

FREEHOLDER DIRECTOR'S SUMMIT MEETING

JANUARY 28, 2009

Open Space, Recreation, Farmland,

and

Historic Preservation Program

**HISTORY OF HUNTERDON COUNTY’S OPEN SPACE,
RECREATION, FARMLAND AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

In 1999, the County adopted its first Open Space, Recreation, Farmland and Historic Preservation Program Trust Fund tax levy. The proceeds of that Fund were dedicated to Open Space and Historic Preservation. In 2004, the citizens of Hunterdon County adopted a referendum renewing the tax levy for an additional five years.

More recently, in November, 2008, the taxpayers of Hunterdon County reauthorized the tax levy, effective 2010. The referendum which was adopted contains no “Sunset Provision.” The revenue source will continue in full force and effect into the future.

The referendum permits a County-wide tax not to exceed 3¢ per \$100 of assessed value. The Freeholders annually determine the amount of the tax.

Once the tax is imposed, the Freeholders are charged by law with determining what proportion of the fund is to be used for each of the four purposes. This can only be done after a public hearing. These proportions were established at the inception of the program (see page 3 for a listing of the applicable percentages) and continue in force today. The County must also adopt a plan which establishes the general outline for the expenditure of the money. Accordingly, the County of Hunterdon has adopted an Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Plan.

Even prior to the initial adoption of the referendum, the County was active in Open Space Preservation. Each Freeholder Board has always appreciated the need to protect Hunterdon County’s natural resources.

Some significant facts:

Total raised through the Trust Fund tax levy through 2008	\$ 52,533,586
Interest earned on fund, spent on acquisitions	\$ 3,675,412
The amount of money raised through the Trust Fund tax levy during calendar year 2008	\$ 7,597,132
The amount of Open Space and Parkland acres preserved:	8,935 acres
The total amount of Farmland acres preserved:	24,951 acres

Hunterdon ranks in Farmland Preservation:

293 farms preserved - #1 in the State,
24,951 acres preserved - #2 in the State; 823 acres behind #1 Salem.

PRESENT FINANCIAL STATUS

The actual amount of cash (including funds already committed but not yet distributed) in the Trust Fund on 12/31/08: \$ 12,780,106

The outstanding commitments for these funds are:

- Reserved for use by municipalities \$ 3,010,622
- Reserved for use by non-profits \$ 2,685,120
- Available for Historic Preservation \$ 3,253,359

SUBTOTAL: ALREADY ALLOCATED/RESERVED \$ 8,949,101

Balance available for County Open Space spending (including farmland preservation) at the Freeholders' discretion **\$ 3,831,005**

Of the available balance the County has formally committed to spend:

- Contractually committed for future PIG installment payments on Farmland Preservation through 2014 \$1,350,811
- Committed to acquire two Open Space initiative projects with cooperating municipalities \$2,500,000
- Contractually committed for Farmland Preservation acquisitions \$3,694,986

Balance available for utilization: **-\$ (3,714,792)**

The current contractual commitments of the County exceed the remaining cash balance in the Fund by \$3,714,792. In addition, the County has committed \$1,457,801 in monies to apply towards Farmland projects which have received final SADC approval, but for which contracts have not yet been signed. These projects, totaling \$ 5,172,593, are expected to close in 2010 and 2011. In the past, this need would be met by future anticipated tax receipts under the Trust Fund. It is anticipated that such receipts dedicated to the County Open Space, Recreation, and Farmland Preservation component of the tax levy in the year 2009, will be approximately \$4,500,000.00.

FINANCIAL PLAN 2009

The County and your municipalities are facing serious fiscal issues. It is difficult to project when and to what extent the problems with the economy will be corrected. In the interim the Freeholders intend to “live within the County’s means” and to exercise fiscal prudence. A part of that decision involves a determination that at this point open space, recreation, and farmland preservation projects should not be funded through borrowing. For the immediate future, these projects will only be funded as revenues are generated through the trust fund tax.

By statute, the Freeholders determine how the money in the Open Space Trust Fund is allocated. Historically, the percentage allocations are:

- 60% for County open space/parkland/farmland acquisitions (County and municipal PIG)*
- 15% for the use of municipalities in connection with their open space, historic and farmland preservation projects*
- 15% for the use of non-profit organizations in connection with open space acquisitions.*
- 10% for historic preservation efforts by the County

(*For the initial referendum period, the percentages were 70% - 10% - 10% 10%)

As a result of the allocations, funds have been accumulated in the reserves for each of the uses as listed on page 2.

The Freeholder Director anticipates that the Freeholders will shortly re-examine the allocations for the year 2009 anticipated receipts. As a part of that re-examination, County Counsel has been asked to examine whether that allocation can be implemented to some limited extent, retroactively. For example, perhaps a portion of the funds previously reserved for Historic Preservation which have accumulated a large balance could be reallocated for use for Open Space or Farmland acquisitions. County Counsel is currently examining this issue.

