

Minutes of the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission

March 9, 2020

Conference call meeting called to order at 7:32pm

Attendees

Members: Richard Leister, Kim Diamond, Renee Ciesla, Chris Scalera, Angus Chen (via phone), and Kevin Hall (via phone)

Guests: Keenan Hughes and Steve Carrellas

Approval of Minutes

- Minutes from February 3, 2020 approved
- Minutes from February 17, 2020 approval postponed until next meeting

Town Planner Keenan Hughes on Master Plan

- The Master Plan is a policy/land use/zoning document that is moving into the “recommendations phase” at this time. Demographic and development trends will be included in the Existing Zoning portion of the Master Plan. The Master Plan also addresses the need for more housing for seniors. A few issues currently at the end of the Master Plan touch on environmental matters. A total of 400 responses were received from residents as a result of an on-line survey with respect to the contents of the Master Plan.
- Kevin Hall is on the Planning Board’s subcommittee that is handling the Master Plan review and revision. Mr. Hughes requested that the Environmental Commission (EC) review the current draft of the Master Plan and make their recommendations by mid-April for any revisions, as Mr. Hughes will be submitting a draft of the Master Plan to the Planning Board on May 6, 2020.
- According to Mr. Hughes, there was a recent amendment to the Municipal Land Use Law that says to identify locations for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- DEP’s stormwater rules were adopted last week. DEP wants the Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission’s (EC’s) input on how to incorporate these rules into the Master Plan.

- Resiliency is something on which the Planning Board is focused with respect to the Master Plan. This is supposed to take into account responses and planning with respect to climate change issues.
- Renee indicated that she and her daughter went on a walk in town and could not walk in certain areas because those areas were unsafe. Kim mentioned that it would be nice if people could walk or jog safely to and from the Connell Center along Plainfield Avenue, particularly with the redevelopment plan around the Connell Center that includes a jogging path.. Keenan addressed these issues, saying that a major goal of the Master Plan is to make Berkeley Heights a more walkable community and a place where people can ride their bicycles around town, safely. This will take into account all new redevelopment projects.
- Keenan stated that the open space in Passaic River Park is a major issue. The Master Plan wants to address this open space in an opportunistic manner.
- The issue of parking was not raised as being a part of the Master Plan.
- Kevin notes that there are “mixed use” zones at the ends of the zoning for our downtown area. He asked how we can get the Master Plan to tie into our ordinances. He suggested that the Planning Board would be receptive to this. Keenan suggested drafting a set of EC objectives that could be integrated into the Master Plan.
- Kim suggested building into the Master Plan certain Best Practices based upon Sustainable Jersey criteria, so that plans for achieving Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum Sustainable Jersey certification are baked into the Master Plan.
- Richard agreed that Sustainable Jersey provides a good way to implement best practices for municipalities.
- Kim and Richard suggested that a “divide and conquer” approach for Sustainable Jersey actions will be the most efficient and effective way to review, select, and incorporate Sustainable Jersey measures appropriate for Berkeley Heights into the Master Plan. Richard will circulate to members of the Green Team various Sustainable Jersey “Actions” so that each person can review and select the ones for which they will take ownership and be in charge for boiling down the content for incorporation into the Master Plan. All Green Team members will need to respond to Richard by March 18, 2020 with a list of the Actions for which they will be responsible.
- Keenan will provide a draft of the Master Plan approximately one week in advance of the EC’s meeting on April 6, 2020. At that time, the EC will provide him with the Green Team’s recommendations for Sustainable Jersey recommended items to incorporate into the Master Plan. Keenan will provide Dijiah Chen’s and his contact information so that the EC can submit these recommendations to them. Keenan will present these recommendations to the Planning Board in early May.

Hearing on agenda items only - 3 minutes per resident

- Steve Carrellas spoke briefly in his role as a concerned township citizen and someone who works with the Township Council regularly regarding how transparent the EC is being. He commended the EC for doing a good job in being transparent, insofar as EC agendas are posted timely on the township's website.

Old Business

Scout Projects –

- Chris explained that Patriots Path 50163 is the Boy Scout Council under which all troops in Berkeley Heights fall. Chris is endeavoring to obtain the non-profit certification from Patriots Path so that it can be provided to the township as proof of its non-profit status for purposes of the Berkeley Heights troops receiving funds after town-wide clean ups are conducted under the New Jersey Clean Community Council clean communities grant.
- Kim indicated that the Girl Scouts follows a similar structure, and that she had reached out to a troop leader in town who was endeavoring to obtain the non-profit certification from the Girl Scout Council under which all troops in Berkeley Heights fall.

