

Raritan Township Open Space Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 11, 2017, 5:30 p.m.
Raritan Township Municipal Building

Members present: Committeeman Richard Chen; Committeeman Craig O'Brien; Township Engineer, Tony Hajjar; Chair, Amy Greene; Tim McCarthy; James Miller; Joel Throne

Members absent: Ryan Edge; Steve Farsiou

Ms. Greene advised that tonight's hearing is the second of two (2) required public hearings to present the proposed 2017 Raritan Township Open Space plan and solicit public input. Ms. Greene explained that the updated plan is a requirement of the 2018 Raritan Township Master Plan Reexamination Open Space Element and also a requirement for continued NJDEP Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant funding for land acquisition.

Ms. Greene presented an overview of the proposed plan that included the following:

- Inventory of Existing Raritan Township Parkland/Open Space
 - 2,456 acres preserved open space (10%)
 - 1,360 acres of privately-owned permanently preserved farmland (5%)
 - Explanation of parcel ownership, Figure 1, Raritan Township Existing Open Space
 - Green: Township
 - Purple: County
 - Turquoise (teal) non-profit, i.e. New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Hunterdon County Land Trust, State-owned, South Branch wildlife management area
 - Parcel Descriptions
 - Active recreation – pavilions, playgrounds, walking trails, athletic fields
 - Passive recreation – conservation lands
- Proposed Open Space Plan
 - Identification of new properties for public open space and farmland preservation – Ms. Greene referred to Table #3, open space plan priority properties for acquisition and preservation, explaining that the properties are categorized based on certain criteria and ranked accordingly.
 - Goals used to develop open space plan
 - Limit Residential Growth
 - Protect Environmental Resources and Vistas or Greenways
 - Linkages to Existing Open Space
 - Future Active and Passive Recreation
 - Historic Resources

- Limit Residential Growth – Ms. Greene advised that properties are ranked according to the following criteria:
 - Existing funding partner
 - High density residential zoning
 - Large farms
 - Contiguous to existing farms

She added that acquisition costs include development rights only and funding partners typically contribute 80% of the cost. She continued that 1,154 acres have been identified in this category.

- Protect Environmental Resources – Ms. Greene spoke of environmental resources targeted for protection through open space preservation, in accordance with the Master Plan, including water resources, stream corridors, and aquifer recharge and wellhead protection areas. She added that the following environmental resources have been identified as important for water resources protection: Category 1 (C1) stream corridors including the Wickechoke Creek and Plum Brook; Category 2 (C2) streams including the South Branch Raritan River and its tributaries, Neshanic River, Walnut Brook; forests; habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species. Ms. Greene also noted additional environmental resources important for water resources protection including wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes. She noted that 518 acres have been identified in this category.
- Linkages to Existing Open Space – Ms. Greene explained the value of adjacency to existing open space to the public and opportunity for trail connections. Ms. Greene commented that over time the Township has been acquiring properties that link together and one example is the Lenape Park parcel in which a lot of properties connect on either side and that the J.P. Case Middle School parcel is a future potential opportunity. She stated that 78 acres have been identified in this category.
- Future Active and Passive Recreation – Ms. Greene reiterated that active recreation may include trails, picnic areas, playground, and athletic fields and that 153 acres have been identified in this category.
- Historic Resources – Ms. Greene pointed out that the Master Plan encourages protection of historic resources and has identified the South Branch Historic District including lands along the South Branch of the Raritan River and along River Road.

Ms. Greene referred to Figure 2, map of existing open space and farmland preservation and proposed parcels for open space acquisition. She noted that Open Space Advisory Committee Member, Tim McCarthy, had commented that the Township is not an island and that the plan identifies adjacent preserved properties in neighboring municipalities for contiguity purposes.

Ms. Greene continued that the open space program is a fluid program which must adapt to the availability of land which is largely dependent upon landowners' willingness to sell. She stated that the Master Plan further notes, "it is always possible that an un-identified parcel will come up that was not previously discussed. In those cases, the matter will be forwarded to the Open Space Committee for their recommendation."

- Funding Resources – Ms. Greene identified funding resources including:
 - Raritan Township Open Space Fund
 - NJDEP Green Acres
 - Hunterdon County Open Space Fund
 - Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Program
 - State Agricultural Development Committee
 - US Department of Agriculture
 - Private Land Trusts – New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, D&R Greenway, Raritan Headwaters Association
 - NJ Water Supply Authority
 - Landowner donations

Ms. Greene explained that the Raritan Township Open Space Fund is a 2 cents tax/\$100 of assessed value that was approved by a non-binding referendum of the voters. She continued that the tax would amount to approximately \$70.00/year per the average home assessed at \$350,000. She continued that Green Acres funds match up to 50% of the acquisition costs and help with surveys and appraisal costs as well.

Ms. Greene solicited public comment.

The following members of the public spoke during public comment.

Ingro Desvousges, 27 Harmony School Road, spoke in support of the 2 cent open space tax and suggested the purchase of the Schwendeman property. Mr. Desvousges added that the acquisition of such property would provide a nice continuous public walkway with existing parking from the municipal complex to Lenape Park.

Jeff Kuhl, 61 Kuhl Road, commended the Open Space Advisory Committee for their efforts on the presentation and the proposed plan and expressed support for same as well.

Donna Drewes, 26 Samuel Drive, expressed gratitude to the Open Space Advisory Committee for their time, effort and commitment in developing the proposed plan; praised the Committee's strategic planning efforts; expressed support for a 2 cents or higher open space tax; and spoke about how the environmental benefits of open space and farmland preservation increases the attractiveness to the community and reduces the tax burden. Ms. Drewes spoke in favor of an aggressive open space plan.

Jim Thul, 3 Fairfax Court, commented on the impact of non-preservation efforts to the taxpayer in additional infrastructure and education costs; compared percentages of preserved land of Readington and Raritan Townships and spoke in favor of a 5 cent open space tax.

Eileen Murphy, 27 Harmony School Road, extended gratitude to the Open Space Advisory Committee for their tremendous efforts; spoke in support of a 5 cent open space tax; and expressed appreciation for the signage installed on open space lands.

Barbara Sachau, 2 Glenway Drive, expressed dissatisfaction of the language used in the plan specific to environmental resources; commented that active recreation is hunting and passive is keeping land peaceful and tranquil for what exists there and continued to speak of shooting incidents resulting in the death of a dog and horses. Ms. Sachau also commented on the need to protect all of nature not just the rare, threatened and endangered plants and animal species referred to in the plan; and on the impact of chemical sprays. Ms. Sachau also presented a chart depicting the days that hunting occurs in New Jersey.

Lou Reiner, Township Committeeman, 445 Highway 12, commended the efforts of the Open Space Advisory Committee for supporting the deer management program and spoke about destruction brought about by the deer population. Ms. Greene advised that deer management is not included in the open space plan and that a separate committee is addressing such issue.

During public comment, Ms. Greene advised that in addition to signage on open space properties throughout the Township, parking lots and informational kiosks are being installed and such has been completed at Micek and Urbach properties. Ms. Greene also clarified comments regarding the language referring to environmental resources explaining that the language was taken directly from the Master Plan and covers a broad category used for several disciplines and addressed comments regarding active and passive recreation.

Ms. Greene extended gratitude to all involved in the development of the proposed plan.

Motion by Committeeman O'Brien, seconded by Chair Greene to close the public hearing and adjourn.

Next meetings 5:30 p.m.: Nov 8, Dec 13, 2017