

HUNTERDON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Minutes – July 6, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carol Hoffmann, Phil Greiner, Andy Borkin, Dana Desiderio, Gabrielle Bolarakis, Page Stiger, Richard Dodds, Marc Saluk, Commissioner Deputy Director Jeff Kuhl

ABSENT: Tom Mathews, Commissioner Director Rich, Commissioner Van Doren, Frank Bell, Natalie Zaman

STAFF PRESENT: Bill Millette, Bob Hornby, Katherine Fullerton, Sue Pena, Rebecca Deakin, Aaron Culton- County Counsel

Planning Board Chair Carol Hoffmann read the Open Public Meetings Act notice and called the meeting to order at 8:15 A.M.

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been provided by prominently posting and maintaining so posted throughout the year in the Office of the County Clerk, Hall of Records, Main Street, Flemington, New Jersey, a public place reserved for such announcements, and by mailing on or before January 19th, 2023 to The Hunterdon Democrat, The Express Times, Courier News, The Trenton Times, Star Ledger, and TAPinto, newspapers designated by the Hunterdon County Planning Board to receive such notices. Notice has also been posted online in the Hunterdon County News."

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 1, 2023 MEETING

Motion to approve minutes with corrections, Richard Dodds, Phil Greiner seconded. Commissioner Jeff Kuhl, abstained. All in Favor.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER UPDATE

Commissioner Kuhl reported that a lot of good things are going on in the county. The County has been providing grants for various public projects. The Flemington Borough Police Department used grant funds for an ADA assessable bathroom towards the new police station and Bloomsbury used funds for barrier free sidewalks. The County had a grand opening of our barrier free playground at Deer Path Park. Eric LeGrand was there, and he spoke. The Polytech building is going out to bid in Clinton. There is a bunch of LED lighting projects going on in the library and other sites around the county. The courthouse project is moving along. The USDA does a lot of funding for projects, so the Commissioners arranged a meeting in the beginning of August where they will come and give a presentation to the 26 municipalities on how they can apply for this grant money.

Carol reported that the therapy dog program has returned to the library.

STAFF UPDATES

Economic Development: Marc Saluk

Marc reported on the Economic Development Grant Program. The County started the program in 2017 to give incentives to different programs that were in line with the county's vision for economic development. I have a listing of grants that have been given out in the past few years for just economic development.

For 2023

- Union Township - updating their website.
- Bethlehem Township – 173 Corridor Study, looking at zoning and land use.
- Holland Township – Looking at home based businesses. Aligned ordinances with the state's new rules.

For 2022

- Flemington Borough – Updating the Economic Development element of their Master Plan .

For 2021

- Raritan Township- Phase II of their ordinance review, which is still ongoing.
- Lebanon Borough – Update and reviewing their E-codes up online accessible.

For 2020

- East Amwell – The Ringoes Village Study and analysis and study of the 202/31 corridor

The 78/22 Coalition Home Based Business Initiative grant brought in a consultant to review each town's ordinances and make recommendations to enhance growth in home-based business without changing the integrity of the neighborhoods. Also, the consultant developed a model ordinance that they could adopt and market. This was not county funded, this was funding by the Highlands Council.

There was a question in regard to the Union Hotel in Flemington. Marc is not involved in it, but Commissioner Kuhl explained that once Flemington moves the police station to the new location, work at the hotel can proceed.

On the tourism front, the American Rescue Plan funded the "Explore Hunterdon" brand. It is out there, people know we're here and what to do here. The money from the American Rescue Plan is limited, so we have been transitioning to social media travel writers. The posts get a lot of views, and we hope to build on it. Every tourism site in Hunterdon is reporting a lot of traffic and is incredibly busy.

Farmland: Bob Hornby

Bob reported that there are 20 active preservation applications in 10 municipalities: 4 in the County Planning Incentive Grant Program, 4 in the Municipal Planning Incentive Grant Program, and 12 in the State Direct Easement Program. Kingwood rejected a State preservation offer as being too low. A State application in Tewksbury closed on June 14, the 4th closing of 2023. NJ Agriculture Secretary Doug Fisher retired effective July 1 after 15 years, Joe Atchinson is Acting Secretary during the search for a replacement. The State Board of Agriculture will make a recommendation for appointment by the Governor. Soil Protection Standards for Preserved Farms were released by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) for public comment. The larger of 12% or 4 acres of permanent disturbance is allowed per easement with a waiver of up to 15% or 6 acres and an additional 2% or 1 acre if the disturbance is over the limit at the time of adoption. Rowan University will be mapping every preserved farm for confirmation by the landowner. Exception areas are not included in the restrictions. Special Occasion Events on Preserved Farms guidance documents have been prepared by the SADC and the CADB has drafted an application that is available on the CADB website. Information is being distributed to a variety of stakeholders. Preserved farms that can show a minimum of \$10,000 in agricultural income can host up to 26 non-agricultural events annually. The registration process is with the easement holder, enforcement is through the SADC. Foodshed Alliance is working with the New Jersey Conservation Foundation on a pilot project in Sergeantsville on a preserved farm owned by NJCF to provide 10-year leases to beginning farmers. It's about 20 acres, divided up into 4 plots. There is a similar project that has been successful in Sussex for several years. They are not pushing organic or any specific practices. It's an effort to help new farmers who cannot afford to buy land in Hunterdon. There was a question about renewing the lease, which may be possible, but it would be preferable that after 10 years the farmer would be established enough to buy their own land. There was a discussion regarding the permitting process for Special Occasion Events. It was confirmed that municipalities must review the application for a special occasion event and the CADB has no jurisdiction to override the final approval. It was noted that applicants should submit the requests early due to timing and that some municipalities have ordinances defining special occasion events.

