

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

JANUARY 22, 2015

The meeting opened at 7:30 p.m. by Chairman Lundin in the Freeholder Meeting Room at the Sussex County Administrative Center, One Spring Street, Newton, New Jersey. The meeting was held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-1 of 1975, as amended. Notice has been forwarded to the newspapers and posted on the bulletin board maintained at the Sussex County Administrative Center for public announcement.

ROLL CALL:

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cliff Lundin, Chairman
Glenn Schweizer, Vice Chairman
Louis Caruso
Lisa Chammings
Wolfgang Gstattenbauer
Donald Ploetner
Wes Powers

MEMBERS EXCUSED: None

STAFF PRESENT: Autumn Sylvester, Program Coordinator
Antoinette Wasiewicz, Recording Secretary

ALSO PRESENT: None

Cliff Lundin congratulated Lisa Chammings and Louis Caruso on their reappointment to the Open Space Committee. Cliff Lundin was also reappointed and will remain Chairman. Glenn Schweizer will remain the Vice Chair.

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made by Donald Ploetner to approve the Minutes of June 26, 2014, as presented. The motion was seconded by Louis Caruso. All were in favor, with an abstention from Glenn Schweizer. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE:

A. ARTICLES OF INTEREST:

Autumn said she has been saving articles since the last Open Space Committee meeting. The Morris County Freeholders are looking to expand their Open Space Program to include trails and recreational facilities. They had done a study to look at the strategy and analysis of their funding. The report was released at the end of October.

Glenn said the analysis was done for the County and the County Departments that were involved with the various Open Space and Preservation Trust. In addition to the analysis, they surveyed each of the municipalities and the non-profits who are engaged in Open Space in the County. They looked to expand the uses of the funds, primarily for trails; but there was a desire to use the monies for habitat restoration, monitoring and stewardship. There was an overwhelming interest in this. At the time the report was presented to the Freeholders, there was a lack of attention to the real issues and as a result, the only thing that received any attention was the use of the monies for trails. The question of using the monies to manage the properties never made it to the ballot. It is uncertain whether funds will be used for trail development because they would have to change the policies of the Open Space Plan in the County. When asked about the rate issue, Glenn said the rate issue also never made it to the referendum. Morris County has a huge amount of money in their Open Space Fund. Even with the reduction of their tax in 2014 to one cent, it still brings in about \$9 million a year.

There was also an article from the Keep It Green Coalition regarding the Open Space Ballot that passed on the State Referendum. It outlined their recommendations for funding. There has been a huge upheaval at the State level with the DEP regarding the operating cost of the parks and forests owned by the State. The DEP is not sure if their funding will be cut or further reduced because of this. Prior to the vote, it did not seem that there would have been such a substantial reduction in services and funding to the DEP.

Cliff said it was only during the last two weeks that people saw what was in the referendum. Basically, they swapped out some of this money for the dedication portion of the tax that went to watershed. A number of programs were funded by that tax, including the weed harvesting on Lake Hopatcong. The funding, which was in watershed protection, was diverted to Open Space. There were a number of people arguing against the referendum because of this transfer.

Autumn said she read that DEP projected that they will have to lay off about 80 people from their staff, which was already severely reduced. They will have to pass regulations about how they will divide the funds. They hoped to have this done by mid-July but that is an extremely optimistic outlook. It is more likely that it will be a next year's budget issue.

Glenn said they anticipated that the amount of money that this tax will generate will increase and over a number of years and that , the original funded programs will be refunded at the current level. Autumn believed the programs would be caught up by 2017.

B. REAPPOINTMENT RESOLUTION:

The Reappointment Resolutions were discussed by the Chairman earlier in the Agenda.

C. FARMS, FORESTS AND RIVERS WORKSHOP INFO:

The Nature Conservancy asked that the County promote their free workshop to be held at the Fairgrounds on Wednesday, January 28. The workshop is titled, "Farms, Forests and Rivers" and will talk about protecting the Paulins Kill River Watershed. The workshop is in collaboration with the Nature Conservancy, the NRCS, Wallkill River Watershed Management Group, the Audubon Society, Rutgers Cooperative Extension and the Xerses Society.

