

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

MARCH 26, 2015

The meeting opened at 7:10 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
Louis Caruso (7:15 p.m.)
Lisa Chammings
Wolfgang Gstattenbauer
Donald Ploetner
Wes Powers

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Glenn Schweizer, Vice Chairman

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

ALSO PRESENT: Daniel Conkling, Green Township

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made by Donald Ploetner to approve the Minutes of February 19, 2015, as presented. The motion was seconded by Cliff Lundin. All were in favor, abstentions from Lisa Chammings, Wolfgang Gstattenbauer and Wes Powers. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE:

A. ARTICLES OF INTEREST:

Autumn discussed an article relating to the use of the New Jersey Open Space funds. The Governor has decided to use the funds to pay for park employees' salaries that are normally paid through the general State budget. Supporters of the Open Space Program disagree, saying that the money was established to pay for land acquisition, farm preservation, etc.

Wantage Township is changing their Open Space Trust Fund law to include buying and acquiring property for active and/or passive recreation and conservation. Previously, it only allowed the township to use open space funds to acquire land for passive recreation and conservation purposes.

Autumn said she received an e-mail from Yvonne LoGiudice from The Land Conservancy asking if the 2015 Open Space Grant deadline had been set; and if so, will it be in September again. Cliff Lundin said they should follow past practice.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

A. OPEN SPACE PLAN UPDATE DISCUSSION:

Municipal Outreach – When the meeting began, there were no members from the towns present. Autumn reported that yesterday she received two municipal surveys, one from Andover Borough and one from Newton. Cliff said he is the Chairman of the Hopatcong Open Space Committee and that the e-mail was not forwarded to him. Lisa said she wasn't forwarded the e-mail either but felt that it may have been because they know she is on the County Open Space Committee. Autumn said the towns she contacted were familiar with the outreach e-mail. Cliff said this item needs to be carried to the next meeting and that there should be another outreach to the towns. Wolfgang said perhaps some towns did not have an Open Space Committee meeting after receipt of the e-mail and that many Open Space Committees do not meet every month.

Cliff said last month he asked the Committee to read the Open Space Plan. There is a lot of very good material in the plan, but at the same time, it is not as strong as, "This is what we want to buy." vs. "This is why we want to buy it." He also said he read the Strategic Growth Plan recommendations as well as the economic studies that Autumn provided to the Committee last month. The transportation factor and the economic

development factor have a lot of support for continuation of the Open Space Program. The Freeholders have got to be shown that having an open space system makes it attractive for quality of life issues. Two days ago, the Star Ledger had an article which said that Sussex County was ranked number five in the 21 counties for quality of life. One of the factors was the open, rural nature of the County and proximity to trails, etc. That is what will draw people to the County. Cliff said he will pull out language from the studies to support keeping the Open Space Program.

Cliff asked Autumn if she has approached the Agriculture Development Board about the expiration of the Open Space Tax. Autumn said there was not a quorum present during the last two meetings, but that she will contact Lori Day on Monday. The Committee discussed the timing in getting the referendum on the ballot.

B. OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND REFERENDUM:

Review of 2005 Ballot Question – Cliff said this issue must go to the Freeholders by summer, but that they need to see support from the towns. He said he will attend the County Agriculture Development Board meeting in April to discuss the Trust Fund Referendum. Wes said he was surprised by the comments in her e-mail from Eric Snyder. Cliff said Eric seems to be in support of the referendum, but that there needs to be proof of support for it.

There was some discussion on the whether or not the ballot language was too broad or not broad enough. Cliff said Hopatcong put their Open Space question on the ballot in 1998. The tax was for three cents and was just for open space and the question failed. In 1999, the question went back for another vote and the tax was for two cents and the funds could be used for recreational facilities. That question passed. He said he will rewrite the County ballot question.

Lisa said that Stillwater does not have an Open Space Committee, but that she does have an Environmental Commission meeting coming up. She plans to have the survey completed by the Environmental Commission and then take it to the Town Committee. She should have the survey back to Autumn by the April Open Space Committee meeting. Autumn said she did include the Environmental Commissions in the survey. Lisa said it could be on the Environmental Commission's Agenda but she hasn't seen it yet.

Cliff said the second outreach should either be by telephone or an additional e-mail or letter. He said he will call ANJEC to get an e-mail list for the County and send it to Autumn. He said he will also ask the New Jersey Land Conservancy for an interpretation on whether or not the tax cap law applies to Open Space Referendums.

