

Raritan Township Open Space Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 13, 2017, 5:30 p.m.
Raritan Township Municipal Building

Members present: Committeeman Richard Chen; Township Engineer, Tony Hajjar; Chair, Amy Greene; Ryan Edge; Steve Farsiou; Tim McCarthy (arrived at 5:56 p.m.); James Miller (arrived at 6:00 p.m.). Also present was Township Planner, Jessica Caldwell.

Members absent: Committeeman Craig O'Brien; Joel Throne

Chair, Amy Greene, acknowledged the attendance of Township Planner, Jessica Caldwell.

Ms. Greene advised that the purpose of tonight's hearing is 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
 - 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 explained that this goal can be accomplished through the acquisition of large tracts of residentially-zoned land through the preservation of farmland for which the cost of acquisition is for development rights only. She continued to explain that the properties are ranked according to the following criteria:
 - Existing funding partner
 - High density residential zoning
 - Large farms
 - Contiguous to existing farms
- 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.
- Linkages to Existing Open Space – Ms. Greene explained the value of adjacency to existing open space to the public and opportunity for trail connections. She added that Lenape Park is a 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.
- Future Active and Passive Recreation – Ms. Greene reiterated that active recreation may include trails, picnic areas, playground, and athletic fields. She commented that a future active recreation goal in the Master Plan is river access along the South Branch of the Raritan River.
- 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.

(James Miller arrived at this point.)

Ms. Greene commented that based on the above-mentioned goals, the Open Space Advisory Committee has identified potential properties for acquisition and farmland preservation, Figure 2. She 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."

Ms. Greene provided an explanation of Figure 2, map of recommended parcels for open space acquisition. Ms. Green also referred to Table #3 in the plan illustrating priority properties for acquisition and preservation as well costs. She advised that typical costs are about 20% of the easement cost.

Ms. Greene announced that this is the first of two public hearings required for the adoption of an Open Space plan and that the second is scheduled for Tuesday, October 11, 2017.

During the presentation, Township Committee Members inquired as to the status of the farmland preservation plan. Ms. Greene advised that the plan was completed by Maser Consulting, for which approximately 2,000 acres were identified for either acquisition or farmland preservation, and has been submitted to the State and awaiting feedback.

(Tim McCarthy arrived at this point.)

Ms. Greene solicited public comment.

The following members of the public spoke.

Bill Kibler, representative of Raritan Headwaters Association, 2121 Larger Cross Road, Bedminster, gave a brief background about the watershed association; commented on the direct impact of land use on water quality; expressed gratitude and appreciation for the partnership with the Township; and commended the Open Space Advisory Committee for their outstanding efforts in the preparation of the proposed plan.

At this time, Ms. Greene commented on the Raritan Township Open Space Fund, a 2 cents tax/\$100 of assessed value that was approved by a non-binding referendum of the voters for which the full 2 cents has not been approved by the Township Committee. She advised of additional funding sources including NJDEP Green Acres, Hunterdon County Open Space Fund, Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Program, State Agricultural Development Committee, The US Department of Agriculture, Private Land Trusts such as New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, D&R Greenway, Raritan Headwaters Association; NJ Water Supply Authority and landowner donations.

Patricia Ruby (Executive Director, Hunterdon Land Trust), commented on partnerships for preservation as a financially solid way of acquiring land and keeping it in open space. Ms. Ruby also spoke in favor of hunting on the Urbach property as a means to control the deer population.

Dave Kunz, 26 Grandin Drive, expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Open Space Advisory Committee and support for the proposed plan.

Richard Chen, Township Committeeman and Member of the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee, advised that the Township has partnered with Dr. Jay Kelly of Raritan Valley Community College to inventory the deer population in an effort to minimize accidents and disease from deer ticks.

Karen Elbert, 254 Everitts Road, commended and thanked the Open Space Advisory Committee for their hard work and strategic planning in the identification and categorization of linked parcels and larger contiguous parcels for the protection of water quality of the South Branch and other major tributaries like the Neshanic. Ms. Elbert also praised the efforts of the Committee for providing a safe environment, improved quality of life, and reduced tax burden to the community through open space preservation.

Lou Reiner, Township Committeeman, 445 Highway 12, commended the efforts of the Open Space Advisory Committee in land preservation; and thanked and expressed appreciation to Committeeman Chen for his efforts and time in instituting the deer management program.

John Belle, 32 Wyndham Court, spoke in favor of an aggressive open space and farmland preservation program. Mr. Belle also applauded the efforts of the Open Space Advisory Committee and thanked members for all they have done with limited resources. Mr. Belle also spoke in favor of the 2 cents/\$100 of assessed value open space tax.

Barbara Sachau, 2 Glenway Drive, commented that she would like protection for all species on open space lands. Ms. Sachau expressed opposition to hunting, advising of shooting accidents involving horses, fox, and eagles. She also inquired whether organic farms were part of the Township's farmland preservation program, commenting on the impact of chemical sprays on trees, soils, and species; and the impact of climate change on such as well.

During public comment, Ms. Greene advised of receipt of a Nature Conservancy Grant for the planting of 100 trees on one of the properties that drains to the Walnut Brook and advised that she had no data regarding organic farms in the farmland preservation program for which parcels are privately-owned.

At this time, Ms. Greene advised of an additional item to the agenda, comment on increased access to Township-owned open space properties. Ms. Greene explained that Committeeman Chen has been working on increasing access to these parcels with parking areas and kiosks describing the parkland.

Committeeman Chen explained that the goal is to have parking and a kiosk on every open space parcel with Micek and Urbach properties targeted first.

At this time, Tim McCarthy, member of the Open Space Committee, explained the concept of cooperating with neighboring municipalities to maximize available resources with bordering parcels. Ms. Greene cited a parcel on Figure 2, depicted by a triangular-shape, proposed for farmland acquisition that is part of a larger piece of a preserved parcel in Franklin Township.

Motion by James Miller, seconded by Committeeman Chen to close public hearing and adjourn.

Next meetings 5:30 PM: Oct 11, Nov 8, Dec 13, 2017