Stormwater Ordinance

- Richard, David, and John met with the township's Business Administrator, Liza Viana, with respect to stormwater management. The plan is to draft the following 3 ordinances by June or July 2020, with those listed taking primary responsibility:
 - Sump Pump (Richard)
 - Stormwater Management for Minor Site Development (~~John Leo Liza and Township Engineer Tom Solfaro~~)
 - Lot Grading (the aim of this ordinance will be to prevent people from grading their property so that runoff does not go into their neighbors' lawns/properties (Tom Solfaro))
- Richard, David, John, and Liza plan to have another meeting by month-end.

Sustainable Jersey

- **Green Team** – Kim nominated Carolyn George of the Recreation Department to be added as a member of the Green Team, given her extensive involvement in the use of Lower Columbia Park for the township's Outdoor Summer Camp and her visioning for the

redevelopment of Lower Columbia Park and its green space in years to come. EC approved Carolyn's nomination.

- **Mayor's Wellness Campaign** – No update; nothing to report.

Tree Ordinance - Nothing new to report

Peppertown Park

- Kim learned from Donovan Hall that a combination of half native trees and plants and half non-native trees and plants are scheduled to be planted under the new redevelopment plan for Peppertown Park. She will endeavor to obtain a breakdown of trees from Donovan.

Recycling

- **Mayor's Recycling Task Force**

- Scheduled to meet with Mike D'Aquila this week to increase education and discuss Earth Day initiative.
- Steve Carrellas noted that things are not posted on the Mayor's Recycling Task Force website regarding recycling.

- **Trex Bins**

- Kim stated that 11,800 lbs of thin film plastics has currently been reported as being collected so far.
- Kim discussed the various site locations around town that she, along with Tom Barton and Carolyn George from the Recreation Department, toured and examined with respect to installing Trex benches. Originally planned locations, including by Sansone Field near the park sign adjacent to Horsehoe Road, were eliminated as options, due to grading issues that would present risks/township liability issues and would be costly to correct. Currently, all of the Trex benches received are located in Lower Columbia Park, in the tennis courts.
- Richard asked if Trex can do collections in our town, giving the town treatment as though it were a commercial generator of thin film plastics. He also asked about whether Trex would be able to provide decking instead of benches. Kim raised liability issues that could potentially accompany decking, particularly if installed in Passaic River Park, and suggested that we stick with ordering benches.
- Carolyn George mentioned to Kim the need for more Trex benches for Outdoor Summer Camp and requested that all new Trex benches received on behalf of the township get donated to Lower Columbia Park. As Carolyn would like benches

around the perimeter of the chain linked fence that borders the walking path between Lower Columbia Park and Park Avenue, many new benches over the course of the next few years can fit there. Kim and Carolyn worked out a consistent color scheme, so that all new benches received for Lower Columbia Park will be in one of two specific colors.

Ordinance on Restrictions on Plastic Bags, Plastic Straws, and Polystyrene Containers

- Richard circulated to the EC a copy of the state-wide bill that would be more expansive in coverage than the township's ordinance, covering everything the township's ordinance covers as well as restricting the use of paper bags. This bill has already passed the New Jersey Senate and awaits review for passage in the New Jersey Assembly.
- Angus and Kim will work to create an "ordinance sub-page" on the EC website that will provide helpful information to the public
- Alvaro still to write a letter to TAP supporting and explaining the provisions of the ordinance in order to alleviate confusion as to what it actually requires.
- EC should continue to monitor if the state of NJ passes a similar ban.

Joint Meeting on Environmental Commissions

- The next meeting is on March 25 in Rahway. The topic is food waste.

Topics for the Township Newsletter

- David will draft the next article, which will focus on riparian zones.

Municipal Complex and Stormwater - Nothing to report

Government Energy Aggregation - Nothing to report

Climate Action Plan Survey - Nothing to report

Passaic River Park

- Chris noted that there are no walking paths from Mount Carmel. He suggested a proposal for bridges and foot bridges from Mount Carmel to Snyder Avenue.

- Richard suggested that there needs to be a big carve out from water draining, as the water drainage issue will impact where the footbridges can be installed. He suggested looking at Station Street to Grant Street.

