

SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

NOVEMBER 19, 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

Louis Caruso
Lisa Chammings
Wolfgang Gstattenbauer
Donald Ploetner

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Glenn Schweizer, Vice Chairman

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

MINUTES CORRECTION/APPROVAL:

A motion was made by Wolfgang Gstattenbauer to approve the Minutes of October 22, 2015, as presented. The motion was seconded by Donald Ploetner. All were in favor, with an abstention from Louis Caruso. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE:

A. ARTICLES OF INTEREST:

Autumn provided the Committee with articles relating to a Delaware River boat ramp, a Geotourism project to highlight the Delaware River Valley and the passage of a Green ballot question in the County and Newton. A short discussion followed.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND REFERENDUM RESOLUTS:

Chairman Lundin said the Open Space Trust Fund Referendum passed by a 70%/30% margin. He publically thanked the Trust for Public Land, the NJ Conservation Foundation and The Land Conservancy of New Jersey for funding a flyer that went out to 15,000 households in Sussex County. He said the flyer was professionally done and educated the public about the referendum. It may have made the difference.

Cliff said now that the referendum has passed, the tax is authorized for another ten years. The questions becomes one of where are we taking it. As discussed last month, he put together a draft letter to the Board of Chosen Freeholders. The letter was distributed to the Committee earlier today. He is looking for comments on the letter and ultimately, if they think it is a good idea, authorization to send it.

Donald said it is a good letter and that it needs to go before the Freeholder Board so that the process can begin. Lou greed with Donald and said it covered everything they discussed.

Cliff explained that the letter requested the opportunity to meet with the Freeholders to discuss the following:

1. Implementation of the Farmland Preservation and Open Space and Recreation Trust Fund referendum
2. The status of the ongoing plan update to the 2003 Sussex County Open Space Master Plan
3. The rate of taxation to be utilized for the trust for 2016
4. Possible modifications of the current informal allocation between Farmland Preservation projects and Open Space projects
5. Possible modification of the current informal policy regarding rollover of Open Space allocations
6. Possible use of Trust Funds for stewardship projects
7. 2016 appointments

The letter also requested that the Committee meet with the Freeholder Board prior to the introduction of the 2016 budget.

Donald asked if it was known when the 2016 budget would be introduced, so that the Committee would have an idea of when they should meet with the Board. Cliff said typically the Freeholders do a temporary budget at the January meeting, and then they introduce it during February/March and adopt it March/April.

Lisa asked if there was anything in the Open Space By-Laws regarding the Open Space Committee helping to oversee funds for stewardship. Cliff said the ballot question talks about stewardship, but it essentially says, "... for the purpose of acquisition of farmland for farmland preservation purposes and acquisition of lands for recreation and open space program." Cliff said one of the things they heard from the towns was for the possibility of a small program to help them maintain a trail or to mark a trail. Theoretically, that is not acquisition but it would definitely help municipalities. Autumn said there is a catchall item that says, any other project that the Open Space Committee feels strongly about.

MOTION:

A motion was made by Donald Ploetner to accept the above-described letter and send it to the Freeholder Board. The motion was seconded by Lou Caruso and carried unanimously.

B. OPEN SPACE PLAN MUNICIPAL OUTREACH DISCUSSION:

Cliff said, as part of the grant to allow The Land Conservancy to update the 2003 Open Space Master Plan, meetings were held with 23 of the 24 municipalities in Sussex County over the past month. He said someone from the Open Space Committee attended 22 of the 23 meetings. He received an email earlier this evening from Barbara Davis with a summary of the meetings. He read the email to the Committee members.

During the meetings, suggestions included: have applications on a rolling basis; consider park stewardship management as an eligible application; and education on the rules or application process. Many towns noted the shift in demographics and loss in the young population. Under Public Lands Management, no one said the lands were being managed or managed well. Trails are a huge priority for nearly all the towns and several towns remarked that they want to put in fitness trails for adults. Ecotourism could be improved with better signage, information and web-based applications to support ecotourism initiatives. Ms. Davis sent Cliff a PDF with a summary file of all 23 municipalities; who attended the meetings and what was said. Cliff said he will send this report to Eric Snyder. Wolfgang said he wanted to thank Barbara for an outstanding job in terms of setting the stage right, listening and documenting the meetings.

Cliff said in the new plan, the overall primary goal is water priorities for land preservation. Dan Van Abs and the GIS staff at The Land Conservancy are developing a model to look at the various layers of GIS to come up with a priority for land acquisition, based upon water quality considerations. The four main areas of water quality consideration they looked at was protecting the water resources hydrology, looking at stream and aquifer quality, looking at source water or surface water use protection and ecosystem functions. Under each item, there are four or five categories that can be mapped using GIS. The goal is to develop a point system.

Cliff said that is not the only concept in land preservation because we also have to look at connectivity. What connects towns? What connects ecosystems? What creates an overall ecosystem? At the same time, we have to look at the reality of what the towns have done and have not done. The people who are funding the Open Space Plan update, the Open Space Institute, have a model of their own. They are allowing us to use the other model, because our model is much more detailed than theirs. They want the recommendations field verified. The Wallkill Group will visit a sample of the sites that come out of the water quality model. Cliff said they can come up with targeted acquisitions, but that's not always the pieces of property that come in. There has to be a way that an application property can be run through the model to see what the score is. Donald felt the Committee should take applications based on their own merit. A property may not meet certain criteria but may be in the best interest of the County to preserve.

Autumn said she went to a conference last Tuesday in Narrowsburg, NY for the Delaware Watershed River Basin Study, which is also being funded through the William Penn Foundation. She said the conference was very beneficial and she can forward the material to the Committee. There will be another conference in Phillipsburg on January 16 and she thought the Open Space Committee would be interested in attending.

Donald said after the municipal meeting with Sparta Township, he received an email from Ernest Hofer, the Foundation Secretary/Science Advisory for the Lake Mohawk Preservation Foundation. He asked him to present an issue to the Committee for feedback. There is a riparian restoration and reforestation project along 4.5 ± contiguous miles of mainstream corridor of the Wallkill River to will improve water quality and promote long-term watershed health. The project goal is to plant 10,000 trees, invasive species removal and control, increase in-stream and streamside habitat and biodiversity, reduce stream temperatures and sediment and nutrient loadings. Approximately 250 trees have already been planted by students from Sparta Township High School. They are seeking funding to cover the cost of trees, planting supplies, invasive weed removal and control, streambank stabilization materials, etc.

Cliff said there is a program called, "Reforest New Jersey," which is run by NJDEP. The goal is to plant 100,000 trees per year for a five year period to make up for the losses

from Storms Sandy, Irene and Lee. Each year, the DEP makes available to any municipality in Sussex County, up to 2,000 seedlings. The DEP ships the seedlings to the Soil Conservation office on Halsey Road and the towns pick them up. He said he would email Donald the link for Reforest New Jersey. He said he believes, under special circumstances, they'll waive the 2,000 tree limit. There may be some financial help for supplies available through Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP.) They should also talk to North Jersey Resource Conservation and Development. They have a truck with shovels and other equipment that they can rent out to groups. There was some discussion regarding projects which were done by the Wallkill River Watershed Group.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

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 8:05 p.m.