The estimates of monies which will be available in 2009 would, based upon last year’s revenues and the present allocations, be as follows:

- \$4,500,000 to existing and future County open space/farmland commitments (60%)
- \$1,100,000 for municipal open space projects (15%)
- \$1,100,000 for non-profit open space projects (15%)
- \$ 700,000 for County historic preservation efforts (10%)

UTILIZATION OF FUNDS

The \$4,500,000 which is estimated to be generated for County use in 2009 will first be used to pay for the \$ 3,714,792* (**see page 2**) which is needed to fund existing commitments for open space, parks and farmland preservation as those projects are ready to close.

(* \$5,172,593 including farmland projects awaiting contract signing.)

2009 FARMLAND

The Freeholders have authorized the CADB to commit an additional \$2,000,000 in 2009 as the County's cost share for new contracts for farmland preservation. This includes funding for direct County farmland acquisitions, municipal PIG acquisitions, and non-profit farmland preservation efforts. This level of funding, when added to State and municipal funding provides the ability to acquire \$10,000,000 in total farmland preservation projects. However, it is anticipated that those closings will not occur until 2010 or 2011, at which time those funds will be needed.

2009 OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

The Freeholders have determined that because of (1) significant pre-existing but not yet funded commitments, and (2) uncertainty over the economic situation, they presently do not intend to enter into any new contracts for general Open Space Acquisition purposes this calendar year. Once the County has fully funded and paid for existing commitments, new projects will again be considered for funding. Accordingly, the Freeholders have informed parties with whom they have been negotiating, that the negotiations will have to be deferred until at least 2010, when the financial picture is clarified and existing commitments have been met.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The County is the owner of a number of historic structures and continues to acquire parcels on which historic structures are located. The County has sought grants from third party funds to restore, repair and maintain those structures which are important to Hunterdon County's heritage. Recent examples are the Main Street Hunterdon County Courthouse and the Hall of Records building. Since its inception, the County's Open space, Recreation, Farmland and *Historic Preservation* program has set aside funds for County sponsored historic preservation projects. Despite being collected and set aside for such projects, these Historic Preservation funds went untapped and unspent. The Freeholders have recently used funds from that pre-existing Historic Preservation Reserve to pay for a portion of historic preservation projects on County historic structures. Such expenditures were not a reallocation of funds set aside for land acquisition, but were instead a utilization of funds specifically and historically set aside for historic preservation. Even after funding those projects, the Historic Preservation Reserve, based upon previous allocations, has a balance of \$3,253,359. County Counsel is reviewing whether or not a portion of that existing balance can be reallocated during this difficult financial time to other Open Space acquisition purposes, such as Farmland and general Open Space Preservation.

MUNICIPAL AND NON-PROFIT FUNDS

The municipal and non-profit dedicated funds are available for municipalities and non-profits based upon the application process described in the **Procedure** Section which follows.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND APPROVAL

Decisions as to:

- what County projects should be funded
- approval for municipal projects
- approval for non-profit projects

are made by following a written procedure.

The County adopted a comprehensive Open Space, Farmland Preservation and Historic Preservation Policy on October 7, 2008, which describes the procedures in detail. Copies of this policy will be distributed at the end of the presentation this evening.

In order to ensure effective communications between the County and municipalities, the County encourages each municipality to appoint liaisons in two critical areas:

1. An Open Space Liaison to the County Open Space Division
2. A Farmland Preservation Liaison to the CADB

If your municipality has not appointed a liaison, correspondence from the County is currently directed to your Municipal Clerk. If you would like to appoint a liaison or change the designation, please contact either the Open Space Coordinator (Kevin Richardson) or the CADB Staff, (William Millette at Planning). A municipality can designate more than one person to receive notices.

UTILIZATION OF YOUR MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE RESERVE

At any time, you can obtain the status of your municipal open space reserve by contacting the Open Space Coordinator, Kevin Richardson. Mr. Richardson can provide an accounting of how much is presently available and uncommitted in your municipality's reserve fund. Your municipality's estimated allocation from anticipated 2009 Trust Fund tax receipts is attached.

Obtaining approval for the use of your municipality's open space reserve is a simple process. Contact the Open Space Coordinator, and if the project meets the standards of the referendum and the Freeholder's Policy, the utilization of the funds will be approved.

COUNTY SUPPORT FOR OTHER MUNICIPAL AND NON-PROFIT INITIATIVES

There is also a process for the County to support either a Cooperative Open Space Acquisition or an Extraordinary Preservation Initiative at the request of a municipality.