Lisa asked if there was a breakdown of how much preservation in the County is Green Acres open space, farmland preservation and historical preservation. She said she

hears arguments against open space because so much of the County is already preserved. Autumn said the County has spent \$4.1 million for Open Space and \$47 million for Farmland Preservation. The Open Space Trust Fund did not allow for historic preservation.

Daniel Conkling, from Green Township, joined the meeting. Cliff said the County Open Space Plan is in need of being reexamined. One of the criticisms of the plan was it was too general and did not identify specific tracks. The County Open Space tax, which has been funding Farmland Preservation as well as Open Space preservation, expires at the end of this year. If it is to be renewed, it has to go back on the ballot and the Freeholders will have to authorize it by August. If there are changes that could be done to the language, they need to be done early. Also, there needs to be strong support for continuing the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Programs. This meeting was called to get an idea about what kind of projects are out there, what the towns' visions are and what works or doesn't work with the Trust Fund. There was also hope that the towns would begin to talk to each other because some of the more successful projects are where open space is linked from one town to another.

Mr. Conkling said in Green Township, there has been outreach to property owners trying to generate interest in open space preservation. They have only had one successful acquisition and that was for a baseball field, which was part of the Tranquility Methodist Church. They were trying to generate funds to rebuild after a fire. The County, The Land Conservancy and other entities partnered with this acquisition. He said that property owners aren't selling, and if they are, it is not for preservation.

Lisa asked Mr. Conkling if there are trail systems in Green Township. Mr. Conkling said there is a trail at Evergreen Park. The park comes out on two locations on Route 611 and is surrounded by their old town hall and by the Western Hills Christian Church. There is a trail that goes around and comes out by the other parking lot on Route 611. There is an easement for a future trail which was part of an approval for a proposed industrial project. Part of his property goes through the old railway. Lou said the town is also trying to tie into Allamuchy and eventually Andover Borough. They are also looking to tie into State and Open Space property near Yellow Frame Road in Frelinghuysen. Mr. Conkling said when the township bought Trinka Airport; they purchased the rail bed from Route 611 up to the end of the property. There is an area for future trails around the edge of a large industrial site.

Donald asked Mr. Conkling if there was any way the Open Space Program could be made more attractive to the towns so they would want to move forward with preservation projects. Mr. Conkling said the process is long and that sometimes sellers don't want to wait. Donald said that perhaps if the process could be streamlined, it would entice people to preserve their property. He asked if there was anything else the Committee can do. Mr. Conkling said right now, property owners aren't even talking to

the town. Cliff said the opposite is true in Hopatcong; people want to sell, but the money isn't there.

Lisa said the public will often fight open space because they feel the purchase of development rights results in a loss of taxes. They are often misinformed about the fact that landowners of preserved farmland still pay property taxes. She said this needs to be clearly communicated to the public.

Wolfgang said Frankford Township has one potential property for open space and he is not aware of anything going into farmland preservation. Autumn said there are two applications for farmland preservation coming from direct municipal Planning Incentive Grants: Dana Ray farm and the Bert Smith farm. Wes asked if there was an application pending from Sandyston. Autumn said the landowner declined his offer but that he may be subdividing and resubmitting an application for a much larger parcel.

Cliff asked Mr. Conkling to have the township complete the Open Space questionnaire and return it to Autumn. Another letter is going out to the towns to invite them to the April meeting. After a brief discussion, the Committee decided to meet at the usual time, 7:30 p.m.

Cliff thanked Mr. Conkling for his attendance and input and invited him back to the next meeting.

Wes asked Autumn if she had a preserved farmland map overlay. Autumn said she did, but that she didn't include it because the preserved farmland database is not joining correctly---about half of the farms aren't showing up. She said she has been working to correct this; but a lot of it is tax data. She hopes to have that GIS layer done in time for the next meeting. Autumn also said she tried adding open space layers and the natural heritage sites, but it got too confusing. She distributed maps showing County open space, by owner; Category One Streams and Buffers; Natural Heritage Sites; and Public Wells and Wellhead Protection Areas. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that Autumn would prepare maps specific to each municipality which will be sent out to the towns with their invitation and survey. A full set will be prepared for the Committee members.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

All business having been completed, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Donald Ploetner. The motion was seconded by Wolfgang Gstatenbauer and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.