The workshop is for County and municipal officials, landowners and farmers. There will be talks about invasive species, forest management, agriculture management, conservation practices, native pollinators, economic development, eco-tourism, etc. Autumn had copies of the invitation available for the Committee.

OLD BUSINESS:

Eric Snyder asked Autumn to report that the sale of the surface easement that runs on the old railroad bed from Lafayette up to Ogdensburg is going through. DEP will be the recipient. They will have to do an environmental remediation to remove some of the old railroad ties.

Autumn said she received a telephone call from the New Jersey Conservation Foundation regarding a possible Open Space application for next year. The project is in Vernon Township and would connect the greenway between the Wallkill Valley Refuge property and the federal land. The cost of the acquisition would be about \$25,000.00.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. 2015 MEETING DATES:

The 2015 Open Space meeting dates were provided to the Committee. The meetings are scheduled for the fourth Thursday of the month, with the exception of November and December. During those months, the meetings are scheduled for the third Thursday because of Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

MOTION:

A motion was made by Lisa Chamings to approve the Open Space Committee meeting dates for 2015. The motion was seconded by Donald Ploetner and carried unanimously.

B. OPEN SPACE PLAN DISCUSSION:

There was some discussion regarding the update of the Open Space Plan at the last Open Space Meeting. At that meeting, Autumn said that she and Eric Snyder would update the Plan in-house, rather than using The Land Conservancy. Glenn asked if using funds from the Open Space Program to have The Land Conservancy update the Plan has been considered. He also asked if it was possible to have them on retainer to assist Autumn and Eric with the update. Cliff said it might be beneficial to see if they provide some help to staff, interns, etc. This would get the Plan updated sooner and at much less cost. Autumn said she would not have a problem updating the Plan but that "mapping" is very time consuming. The County no longer has GIS staff and she does not believe there are funds in Planning's budget for GIS work. Donald Ploetner asked what The Land Conservancy would charge to be on retainer. Cliff said for Hopatcong, the retainer was \$5,000.00 a year and they guaranteed four meetings at Hopatcong's request. Lisa said The Land Conservancy is offering quite a few services on grant writing for free if you also use them for the project. She said Stillwater has used them for a number of services and they are willing to negotiate. Lou said Green Township uses The Land Conservancy on a "per diem" basis and it works out well. Glenn suggested that Autumn prepare a list of what she would like The Land Conservancy to do. Cliff said he can have a conference call or meet with Eric and Autumn to see how this update can move forward. Autumn said she spoke with Eric today about this and that he wants to see an actual working plan. Wolfgang agreed that it was a good idea for Cliff to meet with them to discuss this update. Cliff said he will be away next week, but that he will call Eric the following week.

Donald asked if there were any potential Open Space applications for this year. Autumn said there were two potential applications, one in Vernon and one in Lafayette. Lisa said the project in Stillwater may also be back on the table.

Cliff said he wanted to give the Committee an update on a project he has been working on in Hopatcong. He said Lake Hopatcong is surrounded by four towns. A few years ago, they had a project that was funded by a grant from ANJAC in which they connected the trail systems of Stanhope, Byram and Hopatcong. They connected them at the point on Sparta Stanhope Road, by the old one lane bridge, where the three towns meet. They have on their websites, a tri-municipal trail map which connects the three towns.

Cliff said the Lake Hopatcong Foundation has been around for four or five years and that they will give seed money for projects. They've brought together the Trails Committees and Open Space Committees from the four towns and they've mapped out open space consisting of State lands, private lands that are owned by Hudson Guild and municipal lands which were acquired for open space. It appears that with very few connectors, they can get a trail around Lake Hopatcong. The trail would start at the Landing Train Station, wind along the lake through a bit of Roxbury, to the State Park, up and over the hill to a section of the old Morris Canal and then into Hopatcong. They are looking at two routes, one along the Musconnectcong River between Hopatcong and Musconnectcong and the other through the old Lake Hopatcong Country Club, which is now the Hopatcong Civic Center, up and over passed the schools.