A Cooperative Open Space Acquisition is a project which was developed by municipalities in the ordinary course. An Extraordinary Preservation Initiative is an unanticipated acquisition because a property has come on the market or is in imminent threat of development. In accordance with the new County policy, the County will now consider funding

for these types of projects at two periods during the year. The funding rounds end March 30th and September 30th of each year. Applications are submitted to the Open Space Coordinator and are reviewed. They are then submitted to the County Open Space Advisory Committee (OSAC). The Committee reviews these applications and determines whether they will make a recommendation to the Freeholders that the application/project be funded. The County will accept applications, and endeavor to review those applications, to fund an Extraordinary Preservation Initiative as promptly as necessary to deal with the specific situation.

The members of the Committee are:

- 1 representative from the County Planning Board
- 1 representative from the CADB
- 1 representative from the County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- 1 representative form a non-profit organization engaged in land preservation in Hunterdon County
- 5 members of the public:
 - 3 members - one from each of three geographic regions of the County (Eastern Township Region; North-Western Township Region; Mid- Southern Township Region)
 - 2 members - representatives from either a borough, city or town
- 2 alternate members appointed from the public

No two members are appointed from the same municipality. All appointees must be County residents. Elected municipal officials, appointed municipal planning board or board of adjustment members or staff employees, or County employees are not appointed to the Committee.

There are also four ex-officio non-voting members of the Committee, the Planning Board Director, the CADB Administrator, the Parks Director, and the Freeholder who is the Open Space liaison.

The review process includes:

- (a) Review of the application
- (b) Evaluation of the application against ranking criteria
- (c) A site visit; and
- (d) A review of any other pertinent material.

For municipal/non-profit initiatives, identified solely by the municipality or non-profit, the County will consider providing up to a maximum of 20% of the project cost not to exceed \$500,000.

For joint County, municipal/non-profit initiatives, the County will consider providing up to a maximum of 80% of the project cost not to exceed \$1,000,000.

For an extraordinary preservation initiative which has not previously been identified in a municipal preservation plan, or the County's Open Space Plan, the County may consider providing 20% of the project cost not to exceed \$1,000,000.

For an extraordinary preservation initiative which has been previously identified in a municipal preservation plan, or the County's Open Space Plan, the County may consider providing 50% of the project cost not to exceed \$2,000,000.

Applications submitted in the year 2009 are being considered for funding beginning in 2010.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

The County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) which meets monthly, monitors and administers the County's Farmland Preservation Program.

The CADB Staff meets each month with municipal representatives to discuss the status of each municipality's projects.

Each proposed project is ranked against comprehensive State and County criteria. The project must receive approval from the CADB and also from the State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC).

The County has developed a Farmland Preservation Plan which is available for review through the CADB Staff. This plan and an annual application must be approved by the SADC. Each municipality in order to participate in the municipal PIG program must have its own PIG acquisition plan and an annual application approved by the SADC. Projects are only eligible if encompassed in the general outline of the plans.

In the past, there has been a separate application and approval process for each proposed project in the County Program, the Municipal PIG Program and the newer Non-Profit Acquisition Program. The reduction in available County and State funds has resulted in the CADB making a determination to rank all applications in one process. It is currently in the midst of doing that. As a result of the ranking, the CADB will approve projects based upon the best farmland available for acquisition in the County, irrespective of the program.

LIST OF OPEN SPACE PERSONNEL

Open Space Coordinator:

Kevin Richardson, Administrator

Hunterdon County Open Space Program
Rt. 12 County Complex, Bldg. #1
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 806-5171
email: krichardson@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Farmland Preservation:

G. Sue Dziamara, Director

Hunterdon County Planning Board
Rt. 12 County Complex, Bldg. #1
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
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William Millette, Senior Planner (CADB Administrator)

Hunterdon County Planning Board
Rt. 12 County Complex, Bldg. #1
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Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 806-5575
email: wmillette@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Parks:

John G. Trontis, CPRP, Director

Hunterdon County Department of Parks & Recreation
1020 State Highway 31
Lebanon, NJ 08833
Mailing Address:
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 806-4335
email: jtrontis@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Finance:

Margaret Pasqua, County Treasurer

Hunterdon County Finance Department
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 788-1120
email: mlabar@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Kimberley Browne, Director of Finance

County of Hunterdon
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 788-1120
email: kbrowne@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Freeholders:

Liaison to Parks Department and Open Space Advisory Board:

William G. Mennen, Freeholder Director

Hunterdon County Freeholders Office
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908)788-1102
email: wmennen@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Liaison to Open Space Advisory Board:

Ronald M. Sworen, Freeholder

Hunterdon County Freeholders Office
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908)788-1102
email: rsworen@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Liaison to County Agriculture Development Board:

J. Matthew Holt, Freeholder

Hunterdon County Freeholders Office
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908) 788-1102
email: mholt@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Administrative Staff:

Cynthia J. Yard, County Administrator

Hunterdon County Freeholder Office
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908)788-1104
Email: cyard@co.hunterdon.nj.us

Denise B. Doolan, Freeholder Clerk

Hunterdon County Freeholder Office
71 Main Street
P. O. Box 2900
Flemington, NJ 08822
Tel. (908)788-1104
Email: dbdoolan@co.hunterdon.nj.us

County Counsel:

Gaetano M. De Sapio, Esq.

