

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014 AT 7:30 P.M.

**MINUTES OF THE RP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION
MARCH 27, 2014**

Chairman James Ruff called the meeting to order at 7:45 p.m., it having been duly noted that this meeting is being held in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., notice of which was sent to The Record and the Newark Star Ledger on the 10th day of January, 2014. Members present were: James Ruff, Kevin Avery, Peter Garvey, Gene Hammond, Harry Menta and Steve Quinn. Also present were Don Smith, Peggy, Erin and Vanessa Conversano.

The minutes of the February 27, 2014 and March 5, 2014, meetings were approved.

Correspondence received: 1) Invitation to annual meeting of Bergen County Environmental Commissions on March 31, 2014, at 6:30 p.m.
2) Flood Hazard Area Verification & Individual Permit from Stonefield Engineering & Design for 150-170 Main Street, Hackensack

Old Business:

Eagles – Don Smith from Hansen & Smith Consulting was present at the meeting to discuss a proposal to provide consulting services for the Skymark project. Don Smith had previously discussed a few alternatives to minimize the potential effects of the project on the eagles during construction and completion of the project. Steve Quinn had provided Skymark's development plans and presented the RPEC's concerns, especially those related to the area where a proposed road would be constructed within the nest site's 200-ft buffer zone.

They still want to try to disturb the birds as little as possible. They want to come up with innovative ways to try to minimize the effect of possible development there and keep these urban eagles around. It would be a good lesson to everyone that we can co-exist together.

Don Smith saw a kayaker that came right up against the nest to take pictures. The buoys are not effective. Within the 200 ft. would be a 50 ft. berm. Skymark reduced it to 100 ft. The EC would do 100 ft. The EC is trying to get another 25 ft. from them. Don Smith described some alternatives that he would suggest. It would still have the road where they need it for their development. They would address the concerns of the EC regarding the placement of the road and offer information and recommendations on the following issues:

- 1) Alternatives to minimize potential impacts that may result from placing the road within the 200 ft. buffer zone
Placement of a visual barrier/structure set back from the road. The hard surface of the barrier can be softened by landscaping with native plants.
Installation of a pergola-like structure over the east side of the road. The benefits of such a structure would include its use as a support for street lighting and possibly installation of solar panels.
- 2) Alternative to installing a constructed eagle nesting tower
Aesthetically, constructed towers are not attractive. In addition they provide a perch for predatory species such as crows at the potential nesting site, and require maintenance. A tower would be suitable for attracting osprey but would not provide the more secluded habitat required by eagles. An alternative to the tower would be installing additional large specimen trees (12-15 ft.) within the buffer zone between the nest and the road.
- 3) Recommendation for relocating the bird blind that is directly west of the nest site.
Placement of the blind should take into consideration the plans for providing cover for the nest site. As trees mature in the vicinity of the nest, visual observation will be diminished if not obscured. Locating the blind in a more open area would allow for installation of a permanent scope sighted on the nest.

4) Suggestions for improving the quality of the existing 5.0 acre wetland

The existing freshwater wetland is a degraded Phragmites marsh that provides minimal environmental benefit. However, it has great potential. Historically there was an expansive freshwater wetland habitat along Overpeck. Changes in hydrology and land development created dramatic changes to area and obliterated the wetland. Restoring the 5.0 acre parcel to a habitat reminiscent of the former wetland would increase diversity and provide increased environmental benefits. We would provide the RPEC with information on means for restoring the wetland and improving its benefits.

Don Smith suggests adding another couple of hardwoods so the eagles can have an alternative should something happen to the tree in the future. He suggests planting an easy perching tree for the future. The blind would be too close for a potential eagle nesting site. This would give the greatest distance from the observation site.

Steve Quinn thinks there needs to be some way to facilitate better communication with the State. Steve is not sure of the reason for not keeping the EC in the loop. The State communicates with Audubon regularly.

Don advised that towers kill birds by the thousands every year. On a day of poor visibility, what would happen if the eagle flew into it and broke a wing? If an artificial structure is to be put up, it will most likely end up with osprey nest. It is more likely that birds will collide with a tower. An artificial tree is more likely to work than a tower. It would probably cost a few hundred thousand dollars to litigate that site. Steve Quinn would like to see this done in RP not someplace else. It is entirely possible that this could possibly be used as a mitigation site for someone else who is using wetland and is in need of a mitigation site. The State would allow the tradeoff if it is located in the Hackensack Meadowlands. It is a good possibility of making a strong argument to use this freshwater site as a tradeoff. Skymark could possibly have this site done for free. The credits in a freshwater area like this could be of great value.

This site could be of great value as a possible tradeoff. The people causing the impact would have the burden to implement the design. Skymark would not have to spend any money to do this. Under ideal conditions, this area could be a jewel. It would be providing habitat for many species that are emerging. It does not make sense that the State would prefer a tower over this. It could even be a forested wetland and a wetland forest is rare around here. They will need to make up for that loss.

Steve Quinn could revise the drawings to show the EC's reaction to this and bring Joan and Don to the next meeting. If the EC requested, Don would reach out to the DEP people to try to get into that loop. Skymark wants the EC to support them fully with the revised plans.