Chemtrade - Nothing to report

Budget

- The budget will be discussed at tomorrow's (March 10) Township Council meeting.
- Based on the "wish list" budget that Kim put together and submitted as part of the Sustainable Jersey grant application for Vegan Fest, Brown & Brown (the largest financial sponsor of Vegan Fest 2019) volunteered to contribute \$5 K to Vegan Fest 2020. Kim noted that Mayor Angie Devaney played a key role in helping to secure this donation.

Partnering with Rec Commission for DEP Grant Application Re: Lower Columbia Park Trails

- Grant information should be posted later this month.

NJ Clean Communities Grant

- Kim is coordinating with Township CFO Eugenia Poulos, who requested proof of non-profit status for all organizations to which funds have been proposed to be donated as a result of township-wide clean-ups.
- Saturday, March 29 has been proposed as the next clean-up date. There are multiple sites that can be done on the same day, so Kim is asking for volunteers from EC to lead each site. EC leaders at each site need to make sure everyone who signed up actually attends and participates in the clean-up.

NEW BUSINESS

Treating Ash Trees for Emeralds Ash Borer

- Tom Bocco is getting quotes for this, so that ash trees can be treated once again. Richard explained that half the trees would be treated this year, and the other half would be treated next year. The money for this will be coming out of the Tree Fund Trust. The cost is determined by the price per diameter of each ash tree. There was evidence of ash borer on some ash trees at the Connell Center. No evidence of lantern tree (?).

Community Garden

- Chris and Renee said that people showed up with checks. Richard mentioned that Eugenia Poulos is the contact at Town Hall for receiving the checks.
- A budget for the Community Garden will need to be put together. Richard will provide information about what was purchased for the Community Garden in the past.
- Renee indicated that all of the plots for this year have been filled. She also noted that everyone who signed up for a plot is required to be on a Community Garden Committee. Some of these committees include the Pollinator Committee, the Honey Bee Project, etc.
- Kick-Off for the Community Garden is scheduled to occur on March 31 at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.
- There will be two clean-up days to get the Community Garden ready for this year.
- John Evangelista is the person at the Union County level who gives out county-based grants.
- Renee asked if mulch was free last year. Richard said that yes, it was.

Governor Livingston High School Reforestation

- Richard met with James Finley, Lara Mandenhall, Anthony Amano (the superintendent for the grounds for all Berkeley Heights schools), and Donna Felezzola regarding reforestation at Governor Livingston High School (GL). In order to reforest, the tennis courts would need to be removed. There was discussion regarding whether the steep slope between the back parking lot and the school building could be planted with shrubs.
- If reforestation is not possible at GL, then where? We want to be able to meet our tree canopy goal.

Trees Ordered for Earth Day

- Councilwoman Susan Poage had applied for a grant from the state to obtain trees in honor of Earth Day. She was granted a thousand seedlings, and they will be received April 24th. She proposed having an event on April 25th to give away seedlings.
- There is currently debate as to whether the tree distribution should occur in Lower Columbia Park or at Town Hall. Unless signage and advertising occur, many people may not realize that such distribution is occurring in Lower Columbia Park, compared to Town Hall which is a much more visible location.

- Kim asked if Susan had a pre-registration plan or distribution plan in place, such as a sign-up for getting a sappling.
 - Kevin Hall asked what to do with leftover seedlings not taken by residents. Could the seedlings be planted in places around town, including at schools?
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Citizens hearing on any environmental issues - 3 minutes per resident - None

PLANS

550 Springfield Ave and 128 Station Street – Change of Use

Findings of Fact

- Nothing happening environmentally with the change of use

Recommendation

- No recommendations

87 Twin Falls Road: Expansion with eat-in kitchen and bedroom

Findings of Fact

- To be presented to Zoning Board

Recommendation

- Downspouts not to street, but into a rain garden or drywell

115 North Road: One-story Addition

Findings of Fact

- Drainage could be an issue

Recommendation

- Make sure driveway does not drain into the street. Add pervious pavers on the proposed walkway. Add downspouts on the structure to drain into a rain garden

151 Rutgers Ave. – Front portico and second story

Findings of Fact

- Drainage could be an issue. Building an infiltration basin instead of a drywell (Kevin noted that he has seen this in the past)

Recommendation

- Consider a rain garden/green infrastructure. Ask to slant driveway so that runoff does not go into the street.

Motion to adjourn – Made by Kevin Hall. Seconded by Angus Chen.

Meeting adjourned @ approximately 9:30 pm

Next meeting scheduled for March 23, 2020

Respectfully submitted by Kim Diamond on March 15, 2020