

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING

McDade Administration Building
Planning Department (4th Floor)
640 South Broad Street
Trenton, New Jersey 08650-0068

****Meeting via Zoom online platform due to Covid-19****

April 6th, 2021

PRESENT:

Leslie R. Floyd
Haig Kasabach, Chair
Alan Hershey, Vice Chair
Wendy Mager
Jennifer Rogers
Kristine Walsh

REPRESENTATION:

County Executive
Assunpink Rep.
Piedmont Rep.
Millstone Rep.
Park Commission Rep.
Ag. Board Rep.

ABSENT:

Tricia Fagan
Michael Shine

Cultural Rep.
Planning Board Rep.

NON-VOTING:

Emily Blackman
Lisa Fritzing

Secretary
Assistant Planning Director

PUBLIC: Dan Pace

Chairman Kasabach called the April 6, 2021 meeting of the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board to order at 5:00 PM.

I. STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Ms. Blackman announced that pursuant to the Sunshine Law, notice of this meeting was mailed to the Trenton Times and the Trentonian, and was posted on the County Planning Department's website, including a public zoom meeting link and instructions.

II. REORGANIZATION

A. Election of Officers – Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Attorney

Ms. Floyd asked for nominations for the position of Board Chair. Mr. Hershey nominated Mr. Kasabach to continue as Board Chair. Ms. Mager seconded. Mr. Kasabach was unanimously approved as Board Chair. Ms. Floyd asked for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair. Mr. Kasabach nominated Mr. Hershey to continue as Board Vice-Chair. Ms. Walsh seconded. Mr. Hershey was unanimously approved as Board Vice-Chair. Ms. Floyd asked for nominations for Board Secretary. Mr. Kasabach nominated Ms. Blackman to continue as Board Secretary. Ms. Walsh seconded. Ms. Blackman was unanimously approved as Board Secretary. Ms. Floyd asked the Board to acknowledge Ms. Susan Bacso of Parker McCay as Board Attorney. The Board unanimously acknowledged Ms. Bacso as Board Attorney.

B. Adoption of 2021 Meeting Schedule

Ms. Blackman asked the Board to review the proposed 2021 meeting schedule. Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the schedule as proposed. Ms. Mager seconded. The 2021 meeting schedule was unanimously approved.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the October 6, 2020 minutes. Ms. Mager seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT: Mr. Dan Pace introduced himself to the Board – he will be working on preservation projects for FOHVOS. He previously worked on farmland preservation as a staff Planner for the County.

V. OLD BUSINESS: None

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2021 Open Space Tax and Grant Program Review

- 1. 2021 Tax Levy Resolution:** Ms. Blackman presented a draft resolution to the Board recommending the collection of the Open Space Tax in 2021 at the current rate of \$0.025 per \$100 of equalized assessed value. Mr. Hershey asked for clarification about the current allocation of open space tax funds. Ms. Floyd replied that the allocation is 70% land acquisition, 20% park development/historic preservation and 10% County stewardship. This resolution does not make a recommendation regarding the allocation. There may be an opportunity at a future meeting to comment about the allocation. Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the resolution as presented. Ms. Mager seconded. The resolution passed unanimously.
- 2. 2021 Grant Policy:** Ms. Blackman presented the 2020 Grant Policy and stated that no changes are proposed to the grant percentages (40% of CMV/appraised value; 50% for urban projects) or project cap (\$1,600,000 in County funds) for 2021. Staff does recommend adding a requirement that non-profits provide a copy of a grant application to the municipality where a project is located – and provide proof to the County in the form of an acknowledgment of receipt or resolution of support. The Board agreed that this requirement should be added. Ms. Blackman will send a draft to the Board for approval. (Ms. Rogers joined the meeting at 5:25 pm)

Ms. Mager asked whether the County would consider increasing the current \$1,600,000 County funding project cap in certain situations. Specifically, in the case of Princeton where land values are very high, the project cap is restrictive. She proposed the idea of linking the project cap to assessed value in municipalities and brought up the fact that municipalities with higher assessed values contribute more in open space taxes than other municipalities. Ms. Floyd replied that the County has never considered a sliding scale for grant funding and she will get back to Ms. Mager after thinking about the issue.

