



TOWNSHIP OF LONG HILL

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

<http://www.longhillnj.us/boards/envirocomm.html>

GILLETTE ? HOMESTEAD PARK ? MEYERSVILLE ? MILLINGTON ? STIRLING

Township Offices:

915 Valley Road
Gillette, NJ 07933
Tel.: 908-647-8000
Fax.: 908-647-4150

Dear Applicant/Homeowner:

The Long Hill Township Environmental Commission helps to improve local decision-making by integrating environmental policies into local plans and projects. When applications for development come before the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Adjustment we review these proposals for their impacts on flooding and runoff, stormwater management, open space needs, water and air quality, plant and animal habitat, and so forth.

Whether you are building a new home from the ground up or modifying your existing home, there are important environmental considerations. It has been our experience that applications progress more smoothly through the hearing process when environmental issues have been fully addressed in the initial application. The discovery of these issues during the hearing almost always leads to unnecessary delays and expensive modifications of the plans.

While the Boards are not bound to consider the issues raised by the Environmental Commission, in the past, these issues have affected the outcomes of applications. For this reason, the Environmental Commission, in consultation with the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Adjustment, prepared this handout to advise applicants in advance of a hearing, of some of the common issues that arise during the application process.

We recommend that you read through the following pages to identify issues that are likely to apply to your project. This will help you to work with your design engineer or planner to make sure that your application already contains all of the necessary details when you first come before the board. You can then share with the Board, either in advance of the hearing, or during your presentation at the hearing, what steps you have taken to address the issues that apply to your project. As a result of this effort, the hearing process will be more expeditious, efficient, and cost-effective.

In preparing this handout, we made every effort to ensure that it is consistent with the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL). If, however, there is any inconsistency between the advice in this handout and the MLUL, applicants are advised that the provisions of the MLUL supercede.

If you need any assistance or guidance in dealing with any of these issues please contact us by the email link on our website:

<http://www.longhillnj.us/boards/envirocomm.html>

Some Common Questions

Here are some common questions that are asked by members of the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Adjustment:

Stormwater runoff: Will your project increase impervious surfaces that lead to stormwater runoff?

New Jersey has strict statewide regulations that govern stormwater runoff and Long Hill has adopted some additional regulations beyond these because of the sensitive environmental features of the Passaic River and the Great Swamp. This will be one of the most carefully scrutinized aspects of your project, and careful planning can reduce your construction costs at the same time it will enhance the aesthetics of your property.

The essential element of these new regulations is that almost all of the water from rooftops, driveways, and other impervious surfaces must be recharged into the groundwater on your property. This represents a major shift from the old-style methods of collecting the runoff into underground pipes and sending it directly into nearby streams. This change not only helps to protect our streams and preserve our water supply, it will also make your property more attractive. Here are some of the things you can do:

The runoff from rooftops is clean water and represents a valuable resource if it can be recharged into the groundwater. One method of achieving this is to install a drywell, which is a special underground structure that collects the water and then permits it to gradually seep into the ground. Better still, this rooftop runoff can be incorporated directly into your landscaping plan by directing your rooftop runoff into a special rain garden. A rain garden is simply a specially prepared landscaping bed that has a bottom layer of course stone that is covered by permeable soil and mulch with attractive plants, shrubs, grasses, and where appropriate, trees. The combination of recharge into the groundwater and use of the water by the

plants will effectively handle the rooftop runoff in a very natural way.

The stormwater runoff from patios and walkways can also be handled in simple and attractive ways.

Rather than pouring a bed of concrete, asphalt or some other impervious surface, a much better alternative is to construct the surface in a manner that permits rainwater to filter through it. This can be accomplished by excavating the area to be covered, then placing a sub-layer of course stone, followed by a layer of landscaping cloth, then a layer of sand into which attractive bricks or paving stones are set. Most of the rainwater will then filter down through this porous bed and into the ground.

Driveways can be prepared in much the same way as walkways and patios, but sometimes special consideration must be given to the area immediately outside the garage if vehicles will be sitting there for long periods of time, if the area is likely to be used for lawnmower maintenance, if salt is likely to be applied, or other activities that might lead to harmful chemicals going into the groundwater. (Of course, these chemicals are also harmful if allowed to flow into a storm drain and then into the surface waters of nearby streams.) Some engineers and planners prefer to construct a driveway with an impervious surface and then direct the runoff into a specially constructed swale alongside the driveway. This swale can be planted with attractive shrubs and grasses that are tolerant to salt and actually help to remove salt and other chemicals from the runoff.

Please check the Environmental Commission website for photos and additional guidance on these methods.

