

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

AUGUST 27, 2015

The meeting opened at 7:34 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
 Wes Powers

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

ALSO PRESENT: None

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made by Wolfgang Gstattenbauer to approve the Minutes of July 23, 2015, with some revisions to the Trust for Public Lands Materials discussion. The motion was seconded by Glenn Schweizer. All were in favor, with an abstention from Wes Powers. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND REFERENDUM DISCUSSION:

Autumn provided the Committee with a draft FAQ Sheet. She said she moved the question, "What is the 2015 Farmland Preservation, Recreation and Open Space Trust fund ballot referendum?" to the top of the page. She also added, "A 'Yes' vote would mean that rather than expire on January 1, 2016, the existing program will continue."

The Committee reviewed the FAQ Sheet and offered the following revisions:

To the question "How was the Farmland Preservation, Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund created?" The phrase, "both referendums provided for the expiration of each authorization after a period of 10 years." will be written as a separate sentence.

The sentence, "The Open Space program uses Trust Fund dollars to acquire land or water areas..." will be changed to read, "The Open Space program uses Trust Fund dollars to acquire land and/or water areas..."

To the section that reads, "Projects are selected through an open and competitive process..." the following sentence will be added. "The trust can only be expended for land purchases within Sussex County and that are endorsed by the municipality."

Donald said a contact e-mail address should be included for those who have questions. He also asked if the Agriculture Development Board had any input to the FAQ Sheet. Autumn said the Ag. Board did not have an August meeting and that she did not think they would have any objections. Cliff said the Ag. Board should see it before it is posted online. Autumn said that they will see it and that she also needs to get approval from the County Administrator, County Counsel, etc.

The Committee said they were satisfied with the FAQ Sheet and added that if they start to see pattern of the same questions being raised, it is an indication that something needs to be clarified. Also, if they start seeing letters to the Herald or hear of word on the street talking about something that is totally wrong, then that point needs to be clarified.

Cliff said Barbara Heskins-Davis has asked him to talk to people within The Trust for Public Land about setting up a committee to work on the referendum. Cliff said he has been very busy since returning from vacation and has not been able to contact the TPL. He said he will be happy to meet with them, or if any members of the Committee want to meet with them, that is fine too. He had hoped to get Bob Muir, who spoke in favor of the referendum at the May meeting, to help him with that effort as well. He asked for volunteers to meet with Bob Muir and the TPL late some afternoon. Glenn said if he was available, he would join them.

Cliff said Ms. Heskins-Davis met with Autumn and Eric Snyder last week to talk about the kick-off of the Open Space Plan. She wanted to put together a Press Release which would say that the Open Space Plan works hand-in-hand with the upcoming Referendum. Eric said that the Press Release would have to be approved through the County Administrator.

Cliff asked Autumn if today was the deadline for conceptual applications. Autumn said that it was, and that she did not receive any applications. When asked, she said the potential application in Vernon did not materialize. Lou asked Autumn if she heard anything about the Green Township farmland preservation application being pulled. Autumn said she received an appraisal report for that farm last week and that the farm is being preserved through Green's Municipal PIG program with the Land Conservancy. The County is just committing funds.

There was some discussion about the lack of Open Space applications and that it was due to the fact that there is no money available. Cliff said if the tax is readopted and is kept low, they've got to convince the Freeholders to allow the Open Space funds to roll over into the next year if the funds aren't expended. This is a policy that was set by the Freeholders; it is not in the Referendum. The only way meaningful open space projects can be preserved is if they can accumulate a couple of years' worth of funding.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. REVIEW OF 2003 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

Autumn provided the Committee with the Executive Summary of the 2003 Open Space Plan that outlined the goals and objectives. Glenn asked if there was any ability to determine whether the original goals had been achieved. Under the Land Conservancy's proposal, they were going to take a look at the goals in 2003 to see if we've achieved the goals; have we made a concerted effort; have we exceeded the goals. Cliff asked if it was possible to look at the projects that were funded and see which categories they fit into. Most projects would fall into multiple categories.

Donald suggested the back of the FAQ Sheet show the projects that have been preserved, without listing the acreage. Glenn said it should also show the towns that have received the funding. Autumn said that information could be shown as a section on the website. Cliff said the average citizen may not realize the County helped fund an open space project. Donald said the Committee talked about putting an interactive map on the website where a citizen can see the projects in their own town. Lou suggested that there be a list of towns that received open space funding. Cliff said that list of acres per town was very effective but it can be changed to projects per town. It can say that 21 of the 24 municipalities in Sussex County have benefited by the Trust Fund in some way. Autumn said she can create a story map just for projects that have

received County funding and hopefully she can get that done by November. Donald also suggested that the FAQ Sheet contain the website for Open Space information.

