

Union Township Environmental Commission

Minutes of the May 13, 2008 Regular Meeting

The May 13, 2008 Regular Meeting of the Union Township Environmental Commission was called to order at 7:00 PM.

The notice of meeting as published in the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Courier-News satisfied the requirements of the Open Public Meeting Act, and was also posted in the Municipal Building, on the Union Township website and filed with the Municipal Clerk.

I. **Roll call:**

Present: Bill Harclerode, Stephen Hurford, Michele McBride, Kathleen Corcoran, John Wingler
Absent: Bob Beylickjian, Sandy Stiger, Chuck Neary
Public: Chip Paillex, Colleen Duerr, VJ DiRoberto, Alan Ford

II. **Approval of Minutes:**

With the spelling correction of "osage orange" trees, approval of the minutes from the April 2008 meeting was moved by Ms. McBride and seconded by Ms. Corcoran. The corrected minutes were approved by a 3-0 vote.

III. **Chairmans Report:**

1. Mr. Harclerode stated that Mr. Nargi has stepped down as Chairman of the Environmental Commission. Mr. Harclerode is handling the meetings as Vice-Chairman, and he will speak with Mayor Mazza next week to see what Mr. Mazza has planned for nominations.
2. Mr. Harclerode stated that he has gone through the EC office and has a stack of correspondence that needs attention.
3. John Wingler has been appointed to the EC by Mayor Mazza, and Chuck Neary was also appointed. John Wingler was sworn in at the last Township Committee meeting.
4. There is a Hunterdon County Roundtable Meeting re: Green Initiatives and Recycling at the Bethlehem Twp. Mun. Bldg. on May 17th.
5. There is a Hunterdon County Planning Bd. meeting on May 21 in Whitehouse re: the Rt. 78 corridor issues. Mrs. Corcoran stated that she plans to attend, dependent upon work commitments.

IV. **Committee Reports:**

Open Space Committee:

1. Mr. Harclerode stated that this committee has been split into two parts. Mrs. Stiger will be in charge of open space conservation easements. Ms. McBride will be in charge of property management. Mrs. Stiger was not present to report on status.

Equestrian Trails:

1. Mr. Hurford stated that he has had casual conversation with horse owners.
2. Mr. Harclerode stated that he believes that there is a trails map in the office, maybe left by Bob Nargi, which Mr. Hurford may want to review.

Property Management:

1. Ms. McBride provided a powerpoint presentation regarding open space stewardship and the status of specific properties under the direct responsibility of Union Township. She pointed out that Union Township has a significant amount of preserved open space, owned by the Township, the State, County and individual property owners. Union Township is responsible for the structures and building envelope areas of Hoffman Park, Douglas Farm and Milligan Farm. A significant amount of nonrestricted farmland also exists. Property owners are able to be assessed as farmland as long as the property has 5 acres or more of land and yields \$500 or more in agricultural profit. The house and farmland are assessed separately.

2. Chip Paillex from the audience was introduced. He is in charge of "Grow a Row", which is a non-profit agency that has evolved in Union Township as a major source of produce for local food banks, pantries and other groups. They are looking to expand and sought to learn about the Township open space to see if there might be a mutually beneficial opportunity. Up until this point, they have been working mainly out of Peaceful Valley Orchards, and have had the use of volunteer workers, families, land and equipment. They are currently working on obtaining 501C3 status with the state, as they are looking to expand.
3. Ms. McBride continued with the presentation re: Hoffman Park and its issues. The County is in charge of the property outside of the building envelope for the Hoffman structures. Hoffman has some major safety issues with the collapsed basement tunnel and pool, and some major aesthetic issues as the structures become more and more run down. These issues have been pointed out to the Township Committee, and Ms. McBride has been approved to receive quotes for repair of the major safety issues on the property. There has been some interest in leasing of the structures, but the safety issues must be addressed. Ms. McBride asked for a \$30,000 budget and liability coverage to get past the stage to be able to market this property. The Twp. Committee members in addition to the construction and road officials in the Twp. have all been helping on an individual basis. Ms. McBride is currently receiving quotes. A property management consultant has provided an opinion, and stated that he would be willing to manage properties for a fee of 8% of the rental fee. Local property owners have also expressed interest in leasing the barns; however it was pointed that the leasing might need to be directly related to agriculture.
4. Ms. McBride discussed the Douglas 100 acre farm, which is 100% owned by Union Twp. The barns are partially utilized for hay farming, but the house is not being utilized. The house is in pretty good shape, and is habitable. Farmland preservation was discussed. The memorialized resolution is an issue. It needs to be determined whether the deeded designation is preserved farmland or open space. There was some discussion about subdividing the land for sale of preserved farmland, conservation easements, RFP for sale of a framed barn, and various other options. Franklin and Bethlehem seem to have good farmland preservation programs, and Ms. McBride would like to speak with them to see how their programs may work for Union Twp.
5. Milligan farm has already been subdivided. The 2.4 acres with house and barn are wholly owned by the Township and can be sold; however they are in bad shape, having been vacant for at least 10 years and resident wildlife is evident. 85 acres have been preserved for open space with Green Acres, so that cannot be touched. The remainder is designated for COAH units.
6. There was some discussion regarding the ability of the Township to team with "Grow a Row"; however the Township only owns the Douglas Farm. It was not clear what the Township could do to allow a non-profit to utilize the property. This will have to be investigated with the Township Committee, as the Environmental Commission does not have authority. It was requested that "Grow a Row" do some research on this. Chip Paillex indicated that "Grow a Row" would like to stay local to utilize the Peaceful Valley Orchards equipment. There was some discussion regarding the need to have a public bid to lease Township properties.
7. Mrs. Corcoran made a motion for Ms. McBride to proceed with her endeavors regarding property stewardship and obtaining quotes. Mr. Harclerode seconded the motion.

Planning Board:

1. Mrs Corcoran summarized projects discussed at the last planning board meeting:
 - a. Petri was looking to subdivide 3 structures on 2 lots into 3 lots. The application was deemed complete.
 - b. Apgar Variance was memorialized, which will provide for a low income COAH unit on a shared lot with 2 homes.
 - c. Russuniello, with 2 houses on one lot, requested permission to convert the first floor of one of the structures to a dog overnight sitting service. This would change the property to a third use and would require a D variance.

- d. The Grand Colonial desired to replace its geotextile with gravel in the temporary parking lot. However, the Planning Bd. stated that a revised site plan would be required for this change.

Road Noise:

1. Mr. Harclerode reported that Senator Lance has been providing guidance as to how we should formulate a proposed resolution with the state to make it a \$500 fine for illegal mufflers and engine braking.
2. Amy Switlyk of Clinton Township, a member of the Road Noise Subcommittee, is attending as a speaker and will represent our interests. Ms. Corcoran stated that she plans to attend also; however this will depend upon work commitments.
3. Mr. Harclerode stated that the repaving of Rt. 78 in our vicinity is still planned for the Spring/Summer. All are optimistic that this will significantly reduce road noise.
4. Regarding quiet train crossings, Mr. Harclerode reported that this is likely to take a few more months to even get the application into the database.

V. **Communication and Education:** No Report.

VI. **Sidney Brook:**

Sidney Brook Visual Assessment Report has been prepared by Princeton Hydro which needs to be reviewed by Union Township. A meeting has been scheduled for May 27 at 6:30 pm.

VII. **Adjournment:**

The Vice-Chair asked for a motion to adjourn. It was moved by Mr. Hurford, seconded by Mrs. Corcoran, and approved by a 4-0 vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen Corcoran, Secretary