

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

JULY 23, 2015

The meeting opened at 7:33 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
Wolfgang Gstattenbauer
Donald Ploetner

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Lisa Chammings
Wes Powers

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

ALSO PRESENT: John Willilams, Esq., County Counsel
Barbara Heskins-Davis, Land Conservancy of New Jersey
Freeholder Liaison Richard Vohden

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made by Louis Caruso to approve the Minutes of May 28, 2015 as presented. The motion was seconded by Donald Ploetner and carried unanimously.

CORRESPONDENCE:

None

The Agenda was amended to New Business, B & C.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND REFERENDUM DISCUSSION:

Cliff said the Open Space Committee appeared before the Freeholders on June 10, 2015, and at that meeting, the Freeholders adopted a Resolution to put a question on the November 3 ballot to continue the Open Space Trust Fund. The draft that was provided to the Freeholders had a minimum tax of one half a cent and a maximum of one and a half cents. The half cent minimum was not used in the past but the one and a half cents had been. The Freeholder ultimately adopted a subsequent Resolution on June 25 that amended the June 10th Resolution which took out the minimum appropriation. Therefore, each year the Freeholders will decide the amount of the appropriation. Cliff said a minimum was put in the request to the Freeholders because it would qualify the County for the Green Acres matching funds.

B. REVIEW OF TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND MATERIALS:

Cliff asked John Williams for guidance on how much the Open Space Committee may be involved in the informational session leading up to the November Referendum. He said he believes the Committee can put together a Frequently Asked Questions document and have it available on the County website. He said he knows it cannot say “vote for” or “against” but it can present the facts. Cliff also said he has been approached about organizing a pro referendum or pro Open Space/Farmland Preservation group.

John Williams said he met with Eric Snyder yesterday and they did discuss this issue. Mr. Williams he will look into that as expeditiously as possible. Cliff said that Hunterdon County appropriated funds and retained Trust for Public Land to do a study and make recommendations for the changes in the program. As part of their effort, they put together a public information document. Trust for Public Land is willing to put some of their money and some of their efforts into at least publicizing the County’s referendum. Richard Vohden asked if the handouts are for mailers to be sent out by the Open Space Committee. Cliff thought it was sent out by an individual group but they put together the Facts Sheet. Autumn said she and Eric spoke about this and it was determined that individual members can do whatever they want, but not as the Open Space Committee. She did not believe the Committee is able to send out a mailer. In Hunterdon County, a private group paid the TPL to do the work; it wasn’t Hunterdon promoting it. Barbara Heskins-Davis said the Committee can and should put together a Facts Sheet to educate the voters about what the question means. Cliff said the Facts

Sheet could address some of the misinformation that a couple of people raised at the Freeholder meeting. A woman said she did not want to see County money going to Trenton. Cliff said if the money is raised in Sussex County, it stays in Sussex County. Donald suggested that the bottom of the Facts Sheet should have an area where someone can e-mail the Open Space Committee if they have other questions. Autumn said the Committee can put together a Facts Sheet but it will have to be approved before it can be posted on the website. Freeholder Vohden asked if the Ag. Development Board will need to do their own Facts Sheet. It was agreed that the Facts Sheet would address both programs. Cliff then said they will need some volunteers from the Ag. Development Board to work on this project.

Barbara said she is Vice President of Programs of the Land Conservancy of New Jersey. She said she spoke to Anthony Cucchi today, who is the Director of Trust for Public Lands for New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Trust for Public Land has received a grant from the William Penn Foundation to help with the public education program for the passage of open space ballot questions in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The William Penn Foundation funding is not for material which will say "vote yes." Their funding is based on educating the voter on what the question means. She feels it is worth the conversation with Anthony to find out what it is that Trust for Public Land could support in terms of the ballot question. Barbara said Anthony spoke to her about helping to design post cards or flyers specifically to educate the voters about what the ballot question means. It is up to the Open Space Committee to decide how much information they want out there. She said she can guarantee the Committee, with 99% confidence, that there will be information against the ballot question. She said they should be ahead of the negative information and should have material ready if they choose to use it. She encouraged the Open Space Committee to have a representative talk to Anthony.

Barbara also said that if the ballot question passes, the Trust for Public Land has the funding and the ability to do some polling for Sussex County to discuss with the voters about how the money is allocated for open space and farmland. She said she would provide Autumn with Anthony's contact information.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. 9/11 MEMORIAL TRAIL:

Autumn said she has been part of the Steering Committee for the 9/11 Memorial Trail, which is a multi-state effort for New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to connect all the sites that were affected by 9/11. Currently the effort is for a non-motorized trail but they are going to do a motorized component. Today, it was decided that they would use the Liberty Water Gap Trail which traverses through the Sussex Branch Trail, then crosses and meets up with the Paulins Kill Valley Trail and goes out towards Portland. It is not yet official, but it passed the vote today.

Glenn asked if this would bring any funding for trail maintenance. Autumn said hopefully it will bump up projects such as acquisition, maintenance and stewardship if it is part of the trail. They are not taking ownership over it, so the underlying maintenance groups will still maintain ownership and they would have to apply. They are also considering designating this as a National Scenic Trail or a National Historic Trail and that would open up portions of the trail to Federal funding.