A motion was made by Steve Quinn and seconded by Jim Ruff to accept Don Smith's proposal to provide consulting services for the Skymark project at the hourly rate of \$75.00, not to exceed \$1,000.00. All were in favor of the motion.

Steve Quinn said the EC needs to put together a presentation of some of the suggestions from Don Smith. Steve will do a sketch and some overlays. This would be a continuing contractual relationship with Hansen & Smith Consulting because the EC would need someone to oversee that the project is carried out properly. Perhaps Skymark would take over the contract once the work has actually begun. The EC would make a case to have their own representative to look out for the concerns of RP.

This would be a proud moment for the town and Skymark to say they were able to do this project and keep the eagles.

Peggy Conversano advised that she has the letters the scouts did for the eagles and will send them out. Karen Riede called and advised their schools also sent letters. Peggy spoke to the science teacher at Lincoln. They plan on doing letters as well.

Interpretive Signs – Steve Quinn has done some additional work on the drawings. He has one project to finish up and then he can get back to work on the drawings.

Eagle Scout Project – Steve Quinn said a good future eagle project would be to make a cross country ski trail. Teaneck Creek has great trails.

Earth Day 2014 – May 17, 2014, was set as Earth Day 2014. High tide is 12:51 p.m. on that day. The EC will start with a bird watch from 7:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Earth Day will run from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Vouchers were sent out for signatures. The shows will be kept on the same time schedule as last year. Angel the face painter, Tenaflly Nature Center and Risky Business have all advised they will be participating. Vouchers have been returned by: PO#12068 Wildlife Center, PO#13306 Risky Business, PO#13310 Tenaflly Nature Center and PO#13311 Snakes 'n Scales. They have been submitted for payment. No other vouchers have been returned to date. Vouchers are still outstanding from: Boy Scout Troop 3, Eyes of the Wild, Angel Mavrianos and Lenape Lifeways.

Steve Quinn will be doing the bird watch prior to Earth Day from 7:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. It will start at 7:00 a.m. at McGowan Park and then meet at 8:30 a.m. at the amphitheater in the County Park. It will be advertised on the same flyer as Earth Day.

Vanessa Conversano informed the EC that her girl scout troop wants to make bat houses. They want to put out the awareness of white nose syndrome. Bats are good for the environment because they eat mosquitoes and bugs. They would like suggestions from the EC about where to put the bat houses. McGowan Park is a great location for the bat houses.

Steve Quinn said that Mark Olson has a source for cedar that he is looking into. Steve will work on getting the wood cut by April 7. Mark Olson and Gerard Garofalow will help cutting the wood and a grandfather of one of the girl scouts also wants to help with the bat houses. The girls will make a short presentation with Bat Man on Earth Day. Peggy Conversano will contact Stacey Rosenfeld from the Patriot for coverage of the event.

Erin Conversano and Ariana Dindial might set up a table about bee houses at Earth Day. Steve told her that he and Linda would welcome them at their table.

201 Magazine did an article on girl scouts and featured Erin and Ariana's projects.

The EC received an email from a vendor wanting to know if he could set up a table to sell handmade crafts. The EC does not have any vendors selling goods at Earth Day.

Japanese Knotweed Eradication Project - The EC will install the black cloth on April 5. Supplies are in. Volunteers should meet by the dock at Riverside Park behind the DPW at 10:00 a.m. It should take about three hours to complete the Japanese knotweed eradication project. Volunteers will be asked to help spread the landscaping cloth to cover the Japanese knotweed. A flyer was sent to the high school to see if any community service students want to assist as well as to Scoutmaster Mike Alberque to see if any scouts would like to volunteer to assist.

Buoys – Jim Ruff needs to find a source for the buoys. Robert Somes said he agreed there were not enough buoys but did not offer any advice to get it done. A sign on Rte 46 Bridge should also be put up. Jim Ruff will look into this and ask Robert Somes for some helpful suggestions.

Route 46 Bridge Repair – Funds are in for repair of the Route 46 bridge. The Board of Commissioners needs to remember that peregrine falcons nest under there. This is also a landmark bridge. It is the first of its kind with two towers. The EC should alert the Board of Commissioners to the fact that falcons are nesting there.

A motion was made by Steve Quinn and seconded by Kevin Avery that the EC write a letter making the Board of Commissioners aware that in relation to renovations and repair to Rte 46 bridge, the presence of the NJ endangered peregrine falcon should be considered. Work should be scheduled to accommodate presence of this endangered species. All were in favor of the motion.

Jim Ruff will write the letter to the Board of Commissioners noting that peregrine falcons are present.

Grants – Harry Menta read an ANJEC email about open space grants. He wondered if it was something that could be used for a possible cross country trail. Harry will try to put something together regarding a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile loop cross country trail.

Karen Riede sent an email with various info for the EC, which included:
Ridgefield's town wide clean-up day on April 26. Teams will be on Bell Drive that day; Mother's Day Bird walk, a draft proposal for Bald Eagle Awareness Day on Sunday, May 4 from 2-4 p.m. Meet at the Ridgefield Pistol Range (beige bldg.) on Bell Drive. Scope will be set up on the Overpeck Nest (They thought that the word rally should not be used.)

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 24, 2014, at 7:30 p.m.

The meeting ended at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara DeLuca