

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

APRIL 28, 2016

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
R. Michael Dolan
Donald Ploetner

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Lisa Chammings

STAFF PRESENT: Autumn Sylvester, Program Coordinator
Rudy Dragan, Recording Secretary

ALSO PRESENT: None

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made and seconded to approve the Minutes of February 25, 2016, as presented. All were in favor, with an abstention from Mike Dolan. Motion carried.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the Minutes of March 24, 2016, as presented. The motion was seconded by Glenn Schweizer. All were in favor, with an abstention from Cliff Lundin. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE:

A. ARTICLES OF INTEREST:

Autumn provided the Committee with articles related to restoration work for Sparta Glen; Legislature's opposition to using Open Space funding to pay for salaries and maintenance at State parks; Critical "climate-resilient" lands added to the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area; and the National Park Service special programs and events to celebrate its centennial.

B. SUSSEX COUNTY PLAN UPDATE SCHEDULE:

A timeline was received from Barbara Heskins Davis for the Open Space Plan. It covered the draft date, Freeholder meetings and typical public hearing.

The draft plan is due to the Division of Planning and the Open Space Committee by June 9; the Open Space Committee Public meeting is scheduled for June 23; a report will be provided to the Sussex County Freeholders on June 27; a presentation to the Freeholders on July 13; and delivery of Final Plan Update and adoption/approval by Open Space Committee on July 28. The grant expiration date is July 31 and will go to the Sussex County Board of Freeholders on August 24.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. OPEN SPACE PLAN UPDATE:

1. MODEL & GIS DATA:

The Land Conservancy proposed that the final step is the development of a web-based platform to provide access to the data to municipal officials, residents, stakeholder groups and the County to assess and identify opportunities for preservation and stewardship. The Land Conservancy provided a Scope of Work to achieve this. The fee was broken down into two options. Option 1: The Land Conservancy prepares the data and platform for \$10,000, which would be paid equally by Sussex County and the Open Space Institute. Option 2: The Land Conservancy prepares the data and provides consultation on use of the data. Sussex County GIS prepares the platform for \$2,500, which would be paid by the open Space Institute, pending approval.

A lengthy discussion on both options followed. The Committee questioned the cost for the County GIS Consultant to prepare the platform. Donald said he would like to see a proposal on how Ms. Davis arrived at the \$10,000 cost. Glenn Schweizer agreed and said if this goes before the Freeholder Board, they will want to see it as well. Donald also said we need estimates from the GIS Consultant if they decide to use Option 2.

Ms. Davis also gave a third option which was a proposal from another firm. The cost was \$15,000, and to maintain the platform, it would cost an additional \$2,000 per year. Autumn said she would request a copy of that proposal as well. Donald asked if there were other firms which could provide that same service. Donald also asked if there was any grant money available to cover the out-of-pocket costs. Autumn said she has been looking and hasn't found any. Cliff said they have to consider future costs and annual costs. Autumn said she needs to speak with Thor, the County's webmaster. Donald asked how long after receiving the data will it take to get it running. Autumn said it would take six months, from July, when the report is released, to December 2016, when it would be released to the public. Glenn said it's best to wait until the Freeholders adopt the plan before bringing the \$5,000 issue to them.

2. SITE VISIT/FIELD ASSESSMENT REVIEW:

Cliff said they visited Sparta Glen, Newton Memory Park, and then the group went to two sites in Stillwater. Each site had a different characteristic. Nathaniel's purpose in setting up today's trip was centered on the need for stewardship. There were a couple of sites that were covered with invasive species and are unusable. All of these sites are an active project that his group is already involved in. The discussion centered on whether there is a need to go back to the public for a change in the authorization in the referendum to allow for a certain level of funds to be used for stewardship. Cliff also said he does not think the Freeholders will ever contribute money to maintain State lands. Glenn said he would like to see a planning effort to recognize that and provide examples to identify the need, so that if funds are made available, there may be State, municipal or County funds to help with stewardship programs.

Cliff said when they looked at the Paulins Kill, there were many State, municipal and farmland preservation, and non-profit projects and when they all connect, there is a matrix of protecting the water. Glenn said that Nathaniel put the emphasis on stream bank corridor protection. On the first field trip, most of those properties were State owned property or Wildlife Refuge property. Most of the areas are on either side of the rivers that have river bank erosion. Also, all the trees are gone because 90% of them were old agriculture fields. The plan is to plant trees to help stabilize the banks.

Cliff said if the Open Space plan highlights certain sites for stewardship, will the towns be upset that we're advertising their park and possibly attracting more people. Conversely, will other towns be upset if we don't advertise their parks? Cliff said they would have to run the language by the township if they wanted to use a specific example.

Cliff also talked about a program called, "Tree Recovery New Jersey." The State is contributing 100,000 trees a year for five years to replace trees destroyed by Sandy.

Last week, the Soil Conservation District distributed 5,300 trees to towns in Sussex County.

B. 2016 FARMLAND PRESERVATION AND OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND LEVY:

Autumn reported that the Freeholders set the Open Space Tax. Donald asked if there was any change to the allocation of the funds between farmland preservation and open space. Cliff said that Autumn was told it is flexible. Autumn said that was done by the previous program coordinator. The Freeholders set the split and the tax rate every year but the allocation was a policy. Cliff said it is a joint fund and projects will be considered on their merits. Donald also asked about the funds rolling back to farmland preservation. Cliff said that was also never written down. The 90%/10% allocation and the unused open space funds rolling into farmland preservation funds was part of the first tax, not the second tax. When the first tax expired, these procedures were continued as policy.

Autumn said the Committee needs to finalize the Open Space Plan's goals and objectives. She printed out the matrix that was looked at in September or October, but it was not finalized because the full Committee was not present. The Committee agreed that the document can be sent to Ms. Davis.

Autumn reported that the Highlands Council is considering loosening the septic regulations. Mike said he visited a local farm yesterday with a Ukrainian Agricultural Engineer. He said he was amazed at the extent to which they are working to prevent manure and runoff from going into the streams. There are filters underground to dilute the runoff. He said the experience was very educational.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

All business having been completed, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mike Dolan. The motion was seconded by Donald Ploetner and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.