Land: Are there any unusual features about your property such as steep slopes, bedrock, or shallow water table?

When these special features exist, it is almost always better to work with the land rather than trying to overpower the land with special engineering. Work closely with your engineer or planner to find the best locations for your house, driveway, or other aspects of your project. In general, board members will be looking for ways to minimize disturbance of the land.

Water: Is your property near a stream, wetlands, springs, or within a Flood Hazard Zone?

New Jersey has strict regulations that govern disturbance in or near these areas. You may need to obtain a special permit from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) which can take several months and there may be limitations on the placement of structures that you plan to build. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) may require special insurance for Flood Hazard Zones. Discuss this carefully with your engineer or planner.

Maps that show the major locations of streams and wetlands throughout the town are available in Town Hall. The Environmental Commission or the Township Engineer can provide some preliminary guidance to help you determine if it is advisable to hire a professional to submit materials to the NJDEP.

Plants and animals: Are there any rare or unusual plants or wildlife on or near your property? Mature trees?

One of the most common and most harmful practices during construction of new homes is the destruction of natural habitat during grading. If you are building a new home on a natural, wooded lot, you should work carefully with your planner or engineer to retain as much of the natural habitat as possible. When a home is carefully placed within

the natural terrain it takes on a mature appearance within a couple of years. By contrast, homes that are built on clear-cut lots with landscaping added on often take two or three decades to have a mature appearance.

It is especially important, and often a legal requirement, to protect special habitat. The Boards routinely seek alternatives to avoid the destruction of mature trees as a result of development. If you are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to place a home within a mature, natural environment, consultation with an arborist or wildlife biologist can be an excellent investment—it will enhance both the aesthetic value and the market value of your home.

Native species: Will your project include the planting of new trees and shrubs?

When replacing or adding new trees and shrubs, these should be carefully chosen. In New Jersey, deer damage is a major problem and you may save thousands of dollars by selecting plants that are not prone to destruction by deer. Another consideration is that plants that are not a part of the natural environment in New Jersey can sometimes become problematic because they can spread and crowd out other plants. The Environmental Commission has put together a list of plants that are native to New Jersey and classified them on the basis of their preferred habitat and resistance to damage by deer. The list is available on our website.

Some Less Common Questions

Pollution: Will your project involve the storage, application, or disposal of any hazardous or toxic substances?

This is more often an issue in commercial settings rather than residential settings, but homeowners should be careful to design garage and storage areas away from locations where spills might lead directly to waterways or well heads.

Infrastructure: Will your project cause any increase in vehicular or pedestrian traffic? Will you be constructing or extending a roadway?

Once again, these considerations are more commonly involved with commercial operations, but sometimes a residential project requires the construction of either a long driveway or a private roadway. If your project requires this type of construction, work with your engineer to use low impact design that will reduce stormwater runoff and cause minimal damage to the environment.

Water supply: Will your project entail acquisition of water from a well? From surface waters?

In most instances homeowners will not be drawing from surface waters, but you may need to install a well. Check with your engineer or planner to make sure that you comply with state and local regulations for the installation of the well. Choose the site carefully to minimize land disturbance and minimize risk of contamination from sources such as septic systems. The Environmental Commission has worked with the Passaic River Coalition to develop a well head protection program that may be useful in guiding your plans.

Demand for services: Will your project entail extension of any existing utilities?

If your project involves the extension of utilities such as electricity, public water supply, or public sewers, discuss this carefully with your engineer to minimize disturbance of wetlands and other valuable natural resources.

Conservation easements: Are there any scenic or open space easements on your property?

This can be an important issue that should be discussed with your attorney, planner and design engineer to make certain that any and all restrictions on land use are known in advance of your project. If you have special features on your land such as mature forests, steep slopes, scenic vistas, and so

forth you may want to consider protecting these valuable natural resources in perpetuity by establishing your own deeded easement of protection. In addition to protecting valuable natural resources for future generations, you may also be able to realize tax benefits.

Scenic impact: Will your project block any views from neighboring properties? Will your project be significantly larger or taller than neighboring properties?

This is more often an issue for commercial property than for residential projects, but your lot layout should be done with careful consideration of the impact on neighboring properties. The future value of your home depends in part on the appearance of the entire neighborhood. Your home will be most valuable if it is a good fit within the neighborhood.

Sociocultural impact: Are there any known historical or archeological sites or structures older than 50 years on your property?

If your property has any historic or archeological features, you may be under some legal obligation to protect them. Even if there is no legal obligation, your property value may be enhanced if you preserve these features and incorporate them into your project.

Thank you for helping the Long Hill Township Environmental Commission to protect the natural resources of our town!