There was a tract that was threatened for a 600-unit Senior Citizen Complex about ten years ago. It has now been acquired by the State under Forest Legacy. He said they can route the trail through there and it would then run into the New York/New Jersey Highlands Trail and the tri-municipal trail. Hopatcong has a green belt across the entire back end of Hopatcong with connectors into all the neighbors. It takes you up to Byram Cove and Bear Pond and a place called Mohawk Trail. There is a 500' gap but they can negotiate their way through it. It takes you to Prospect Point Preserve which is a new Jefferson Township park. A second alternate would be to go up and around the Weldon Quarry, come down through the Berkshire Valley Fish and Game tract to the east shore. They are looking at two alternatives; a historic alternative through Mount Arlington and a woods alternative through Berkshire Valley Fish and Game. The trail would come out from Pub 199 into the back end of their parking lot and through the green areas that were preserved as part of the Nolan's Ridge Development. The trail brings you back to Landing along the old Morris Canal Tracks, which were also preserved as part of a deal with the developer.

Cliff said they plan to open the Hopatcong section first. They are making a contract with New York/New Jersey Trails Council to go out and map GIS and mark and blaze the trail. Ultimately, they are looking for a land-based trail around the lake with lots of spurs and alternatives. The trail will be available on a phone app where you can get historical tour as well as a GIS map. They are also looking to map all the lake access points where people can park and launch a canoe or kayak. When asked how long the trail will be, Cliff said they figure it will be 24 miles if you take longest way. They hope to have about six miles open through Hopatcong within a year.

Glenn said Hampton was trying to meet with Stillwater and Frankford for a joint project but it was not very successful. He thought it might be more successful from a County perspective and that it should be looked into when updating the Open Space Plan. Lisa said that Stillwater recently acquired contiguous land with Hampton by the State Park. Glen said there are a lot of opportunities in many municipalities to connect with other open space. Lou said about five or six years ago, Green Township officials met with officials from all of their adjoining towns, including Alamuchy and Frelinghuysen, to discuss open space. It worked out well and because of that, they were able to connect open space with Frelinghuysen.

Lisa said Stillwater does not have an Open Space Advisory Committee, although it is part of their Ordinance. They are trying to get it reestablished because their Open Space tax sunsets in April 2016. They have some monies available and they are looking at using it for trails. Lisa asked Autumn if she would be interested in serving on Stillwater's Open Space Advisory Committee since she lives in Stillwater.

Wes said he did not understand the mindset of Sandyston Township's Resolution against the National Parks Service's 2013 Vision Plan, which included connecting greenways and acquisition of property. He found it surprising because in the past, the township approached Green Acres about buying vacant residential property for that purpose.

Lou said that Green Township has a 16-acre property that is going into Farmland Preservation. The property will be given to The Land Conservancy as a trade-off. Lisa asked Autumn how many Farmland Preservation applications are before the Ag. Board. Autumn said the County made offers to nine landowners. Three have accepted their offers and two have extensions. By the end of the month she will have a better idea of how many farms will be preserved. When asked if any are from Stillwater, Autumn said, "No" but that the Syberg Farm is back on the table. The Board is open to keeping it but they need to know how many farms accept their offers in order to account for funding. Lisa said Stillwater did a Resolution of Support for the farm.

Wolfgang said that Frankford found a home for the Savannah Sparrow which allows them to obtain DEP approval for a waste treatment plant at Ross' Corner. Cliff said the Soil District owns a parcel of land in Frankford which is along the stream that connects Lake Owassa and Culver's Lake. He said if Frankford ever needs connectivity for a trail through there, they are open to suggestion. Wolfgang said he would like to get the hikers off of Route 206 because there are no sidewalks and it is dangerous.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

All business having been completed, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Glenn Schweizer. The motion was seconded by Wolfgang Gstattenbauer and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.