Open Space: Bill Millette

Bill reported that the County held a great ribbon cutting for the new all-inclusive playground at Deer Path Park that was very well attended. Next, we are looking forward to the completion of a new pavilion directly adjacent to the playground. Work has already begun on that project. Hunterdon Land Trust and Raritan Township are preparing to close on a 4-acre lot that adds to the open space surrounding and protecting the Plum Brook that was reported on last month. They hope to see that closed soon.

There are a few open space applications for the July 24th POSAC Meeting. It is a good sign that municipalities and non-profits are putting together acquisition projects. Along with interest in open space acquisition grants, there has been renewed interest in our Municipal Open Space Grant program as a result of outreach by the Commissioners. I've been working with several municipalities that are learning about the program: what qualifies as an eligible project and how much funding is available for each municipality. If there are questions in your respective municipalities, please have them get in touch with me.

GIS: Rebecca Deakin

Rebecca reported that no additional farms/businesses were added to the Hunterdon Harvest web mapping application in June and there were no additional requests to participate, we still have 20 farm/business locations on the map. GIS is working with Parks & Recreation to determine the best way to visualize the tree inventory data that they are receiving. New tax assessment software is being rolled out in July; this software should streamline our process for joining the tax data to our parcel layer. The sign and pole data for the Sign Management solution was finalized and imported, we are now working on designing the solution. The update of our data layers is nearing completion, with the road sign layers remaining. Our new GIS Specialist 2 is starting on Monday, July 10th.

Planning Issues: Katherine Fullerton

Katherine reported that the subcommittee for the Growth Management Plan met on June 28th to review the latest draft chapters. The chapter that was reviewed was included in your digital packet, there is another chapter printed for your review. We received only one comment for the material provided in May. We are anticipating a full draft to review by Board members in late August. We have finalized the RFP on the Historic Preservation Plan. It should go out for proposals soon. We will need a subcommittee to review the proposal when that comes in. We need at least one person from the Planning Board, currently we have 2 or 3 from the Cultural & Heritage Commission. The Breakfast Talk for emergency management and natural disasters had to be canceled suddenly as the DEP wanted to use their best staff to do the presentation but couldn't get them all together on the date already promoted. They are working on another date. Meanwhile there is a good speaker available from the BPU for the electrical grid talk. BPU suggested a person from JCP&L be present. Staff is working with Brayden on the cybersecurity section. The Final Report for the FY-23 STP grant is being prepared. Staff attended all the meetings this quarter. The Commissioners approved applying to NJTPA for funding for a Greenway Trail Plan. The thumbnail application is due Friday. There has been a push for trails and connectivity. We find out July 24th if they accepted our thumbnail. The full application is due August 14th. There was a question of whether this funding is a county or municipal grant. It is a county grant that would start next year if we were approved. The plan is about larger trail systems connecting communities. We are hoping for \$200,000 in funding including a portion from the Highlands Council. We had flurry of applications for the June 1st DRC meeting. There were 4 site plan applications, 1 sketch plan, 1 minor subdivision, 1 major subdivision application, and 2 returns. The site plans were given conditional approvals not to construct until we can get all the GIS files. About 6 months ago the Division of GIS created a portal that the applicant can upload GIS files to and that has helped a lot. Two Board Members suggested that the JCP&L municipal representative would be good to do the presentation.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive Committee:

Carol reported that the Executive Committee did meet, and the Breakfast Talk was discussed as well as the Growth Management Plan. We had some changes, which is why you got a paper copy of the vision to review.

DRC Committee Report:

Carol said that she and Richard would attend today's meeting. The next meeting is on July 20th. If necessary, an email will be sent looking for volunteers.

Transportation: Tom Mathews was not present, but submitted a report on current projects

- B-24 on County Route 635 by Mine Road between 78 and Hampton and Rounseville Road will have drainage improvements this month with detours starting on Monday June 19th.
- D-304A Covered Bridge & D-304B (Rosemont-Ringoes Road) closed for repairs starting on Tuesday June 22nd. Completion is expected early Fall of 2023.
- D-402 (Whiskey Lane) The bridge will be closed starting on Tuesday June 20th for bridge painting. This will run 3 to 4 weeks weather permitting.
- W-115(Alexauken Road) This bridge is now open.
- County Route 635 paving and drainage work, intersection improvements and resurfacing beginning June 14th and running through August 21st.

Old Business/New Business:

Richard reported that they had a meeting with the Rock Fall Mitigation Design Committee in Kingwood with a lot of representatives from various entities, including people from Pennsylvania. A very open and honest meeting, but at the very end of the conversation, the last comment was “we appreciate everyone coming, just to let you know regardless of how this discussion goes: we’re doing this project.” The belief was that this was a DOT photo op and we had community input and outreach and a box was checked.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau (Raritan Township) commented that many studies show trail work almost always hurt nature with uses such as ATVs, horseback riding, and biking.

Board members asked about ATV trails are in the county. The County does not allow ATVs on County lands.

There was no further business to be brought before the Board. Richard made a motion to adjourn the Planning Board meeting, Commissioner Jeff Kuhl seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 AM.

NEXT MEETING DATE: Thursday September 7, 2023, at 8:15 AM
Susan Pena for Secretary, Phil Greiner