Donald asked if they need to purchase any parcels to connect the trails. Autumn said they are using existing trail systems. If there are areas that are not connected, they will use roadways where feasible. The Liberty Water Gap Trail connects from Jersey City. There is a small piece in Columbia that has not been acquired yet, but they are working on that.

Autumn provided the Committee with a map that shows historical sites and all the 9/11 Memorial sites that are on the trail path. Cliff asked if the municipal monuments will be connected to the 9/11 Memorial Trail. Autumn said there are some "spurs" planned which would connect to municipal monuments.

B. COMMON WATERS UPDATE:

Autumn reported that the Common Waters group met at the beginning of July for a round table discussion and an update of the last meeting, which was held in April. She said this was her first time attending a Common Waters meeting and that Cliff Lundin was there with the Soil Conservation District. The NRCS approved funding for technical assistance for private landowners in the Delaware Watershed. However, the majority of the funding was going to landowners in New York and Pennsylvania because New Jersey already has a substantial amount of funding from other sources.

Cliff said Common Waters is a consortium of groups dealing with the Upper Delaware, from the Delaware Water Gap north. It is comprised of representatives of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania who meet on a quarterly basis to exchange ideas and coordinate development. It was initially coordinated by Eric Olsen of the Nature Conservancy and is now being coordinate by the Pinchot Institute. Last year, the Pinchot Institute ran a program which had \$1 million in funds which was given to forestry orientated properties within the watershed to create a Forest Stewardship Plan (a higher level of management than a Forest Management Plan) and to do some Best Management Practices on the land. It was a pilot program that worked out very well, but the funds are now exhausted.

Cliff also said there is a program run through NRCS called the Resource Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP,) The Delaware River Watershed as a whole has been targeted for an intense effort to improve water quality by improving efforts on both agricultural and forestry land. The William Penn Foundation is coordinating that effort and is putting \$35 million into the program over the next three years. The RCPP grant is targeting three areas within in New Jersey, the Bridgeton Cohansey cluster, the

Highlands cluster and the Kittatinny cluster. Sussex County is in two of the clusters. The funds toward the southern and central clusters in New Jersey are being directed toward agricultural improvements; the funds toward the Kittatinny cluster are being dedicated toward forestry improvements. The Upper Wallkill Watershed Association group is one of the grantees.

C. KICKOFF MEETING WITH THE LAND CONSERVANCY:

Cliff said a couple of years ago; the Open Space Committee received a proposal from the Land Conservancy of New Jersey to have the County fund an update of the Open Space element of the Master Plan. It could not be funded at that time. Subsequently, the Open Space Committee received an endorsement from the County Administrator for a Grant Application from the William Penn Foundation to help with the process. This grant was awarded.

There was discussion with Eric Snyder about the original Open Space Plan, which was broad enough to meet all the requirements of the DEP to qualify for aid. Mr. Snyder would like the updated plan to look at more targeted land acquisitions with specific goals.

Barbara Heskins-Davis said she is with the Land Conservancy of New Jersey, formerly the Morris Land Conservancy. (She distributed three sheets and her business card.) The Land Conservancy of New Jersey is a non-profit land trust, based in Montville, NJ. They did Sussex County's original Open Space and Recreation Plan in 2003, the Sussex County Farmland Plan and updated the Farmland Plan in 2008. They've worked in Sussex County since 2001 and have been preserving land in Sussex County since that time. They've helped the County access Green Acres funds and State Farmland funding.

The William Penn Foundation is putting \$35 million dollars towards the restoration and preservation of the Delaware Watershed. The William Penn Foundation is based out of Philadelphia and traditionally, they've funded education and environment projects within their own hub in Philadelphia. They updated their Strategic Plan and in that plan they made the decision that, for the health of the watershed, they needed to protect the entire watershed. They identified a series of clusters that are of high priority for preservation and restoration. In New Jersey, there are two clusters. The New Jersey Highlands cluster has been identified by the Foundation as one that can receive funding for both land acquisition and restoration.

Barbara said when the Land Conservancy put the proposal together; she spoke to Mr. Snyder several times about what the priorities for Sussex County were. Mr. Snyder said he is looking for a document that's focused, that's strategic and that's targeted on specific areas and specific projects. He wants it to connect to the County's Water Quality Management Plan and the Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan and he wants it to result in specific actions.

Barbara said they spoke with Nathaniel Sajdak, of the Wallkill River Watershed Management Group. He is one of the partners with the Highlands cluster. Nathaniel is actively restoring the riparian corridor in the Upper Paulins Kill. When the grant application was submitted to the William Penn Foundation, the Land Conservancy listed Nathaniel as the sub-contractor with the focus of on-the-ground identification and prioritization of areas in need of restoration, with specific focus on water quality.

The Land Conservancy has a method by which they do plan updates. For this project, they do not have a method pre-defined but they do have a conceptual framework for how they think the project should be laid out. Barbara said she is here this evening to collect base information. She brought with her the first draft of a base map for Sussex County. She expects that Autumn will be working with her to make sure that they have all the data they need.