1110 Harrison Street
Suite H
Frenchtown, NJ 08825
Tel. (908) 996-6240
email: desapiolaw@earthlink.net

2009 COUNTY AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (CADB)

FARMER MEMBERS – 2 Vacancies

Four Year Terms

01/93	12/09	Peter Melick , CHAIR Oldwick, NJ 08858
02/96	12/10	William Bowlby , VICE CHAIR Flemington, NJ 08822
02/96	12/11	Robert Hoffman, Jr. Califon, NJ 07830
12/98	12/11	Susan Blew Pittstown, NJ 08867
01/00	12/11	Dave Bond Ringoos, NJ 08551

PUBLIC MEMBERS – 2 Vacancies

12/04	12/12	John Van Nuys Ringoos, NJ 08551
12/04	12/12	Paul Dahan Pittstown, NJ 08867
08/08	12/11	Robert Zelle Pittstown, NJ 08867

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Win Cowgill, Rutgers Cooperative Extension
(908) 788-1339 (W) 806-4735 (FAX)
cowgill@rce.rutgers.edu

Bob Mickel, Rutgers Cooperative Extension
908-788-1338
mickel@aesop.rutgers.edu

William Engisch, Soil Conservation District
687 Pittstown Rd - Suite #1
Frenchtown NJ 08825
(908) 788-1397 (W) 788-0795 (FAX)
HCSCD@att.net

Honorable Matthew Holt, Freeholder – 2009 *Freeholder Liaison*

CADB STAFF

William Millette, CADB Administrator
Rick Steffey, PIG Program Administrator
Hunterdon County Planning Department
908-788-1490

2009 OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (OSAC)

County Representatives

William Bowlby – **standing** *County Agriculture Development Board representative*
Raritan Township

Gregg Rackin – **standing** *County Planning Board representative*
Stockton Borough

Deborah Hirt - **standing** *County Park and Recreation Advisory Board representative*
Union Township

Vacancy - Nonprofit Organization representative

Public Member Representatives

Suzanne Wilder - **standing** *Public Member representative*

Bethlehem Township: North-Western Township Region

Belinda Ulrich - **standing** *Public Member representative*

Delaware Township: Mid-Southern Township Region

Rob Tucher - **standing** *Public Member representative*

High Bridge Boro: Borough; City; Town Region

Kimberly Testa - **standing** *Public Member representative*

Frenchtown Boro: Borough; City; Town Region

Vacancy - Eastern Township Region

(Clinton Tp.; Readington Tp.; Tewksbury Tp.)

Alternate Member(s)

Julie Hujdusek, *Public Member representative*

Lebanon Township: North-Western Township Region

Vacancy - (from a municipality not represented in any Region)

Ex-Officio Representatives

John G. Trontis – **standing** *Ex-officio Member*

Director, Hunterdon County Department of Parks and Recreation

G. Sue Dziamara - *Ex-officio Member*

Director, Hunterdon County Planning Department

William Millette – *Ex-officio Member*

CADB Administrator - Farmland Preservation Program

Hunterdon County Planning Department

Honorable William G. Mennen, Freeholder Director – 2009 *Freeholder Liaison*

Honorable Ronald M. Sworen, Freeholder – 2009 *Freeholder Liaison*

Chairperson

Kevin Scott Richardson, Open Space Coordinator

Hunterdon County Planning Department

MEMBERS OF THE PARKS DEPARTMENT ADVISORY BOARD

Bruce Hawkinson, Chairman
(12/31/08)

Renee McNamara, Vice Chair
(12/31/08)

John T. Balint (12/31/09)
Deborah Hirt (12/31/08)
Thomas Kacedon (12/31/09)

Richard P. Ugrlavitch
(12/31/08)
Earle Steeves (12/31/08)

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR DISTRIBUTION

AFTER THE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION THIS EVENING

If there is any material that you need and is not on this list, please contact the appropriate County representative.

- Open Space, Farmland Preservation, Historic Preservation Policy of October 7, 2008
- Municipal Grant Application request for Open Space Funding
- Criteria used by OSAC to evaluate Municipal Partnership requests
- Application for Funding Under the County's Farmland Preservation Program
- Criteria Utilized by the CADB and SADC in Approving Farmland Projects