Wolfgang recommended that the goal, "Secure protection of and access to surface water bodies" read, "Protect watersheds and the access to surface water bodies." Cliff said the goals are good but it would be great if the projects could be broken down to show the needs they addressed. Cliff asked if there were any goals that could be added or reinforced that speak to the current trends, such as a regional greenway or trail development. Cliff said Eric Snyder talked about using targeted development for certain connections. Autumn said Eric's wish would be for the plan to identify properties that need to be preserved because they connect certain other open space, greenways or connect missing links of trails. Cliff asked how that can be enunciated as a goal. Glenn said the goals are listed in order of the responses to all of the planning outreaches. Perhaps the Committee can do their own prioritizing, what they think the goals are, with an eye towards making it as supportive as possible. Perhaps they can break Greenway and Trail Development two different items. They can be moved up the goals list to be under "Protect the quantity and quality of water resources." Cliff said that could also talk about the interconnection of municipalities. Lou said it would also connect Counties; Glenn, Autumn and Donald added that States would be connected.

There was some discussion about stewardship of Open Space. Cliff said that both land conservancies and a group called, "North Jersey RC&D" had money available to for Stewardship of Open Space, a matching money program to help towns develop a Stewardship Plan for open space. Very few towns took advantage of it. Now that money is gone. Autumn said she just heard that the Highlands Council is using the money from PSE&G to open up grant opportunities for towns and counties in the Highlands area to use for open space and farmland preservation. She believes it is around \$9 million.

Cliff asked if the Committee had any changes to the goals ranking. Wolfgang said he would like to see Greenway and Trail Development moved to rank immediately after, "Safeguard threatened and endangered species habitat." Also, he feels that, "Preserve scenic vistas" is more important than "Provide opportunities for active recreation." When asked, the Committee agreed that Autumn should send them a Word version of the Goals and Objectives so that they can rank them before the next meeting. Glenn suggested that if the Committee thought of a goal and objective that isn't listed, they should add them.

Autumn provided the Committee with a spreadsheet that Ms. Heskins-Davis emailed her today. She wants the Committee to work on meeting dates to visit the municipalities to discuss the Open Space Plan update. She included the Environmental Commissions, Open Space Committees, Planning Board meetings and governing body meetings. As shown, there are meetings every night from now until December because

each town would need to be visited once and not every town meets on the same day. Ms. Heskins-Davis decided this was an impossible task and felt that it would be better to schedule special meetings during the workday and go from town to town over a span of five days. She requested that a Committee member attend the meetings with her. Autumn suggested that the members take the town they represent and the surrounding towns. When asked what time of day would the meetings be held, Autumn said that would be up to the municipality. The towns will be asked to set up one meeting which will be attended by representatives from their various committees. Glenn suggested that the meetings be set up with the towns first and the list be given to the Open Space Committees to see if they are available. Autumn said Ms. Heskins-Davis would like to have somebody from the Open Space Committee attend the town meeting, especially if it is in the town they represent. The Committee said they will make the best effort to attend. Autumn asked if there are any days of the week or times that will not work. Lou and Donald said that they would not be available on a Friday. Autumn said the meetings should last between 45 minutes to an hour and that materials will be provided to the Committee member who is attend the meeting. Glenn suggested that the Committee members be copied on the correspondence with their particular towns. Some members offered corrections to the meeting dates that were listed on the spreadsheet.

B. WEBSITE:

Autumn asked the Committee if the website should talk about the number of acres preserved. Donald said if the number of acres preserved is listed, the public may say that the County has preserved enough land. Other members agreed.

Lou displayed the Green Township Greenbelt which runs from Allamuchy Township through Green Township and into Andover Township, terminating at Route 206. He said he plans to invite all the parties to their October Open Space Committee meeting. He believes that the town Engineer has applied for a grant for a section that goes through Green Township.

Sandyston Township is finishing up the acquisition of five tax lien properties. Three of those were going for closing to Green Acres with a fourth pending. Even though a Sandyston resident spoke up against the tax, the Sandyston Mayor and Committee are very pro Open Space. Branchville Borough is currently dealing with Green Acres on another piece of the railroad link in town which involve two separate blocks and lots. Because of their current sewer project going in, it was encumbering one of those, which will be split apart. One will be marketed to Green Acres and the second to follow, once they do the legal work for the easements. Green Acres is still interested in the Madison Reservoir property from Branchville and they are back in negotiations. Green Acres is still acquiring smaller parcels and is still putting links together.

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 8:35 p.m.