B. Grant Applications

- 1. Amboy Bank property, Princeton – D&R Greenway Land Trust application (Ridgeview Conservancy partner)**
Fee, 4.48 acres, 388 Cherry Valley Road (Block 401, Lot 2)
Grant request: \$99,200 (40% Appraised Value)
Status: Approved, \$99,200

Ms. Blackman presented the Amboy Bank property application from D&R Greenway Land Trust for the Board's consideration. The property is approximately 4.48 acres with frontage along Cherry Valley Road. An existing bridge provides access to the road across the Cherry Run stream that traverses the property's northern boundary. The property is approximately 90% forested wetlands and is part of the Princeton Ridge, an environmentally sensitive area. The property is classified as High and Medium-High Priority for preservation by the NJ Conservation Blueprint. Cherry Run is a tributary of the Beden's Brook, a Category-1 stream. The area in which the property is located has been documented to provide habitat for numerous species designated as endangered and/or threatened in New Jersey, including the red-shouldered hawk, barred owl, wood turtle and bobcat. In addition, the history of this property and adjoining properties is significant – including Native American artifacts and connections to Paul Tulane, Silvia Dubois and Upton Sinclair. A history trail is planned for the area that will include this property. The Princeton Environmental and Historic Commissions have passed resolutions identifying this property as a high priority for conservation. This project is a partnership between D&R Greenway and the Ridgeview Conservancy.

The grant request is for 40% of appraised value, or \$99,200 with one appraisal of \$248,000. Only one appraisal is required because D&R is not using Green Acres funds (and even if they were, Green Acres only requires one appraisal for projects under \$250,000). The Board discussed the appraisal and value, given that the property is almost entirely wetlands and it would presumably be difficult to get construction approvals. The appraised value relies on the ability to get a NJDEP permit; a previous owner had a permit, but did not renew it. The Board reviewed the comparable sales in the appraisal and discussed whether a second appraisal should be obtained. After discussion, the Board decided to accept the current value because it does appear to be significantly discounted from other building lots in Princeton.

Mr. Kasabach made a motion to approve the application, which was seconded by Ms. Mager. The application was unanimously approved.

VII. DISCUSSION

A. Project Updates

1. **County Open Space/Farmland Acquisitions:** Ms. Blackman reported that the Chowdhury farm preservation project is close to closing and the Kerr farm preservation project is making good progress. The survey is complete and the family is expected to apply for the subdivision soon. Both projects are in Hopewell and include public access components for trail connections. Ms. Fritzinger updated the Board about current County open space acquisition projects. Both properties adjacent to Baldpate are under contract – the one off of River Road has some significant survey problems, but the County will continue to pursue it if possible. The Jacobitz property adjacent to Mercer Meadows is also under contract.
2. **Park Development**
 - a. **Dam Site 21 (Miry Run):** There are no updates at this time.
 - b. **Moore Station Quarry:** Two public meetings about quarry park development ideas have been held with high public attendance. A draft plan will be presented at a third meeting via zoom on May 18th. Board members can find the public survey about park development options on the Park Commission’s website.
3. **2021 Stewardship Projects:** Ms. Rogers updated the Board about stewardship projects planned for 2021. They include new meadow seedings, native plantings at Mercer Meadows and Roebing Park, plantings for Ash tree replacement (due to emerald ash borer) at Baldpate, a forest restoration fencing project at Sommer Park in the Sourlands, a living shoreline installation and continued treatment of phragmites at Roebing Park and invasive species management across the County, including the treatment of Tree of Heaven (Ailanthus) to reduce spotted lanternfly populations. Of particular note is the replacement of about 30 acres of lawn at Mercer County Park with native meadow habitat. (Ms. Mager left the meeting, 6:27 pm)
4. **County Open Space Plan Update:** Ms. Fritzinger sent the draft Open Space Plan update to the Board ahead of the meeting and asked them to review it before the May 4th meeting. She explained that it does not contain any major changes. After discussion at the May 4th meeting, she expects to present a final draft to the Board for adoption at the June meeting.
5. **Return on Environment Study:** Ms. Fritzinger reported that the Return on Environment Study is almost complete. She expects to have a final draft this summer.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE: None

IX. CLOSED SESSION (if necessary): None

X. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:41 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Blackman, Secretary

Date Adopted: May 4, 2021