Autumn said that the County no longer has a GIS Department and that Dave Kunz is now a Consultant working with the County. The Planning Division meets with him bimonthly to go over its GIS needs and requests. Barbara suggested that it would be best if she worked directly with Autumn and Cliff. Autumn advised Barbara that she has not been receiving e-mails from her in a timely fashion. They are being quarantined for a few days by the County IT staff. Autumn said she will contact IT staff about this issue.

Barbara discussed in detail two of the sheets she distributed: "Supporting Materials-Roles and Partners Involved" and "Tasks and Timeline." Barbara also advised the Committee that she met with John Eskilson before he retired and he said any document that is completed is not final until it has received approval from the Freeholders. She asked that Autumn and either Richard Vohden or John Williams follow up with Stephen Gruchacz because John Eskilson requested a Memorandum of Understanding, which she has sent to Mr. Williams and Mr. Gruchacz but has not yet received it back.

There was some discussion about the title of the document. The original title was an Open Space and Recreation Plan. What is being done now is not necessarily an update to the plan. The County is looking for a plan that is written with respect to the conservation of the natural resource base in Sussex County. She feels the title is more in line with a Conservation and Stewardship Plan for Sussex County. (For the purposes of the Memorandum of Understanding, it is referred to as a plan update.)

There was also some discussion about public meetings and whether to hold them before or after the November vote. Barbara said it would be best hold off on the regional meetings until after we know what it is we want to talk about. She wants to get information and base maps together. Donald suggested that the website Facts Sheet have a link to an interactive map so that people can click on their town to see what lands are preserved for farmland and open space. Autumn said for the County Wastewater Management Plan, each municipality had a sub-plan and maps where

people could leave comments, make corrections, etc. A similar map for open space and farmland preservation can be done. Barbara said Donald's suggestion for a way to contact the Open Space Committee was really well placed. She said there should be a list of the Open Space Committee members and a way to contact them. Cliff said the Committee member's town should also be listed.

Barbara also provided the Committee with a sheet outlining the Scope of Work. She said she created it using information from the grant application. The Scope of Work includes a series of things to be assessed; the methods by which to assess them, the maps that will be produced, the results, the community component and the final end products. She reviewed in detail the Scope of Work and suggested that the Open Space Committee review its goals for open space. She will send the goals component from the 2003 plan to Autumn and Cliff to review and make changes. Barbara said Mr. Snyder wants the County's Recreational Trail system to be looked at to see if there are opportunities for connectivity. She said the question for the Committee is whether the targeted and site-specific areas become a separate, confidential addendum or part of the plan.

Glenn asked Barbara if there was a specific Scope of Work that Dan Van Abs has developed as part of the grant process. Barbara said she purposely kept the Scope of Work a little vague because she wants to see how it will evolve. She said she can send him what it is that she has developed from Dan's Scope of Work. Dan is paid on a per diem basis and she anticipates that his focus will be on the interpretation and analysis of the water quality information. He is making sure we use the best available information. She added that he hasn't signed a contract yet, so if the Committee has other suggestions, they should let her know. Glenn said he would like to take a look at the methodology that was used.

Cliff said this is huge project and it is far more than an open space update. If done right, it has the ability to put Sussex County on the map. Glenn said, given the funding constraints that exist, something that produces identifiable projects may assist in going back for more William Penn Funding for acquisition.

Freeholder Vohden asked if the Committee would actively solicit properties in the targeted areas. Barbara said, at this time, she is not sure. Mr. Snyder felt that we needed to have a document that says, "This is what the County is interested in." It may be specific properties or specific regional areas that are important to Sussex County. You may also have a Municipal program where those applications are ranked higher if they are in those priority areas. Barbara said more and more of the grant applications that the Land Conservancy looks at have areas of geographic focus. An applicant may apply outside of that geographic focus, but is less likely to get funding. There is limited County funding and it may want to have areas that are of geographic focus. The challenge is that the County has all the municipalities contributing; so you want to make sure that those geographic focuses are somewhat equitable. She said that what is happening in Sussex County is not unique, in terms of applications coming in,

because municipal funding is less. Towns are reluctant to submit applications because there is a commitment on their part.

After a brief discussion, it was agreed that Barbara would skip the August Open Space meeting and attend the September meeting. She said she hopes to send Autumn and Cliff a link to all of the maps, which can then be forwarded to the Committee members. She will send this link out about a week before the September meeting.

Lou Caruso said he met with the Allamuchy contingent for Open Space. They are looking to tie in the trail from Allamuchy to Andover Township on Route 206. This will tie the trails in Sussex County to Warren County and the Warren County Highlands. Autumn said she spoke with Cory Tierney and Liz from Warren County. They want to meet with her and Eric Snyder to examine trail connections because they are updating their Trails and Recreation Plan. Autumn suggested that the towns also attend this meeting to see what their long-term vision is. It would be good to include that in both plans.

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 Louis Caruso and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.