

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING
April 2, 2024 MEETING MINUTES

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

VOTING MEMBERS:

(Present)

Dan Benson, County Executive
Haig Kasabach, Chair, Assunpink Representative
Alan Hershey, Vice Chair, Piedmont Representative
Anthony Cucchi, Park Commission Representative
Wendy Mager, Millstone Representative
Emily Blackman, Mercer CADB Representative
Michael Shine, Planning Board Representative

(Absent)

None

NON-VOTING:

(Present)

Leslie R. Floyd, Director of Planning, County Executive Representative
Cindy Taylor, Secretary

(Absent)

Susan Bacso, Counsel at Parker McCay

PUBLIC:

None

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Kasabach called the April 2, 2024 meeting of the Mercer County Open Space Preservation Board to order at 5:03 p.m.

I. STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Ms. Floyd announced that in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of this meeting was mailed to the Trenton Times and was posted on the County Planning Department's website, including a public zoom meeting link and instructions.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Mager provided a spelling correction to the minutes. With that correction, Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the December 5, 2023 minutes. Ms. Mager seconded the motion. Minutes were unanimously approved.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT: None

IV. OLD BUSINESS: None

V. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. **Reorganization** – Ms. Floyd asked for nominations for Board Chair or the slate. Mr. Shine made a motion for the slate. Ms. Mager seconded the motion. The slate consists of Mr. Kasabach as Chair, Mr. Hershey as Vice Chair, Ms. Taylor as Secretary, and Ms. Bacso as Counsel. Ms. Floyd noted that Ms. Bacso’s contract runs until the end of June. The motion passed unanimously.
Mr. Benson moved to adopt the 2024 Meeting schedule. Mr. Shine seconded the motion. The 2024 Open Space Preservation Board schedule was unanimously adopted.
- b. **2024 Tax Levy Recommendation** – Mr. Benson explained that the new administration has brought in a financial consultant to better understand the status of the Open Space Trust Fund. As is currently understood, the Open Space project commitments exceed the available funding in the Trust, even after increasing the Open Space tax to \$0.03. However, increasing to \$0.03 allows the MCOSAP program funding and stewardship projects to continue, while park improvement projects may be funded through other avenues. The financial study is ongoing. The Board recommended an edit to the draft tax levy resolution, removing a “whereas” clause that was addressed elsewhere in the document. Mr. Hershey moved to adopt the edited draft and it was seconded by Mr. Benson. The Resolution to increase the tax levy to \$0.03 passed unanimously.
- c. **Mercer County Open Space Preservation Assistance Program Policy Re-evaluation** – Mr. Hershey noted that the more land our partners preserve, the higher the stewardship burden becomes and wanted to call attention to the need for a stewardship funding source. Ms. Floyd affirmed that the current Policy only covers the cost of purchase price, not ancillary costs and not stewardship. She also noted that the County owns and manages approximately 10,000 acres, so the demand for stewardship and park improvement funds for County land is substantial. Mr. Benson noted that this funding need is recognized by the Legislature and he sees the County as an able partner to assist in acquiring grant funding for stewardship and trail work. Mr. Cucchi noted that the County stewardship staff have provided in-kind services by way of sharing expertise and ideas with Municipalities. Ultimately, it was acknowledged that the Policy will remain as-is, while the new Administration works to complete the 2023 audit. Mr. Shine provided a grammatical edit to the Policy and made a motion to approve as amended. Mr. Hershey seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved as amended.
- d. **Hamilton Township application for 2367 Kuser Road, Hamilton Township (Block 2575 Lots 167-170)** – Hamilton Township submitted an application for a fee simple purchase of approximately 10.5 acres that contains a vacant resident dwelling, former print shop, and other associated buildings. Veterans Park is located across the street. Hamilton’s ultimate goal is to add public access trails to the property. The CMV is \$2,880,000 and the township is requesting \$1,152,000; 40% of the CMV. The board discussed the discrepancy between purchase price (\$3,400,000) and CMV. Mr. Kasabach provided context, noting the owner already obtained planning board approvals for a warehouse and suggested the owner may be trying to recoup their costs for engineering and environmental studies. The board also discussed a mathematical discrepancy between the purchase price (\$3,400,000) and total funding amount. Regardless of the discrepancy, Mr. Hershey made a motion to approve the request to fund 40% of the CMV and Mr. Benson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, with Mr. Kasabach recused.

**VI. DISCUSSION:
Project Updates**

Ms. Floyd stated two County-owned farms in Hopewell were sold via auction and are now privately owned with agriculture easements.

She also noted that the County is under contract to purchase the PennEast property on Blackwell Road in Hopewell, which abuts Curlis Lake. The County is currently in litigation over the purchase and there are no further updates.

1. Park Development Project Updates: Mr. Cucchi reported the following:

- a. **Moore's Station Quarry** – The County is now responsible for maintenance of the site. Next steps will be determined after the financial assessment of the Open Space Trust Fund is complete.
- b. **Dam Site 21** – Dredging is about 25% complete and should be done by the end of May. Staff are currently in the process of submitting NJDEP permit applications for improvements (parking, trails, etc.).

- c. Trenton Wharf Project – NJDOT work on the flood wall will take as much as a year and a half to construct, so County park improvements will not begin until after that.

2. Stewardship - Mr. Cucchi reported the following:

- a. The Community Based Deer Management (CBDM) program was completed in March. Unfortunately, the State did not approve CBDM at Roebling Park, partially because the park does not support traditional recreation hunting (which works in tandem with CBDM). The native plant communities at this park continue to be damaged by over-browsing from deer.
- b. Bid specification documents are being finalized for deer enclosure fencing at Baldpate Mountain (50 acres) and a portion of Cadwalader Park in Trenton. The County does not own Cadwalader, but was able to help source US Forest Service grant funding for the project.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE: None

VIII. CLOSED SESSION (if necessary): None

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Shine moved to end the meeting and Mr. Hershey seconded the motion. The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:03 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Taylor

Cindy Taylor, Secretary