

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****

May 4th, 2021

PRESENT:

Leslie R. Floyd
Haig Kasabach, Chair
Alan Hershey, Vice Chair
Tricia Fagan
Jennifer Rogers
Michael Shine
Kristine Walsh

REPRESENTATION:

County Executive
Assunpink Rep.
Piedmont Rep.
Cultural Rep.
Park Commission Rep.
Planning Board Rep.
Ag. Board Rep.

ABSENT:

Wendy Mager

Millstone Rep.

NON-VOTING:

Emily Blackman
Lisa Fritzingler

Secretary
Assistant Planning Director

PUBLIC: None

Chairman Kasabach called the May 4, 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. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the April 6, 2021 minutes. Mr. Kasabach seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

IV. OLD BUSINESS: None

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. 2021 Mercer County Open Space Plan Update

Ms. Fritzingler and Ms. Blackman presented a draft of the 2021 Open Space Plan update for the Board's review. A copy was sent to Board members prior to the meeting and Mr. Kasabach sent comments via email. Ms. Blackman shared the plan on her screen via zoom and went through all of the pages, with Board members providing comments and discussion throughout as follows:

- Utility corridors: Mr. Kasabach commented that utility corridors are an untapped resource that could provide miles of trails throughout the County if the utility companies could be released of liability. Mr. Hershey asked whether the landowner liability law that protects private landowners from liability related to trail use could be extended to utilities. Ms. Floyd and Ms. Fritzingler will ask the County's attorney to look into existing law and what challenges there might be to develop comparable legislation for utilities. Ms. Floyd noted that County staff cannot suggest legislative actions, but that utility liability protection for the purpose of trail development is a good long-term goal. Projects in utility corridors have been accomplished in the past through seeking one-time permission to use specific parts of corridors rather than global agreements. Mr. Shine asked whether another challenge is difficulty with utilities' large bureaucracies and knowing who to channel requests through. Ms. Fritzingler confirmed that this is the case. She will add some language to the Plan addressing the importance of these corridors and the challenges related to accessing them for trails.
- Habitat stewardship: Mr. Hershey requested clarification about a statement in the Plan related to the health of forests and invasive species management. Ms. Rogers will review this section of the Plan with Ms. Fritzingler to provide her input and guidance.
- Environmental remediation: Mr. Hershey asked whether County funding is available for environmental remediation projects. Ms. Floyd clarified that the County does use its funding for remediation on its own lands.
- Accessibility: The Board discussed whether the term "accessible" is problematic in the way it is used in the Plan. In some cases, the Plan does intend the term "accessible" to indicate accessibility per ADA standards and in other cases the Plan intends the word "accessible" to indicate the general availability of open space. Mr. Hershey noted that many open space trails are footpaths that are not intended to be accessible in the ADA sense of the term. Ms. Fritzingler will review where the term is used in the Plan and make corrections where needed.
- Acquisition policies: Ms. Rogers asked whether the County acquisition policies could include regional priorities (such as CHANJ) in addition to the County prioritizing land adjacent to current Parks. Ms. Floyd and Ms. Fritzingler will consider this addition. Ms. Fagan arrived 5:25 pm.
- Grants disbursed: The Board asked that the dollar amount of grants disbursed since 2010 be included in the Plan. Ms. Fritzingler is planning to add this number.
- Acreage goals: Mr. Hershey asked to add the number of acres that would be needed to maintain the current County standard of 26 acres per 1,000 people considering the County's projected future population growth. Ms. Fritzingler will make this addition.
- Action Program Areas: Mr. Hershey asked that an overall goal for each Action Program Area be added. Ms. Fritzingler will make this addition.
- Executive Summary: The Board asked that the Executive Summary include mention of the Return on Environment Study that is in progress and that the Summary specifically mention carbon sequestration as one of the benefits of preserved open space. Ms. Fritzingler will make this addition.

The Board thanked Ms. Fritzingler for her work on the draft Plan and Ms. Fritzingler thanked the Board for their input. A Final Draft will be presented to the Board at the June 1st meeting for their consideration for adoption. Ms. Fritzingler will provide a copy by email a week or two before the meeting for Board review. Ms. Floyd plans to present the updated Open Space Plan and the updated Farmland Preservation Plan to the County Planning Board for adoption as part of the County's Master Plan in late summer.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Project Updates

- 1. County Open Space/Farmland Acquisitions:** Ms. Blackman reported that the Chowdhury and Kerr farm preservation projects are still in progress. Ms. Fritzinger reported that the current County open space acquisition projects are also still in progress. The County is still hoping to find a solution to preserve the property off of River Road that has significant survey issues.
- 2. Park Development:** Ms. Blackman reminded the Board that a draft plan for the Moores Station Quarry park development will be presented via a public zoom meeting on May 18th. Ms. Blackman will forward the meeting information to the Board. (Mr. Shine left the meeting, 6:00 pm)
- 3. 2021 Stewardship Projects:** Ms. Rogers and Ms. Blackman updated the Board about recent stewardship projects – the Stewardship Department planted ~1,400 native trees and shrubs over the past few weeks in Mercer Meadows, Baldpate and Roebing Park with the help of many volunteers!
- 4. Return on Environment Study:** Ms. Fritzinger reported that meetings continue for the development of the ROE study. She expects to have a final draft in August.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE: None

VIII. CLOSED SESSION (if necessary): None

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Blackman, Secretary

Date Adopted: June 1, 2021