond/ Pascack trail entrance
 - R. Hanrahan met with Mike Elefante who donated 5 loads of boulders.
 - The boulders were used to create a visual guideline/demarcation of the trail from the pond.
 - Numerous boulders were placed along the trail entrance and a dry stone pond is being constructed.
 - Steve Rich Environmental Contractors brought a backhoe and moved the boulders on location and is still helping us out.
 - Randy Preston, Jan Edgers and Rob Hanrahan and Bob Hanrahan helped out.
 - Installation of dry pond is under construction. Still some volunteers needed to complete the work.
- Tree removal at Huff Pond
 - We have had some requests from the public to remove hazardous trees from Huff Pond. Six trees in question as follows:

1. Maple 1- Tree is leaning.
2. Maple 2 – Downes recommended pruning but not removing.
3. Maple 3 – Has one trunk that is hanging over.
4. Maple 4 – Has a hollow hole.
5. Maple 5 – Trunk is hanging over significantly.
6. Maple 6 – Quad trunk.

Comments from the EC Members:

- The rotted tree should be removed.
- The one in playground should be trimmed.
- Suggestion to remove the dangerous portion only of Maple 5.
- Suggestion to err on the side of caution.
- Suggested that residents won't use the playground in the summer without shade but safety is the priority.
- Suggestion to get a 2nd opinion.

Roll call vote to obtain a second opinion on the health and safety of the 6 maple trees referenced above: Lou Baldanza(Y), Lisa De Pellegrini(Y), Chairman Robert Hanrahan(Y), Mairead Jensen(Y), Randall Preston(Y), Lisa Skoglund(Y), Antonio Vozzolo(Y), Michelle Zink-Jojic(Y), Planning Board Liaison/Member Robert Zitelli(Y) & Council Liaison Christopher Roche(N)

Old Business:

- Community Project Update (Lisa De Pellegrini)
 - Update on Bat Education Project (Lisa De Pellegrini) – No news to report.
 - Update on Pollinator Garden Project (Lisa De Pellegrini)
 - The pollinator garden needs maintenance, weeding, etc.
- Pascack Trail/Huff Pond Update (Robert Hanrahan) – See comments in new business above.
- Montvale Plastic Bag Recycling Update (Randy Preston/Mairead Jensen)
 - Thank you to Mairead, Randy and Ellen for their efforts in managing the plastic recycling.
 - We have completed our 6th challenge; and just collected 900 pounds of plastics in total during this past six month period.
 - C. Roche recommends the reading garden outside borough hall as a possible location for a Trex bench.
- Electric Vehicle Update (Antonio Vozzolo)
 - A. Vozzolo found a program that reimbursed \$4000 maximum per electric vehicle. This would be a very small offset toward the total cost of a new EV.
 - NJ Department of Environmental Protection has grant funding available to apply for up to \$ 500,000 for charging station. Applications are due in December.
 - We could work toward installing charging stations at borough hall and the DPW.
- Community Garden Update (Robert Hanrahan) – No news to report.
- Girl Scout Garden – Huff Pond
 - The rock border installed around the garden was disrupted and the weeding has not been maintained.
 - L. DePellegrini spoke to Girl Scout leader to ask her to have the scouts maintain their garden installation.
- Open Spaces and Recreation Plan (Mairead Jensen/Robert Hanrahan)

- We are waiting for feedback from the Planning Board.
- Environmental Resource Inventory (Robert Hanrahan)
 - Last week R. Hanrahan and J. Voytus met with the Land Conservancy of NJ to go over input.
 - Some of the feedback provided to the land conservancy was that some of the information was stale or out of date.
 - The Land Conservancy has found other avenues for getting more current and valuable information.
 - The Land Conservancy is working on providing us an updated draft by the end of July.
 - The EC may have the opportunity to provide further input.
- Summit Avenue Open Space Land Purchase/Trail (Robert Hanrahan/Chris Roche)
 - C. Roche stated that the borough is currently considering Summit Avenue as a location for a water tower.
 - The location would provide the required space and access needed.
- Bicycle and Walking Plan (Antonio Vozzolo)
 - Currently waiting from guidance from the DOT.
 - A. Vozzolo will provide an update as soon as possible.
- New Community Center discussion (Robert Hanrahan/Chris Roche) – No news to report.
- Repair of Environmental Learning Center, trail discussion (Robert Hanrahan)
 - Someone gathered branches off the trail and placed them in the middle of the walkway, away from foot traffic.
 - One area of the trail that was blocked by a tree has been taken care of and that portion of the trail is now accessible.
 - Approx. 35-40 floor boards need repair.
- Category One, Riparian Zone and Wetland Protection Ordinance Discussion (Robert Hanrahan) – No news to report.
- Sustainable Jersey
 - R. Hanrahan states that the Land Conservancy is available give advice/consultation.

Council Liaison Report – Chris Roche

- Update on Summit Avenue as stated in above comments.

Planning Board Report – R. Zitelli

- Montvale Grove - 4 acres, 14 residence
- Age restricted
- Still needs some variances.

Adjournment - A motion to close was made by R. Preston and seconded by M. Jensen.

Next EC Meeting will be on Monday, July 17, 2023