

Highland Conservancy E-newsletter

November 30, 2009

Please mark your calendar:

We are encouraging you to attend this Thursday Dec. 3rd at 7:30 p.m. in the township hall when Highland's new Natural Features Preservation ordinance (Article 15) will be open for public comment during the Planning Commission meeting. For the full text, follow this link: <http://www.highlandtwp.com/page/Twp+PlanningZoning-130.html>

Why? Conservancy members have been attending Planning Commission meetings for over two years now voicing their concerns and providing input as this ordinance was crafted. The ordinance has gone through many drafts with the goal of protecting individual landowner's rights while preserving natural features such as mature trees, top soil and clean lakes in future developments. *Now this ordinance is in grave danger of being gutted and left without any substantial or enforceable requirements.* The current version has removed specific requirements for tree preservation and all penalties for non-compliance (doing a natural features/tree inventory is nice but the idea is to protect the trees by establishing a required percentage of tree canopy or establishing replacement tree percentage requirements).

The Highland Conservancy is asking for two basic requirements for new developments: First, preserve the trees as much as possible and second, stop unnecessary grading. Simply put, keep the lots in their natural condition by permitting tree cutting only for construction of roads and installation of public utilities. There is no reason why trees and top soil need to be stripped off building lots before there is any plan for the home that might be built there. When the trees and topsoil are removed, all plant and animal life is eliminated from the site. This is not the legacy that we want to leave for Highland. Stopping these practices will allow for subdivisions with green meadows, mature trees and home sites that fit the gently sloping land and crystal clear rivers and lakes as opposed to tract homes on a barren flatland stripped of all topsoil, vegetation, grass and wildlife. We already have several of these unwanted wastelands in Highland with hundreds of lots remaining unsold. Economy aside, if the current version of this now-gutted ordinance is passed, we will be leaving the door open to more of this natural destruction. The point is we need to protect the natural beauty, woodlands and watersheds in Highland.

There will be another public hearing on this ordinance in the township auditorium on January 7, 2010 at 7:30 pm. We encourage you to attend either meeting and voice your concerns for a return of the *specific* requirements protecting woodlands, preventing topsoil removal, requiring (not just encouraging) native plants and trees in roadside beauty buffers and native vegetation in storm water protection in the Natural Features Preservation ordinance. Highland Township needs your support!

Public Input Workshop for Highland Recreation Area:

On Thursday, November 12th, a variety of interested citizens met at a workshop to review the proposed General Management Plan for Highland State Recreation area. We reviewed a master map of the park and most everyone in attendance agreed with the overall plan while making some additional recommendations. These included possibly moving the equestrian campgrounds to an area adjacent to more trails, expanding the current camping area, and extending and creating additional equestrian and hiking/biking trails. The overall goal is to protect the natural beauty of this unique area rather than change it into a high-impact, heavy-use type park.

New Parks and Recreation Master Plan Approved:

Also on November 12, 2009, the Highland Township Board approved Highland's new Recreation Master Plan. This process began with a public workshop in October 2008 where a variety of local residents took part in a working session to review the previous plan, brainstorm suggestions for changes, and recommend future goals. A wide variety of interest groups were present including conservancy members, equestrians, hiking, running and biking groups, business owners, DDA members, sports groups, and others. The final Parks and Recreation plan is split into ten goals, each with their own action plan, estimated timeframes and budgets. For a full copy of the plan along with some interesting historical information and a summary of the recreational activities available in Highland, click on the following link:

<http://www.highlandtwp.com/page/Parks+and+Rec-133.html>

We applaud the board's commitment to Highland's natural features and their efforts in preserving the unique character of our very special community.

Katheryn Krupa, Editor

www.highlandconservancy.org

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