

SPECIAL MEETING

HUNTERDON COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

Main Street County Complex, Second Floor

Flemington, New Jersey 08822

April 22, 2008

The regular meeting of the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders convened at 12:20 p.m. in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act.

PRESENT: MR. PETERSON, MR. MENNEN, MR. HOLT, MR. MELICK, MR. SWOREN.

Also Present: Cynthia J. Yard, County Administrator, Gaetano M. DeSapio, County Counsel and Denise B. Doolan, Clerk of the Board, Cheryl A. Wieder, Human Resources Director, Kevin Richardson, Open Space Coordinator and John Trontis, Director of Parks and Recreation.

Open Public Meetings Act

Director Peterson announced: "This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been given by posting throughout the year a copy of the notice on Bulletin Boards on the First and Second Floor of the Main Street County Complex, Building #1, Flemington, New Jersey, a public place reserved for such announcements. A copy was mailed on or before April 15, 2008, to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Lambertville Beacon, The Express, Courier News, Trenton Times, Hunterdon Review and The Star Ledger, newspapers designated to receive such notices and by filing a copy with the Hunterdon County Clerk."

Pledge Allegiance

Open Space

Cooperative Purchasing Acquisition Program:

Mr. Richardson stated that the materials provided to the Board are still a work in progress, still going through revisions. The County is still striking certain things and revising things. The document consists of getting all the notes from the meeting discussions written down in a clear and comprehensive document. The document is an overview of the proposed program. Mr. Richardson is building the frame for the program right now and upon the frame being constructed, the policies, procedures, and applications will be prepared for the design and intent of this new program.

The purpose of the proposed committee will be charged with the review, evaluation and recommending cooperative acquisitions initiated by the municipalities and non-profit agencies, which is distinct from projects the County is initiating. This is an attempt to distinguish between the two.

Mr. Holt stated he wanted to clarify how the County breaks apart the funding which comes from the open space tax – 10% goes to County historic; 15% to municipalities; 15% to non-profit. The remaining 60% is split in half – half to farmland and half to county open space projects.

Mr. Richardson stated the Open Space Advisory Committee is charged with reviewing, evaluating and making recommendations to the Board for municipal allocations and non-profit allocations solely.

Mr. Holt clarified that Committee's responsibility is geared towards the 15% to municipalities and 15% to non-profits funding. Is the new cooperative committee being presented as a second committee, and if so, are they rating the same things the Open Space Advisory Committee is or is this to be anew committee?

Mr. Richardson's understanding is that the new Cooperative Committee will not replace the Open Space Advisory Committee but they would be separately charged with meeting 3 times each application round to review the requests, attend site visits and then make an official ranking recommendation to the Board.

Mr. Peterson stated that the Open Space Advisory Committee is responsible for the money which is allocated back to the municipalities, which can be used for various things including land acquisitions. The goal of this cooperative is to change Mr. Richardson's role, which is separate and distinct from that organization and to put it in a framework where we evaluate in a systematic way the applications that people submit to Mr. Richardson for purchases of land. Part of the problem is that there is no system in place for that process.

Mr. Holt asked if what was being set up is a mechanism that when any entity comes in that does not fall within their 15% or their piece that there is a process.

Mrs. Yard expressed that there have been questions as to whether you need 2 committees or have one. As Mr. Richardson does his presentation, there is a suggestion of how to meet those 2 charges under one committee that would have 2 clearly delineated charges but the final decision lies with the Board.

Mr. Peterson stated the Board allocates every year how the open space money is distributed.

Mr. Richardson stated the distribution of the County's open space tax is purely the prerogative of the Board as to what gets distributed of the County's tax. From the onset, the Board has decided that of the amount the County raises and collects, 15% is allocated to municipalities, but this is a policy decision of the Board. The first 4 years, the amount was 10%, in the fifth year the Board decided to raise it from 10 to 15%. The portion for County historic preservation has remained at 10%. Page four of the documents shows how those funds are distributed by percent and the amounts that have been typically distributed for collective open space, farm land and historic purposes.

Mrs. Yard stated that when the Board, at the time of the budget, put in close to 5 million for farms and close to 5 million for open space, that's not just the tax. The tax is just one piece that the Board agreed to distribute for open space or farmland.

Mr. Peterson stated the Board can allocate based on how much money there is and what the needs are. Every year, the Board can make a sophisticated decision based on need. The Board can set that and it gives the Board flexibility. This current process is to decide how to handle these types of requests and how to evaluate these requests. All information would be gathered and submitted to the committee for review, site visitation and recommendation to the Board. There may be some that we choose not to follow, choose to follow, or choose to follow some and not others.

Mr. Holt asked if the Board would be able to review the applications. Mr. Peterson stated that the Board could if they wanted to. The Board can choose to review applications before the entities come before the Board.

Mr. Peterson said this is nothing different than we currently do with the Open Space Committee. The current Committee does a good job; sometimes they approve and sometimes they deny the applications.

Mr. Richardson said it is a little different with municipalities. The County's been clear that 15% is allocated to each municipality for eligible purposes. It's only an instance where the eligibility is a grey area as to whether that is eligible or not. Most of the time, it's a blanket recommendation to allow the municipality to use any or all its funds for eligible purposes.

Mr. Trontis stated that it's not competitive as it would be for non-profits. For non-profits, it might be competitive to rank one against another but if a municipality is entitled to 15%, there's less competition.

Mr. Richardson stated that the distinguishment between what we presently do and what we want to accomplish is that all of these municipal requests that come in for additional county funds has historically been funnel through him and based on earlier policies, he would review, evaluate, make a recommendation, the projects would be ranked and then it would be further evaluated by the Board. The basis and objective of this is to take that out of his exclusive hands and put it into a committee so that the committee would be doing the reviews, evaluations and making the recommendations for these cooperative requests.

Mr. Peterson added that this would group applications together to be compared and contrasted to make sure that the County is using the taxpayers money as strategically as it can. It also provides a known process with known timelines and makes it an objective process. It will also allow the County to process applications quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Richardson asked the Board for direction on whether the committee is a new committee or modification of the existing committee and how the committee is going to be formed and what the composition of the committee will be.

Mr. Peterson stated one reason he would advocate for a separate committee is that when you start adding meetings on people, the likelihood their attendance would deteriorate and you wouldn't be adding an additional burden on the existing committee.

Mr. Holt stated that if you are interested in open space and want to be on the committee, you should make the meetings.

Mr. Mennen stated there is a procedural concern with the difference between 2 boards vs 1, that being the membership make up of the existing open space advisory committee is somewhat different than the proposed membership of the new board.

Mr. Richardson stated that a committee needs to be pulled together from a successful pool of candidates so that the committee members can be appointed, education can begin to bring the new committee up to speed. There are no statutory requirements which cover the make up of this committee or the open space committee. Right now, the thought is 4 public members, 1 member who represents the Park and Recreation Advisory Board, 1 member to represent CADB.

Mr. Peterson stated that the Board should review the information which was provided and vote on how the committee will be formulated at the next meeting.

Mr. Richardson also questioned how the Board wanted to fund this new initiative. He stated that this all emanates from the County's open space tax revenue and how those funds are split up. This is the only funding source other than the County's Capital Improvements and Bond Ordinances or selling bonds. It's looking at the residual County allocation amount of 60% or

