

## **New Excessive NJDEP Restrictions A Concern For Property Values In County**

Hunterdon County's Freeholder Board heard testimony at the April 16<sup>th</sup> meeting that overly expansive new rules proposed by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) in Trenton could have a negative impact on economic and job growth, as well as property values in the County, and contracted with a former NJDEP Deputy Commissioner to help analyze the proposal.

With seeming disregard for Hunterdon County's record of protecting clean water by preserving over 33,500 acres of farmland, as well as over 8000 acres of open space from development, the proposed excessive NJDEP rules could hamper job growth in areas locally designated for economic development.

County Economic Development Director Marc Saluk told the Board, "The proposed rules will impact economic growth in Raritan Township, Readington, Flemington, Clinton, Clinton Township, Delaware, East Amwell, and High Bridge. As a result, property values, both residential and commercial, across a wide area of the County could be negatively affected.

Currently the Economic Development office is aware of 520 new and retained jobs associated with pending business attraction/expansion projects that could be impacted. And that only takes Raritan Township into account."

Freeholder Board Director Suzanne Lagay commented after the meeting, "There is no question that Hunterdon County has gone above and beyond, over the years, to protect the environment, clean water, and our open spaces and farmlands from development.

We are advised that the NJDEP offers no significant data to support the new rules that can be analyzed, and this is a concern. There is a lot more information to be learned, however, the proposed rules appear to disregard the County's locally vetted open space strategic and economic development plans."

Margaret Carmeli, an attorney that represents the RTMUA, said, "RTMUA is in the business of clean wastewater. So we know about clean water, and that's our business. This isn't really about whether we want clean water."

Ms. Carmeli told the Freeholders that the plan most likely makes it technically impossible to expand the discharge from the RTMUA plant. And even if a way could be found to expand its treatment capacity, it would probably be "unfeasible economically."

Saluk pointed out, "The RTMUA's inability to expand means existing businesses that have been responsible corporate citizens of our communities for, in some cases, many decades, may no longer be able to expand and grow their companies locally."

John Tully, an RTMUA commissioner and Raritan Township's senior engineering assistant, presented a map demonstrating the excessive buffer zones in Raritan Township that would result from the rule. "1,970 properties in Raritan would be affected by the change," Tully said.

Following testimony from the County Economic Development Director and professionals from the Raritan Township Municipal Utilities Authority (RTMUA), the Freeholders approved a contract with engineering firm the Alaimo Group and former NJDEP Deputy Commissioner David Glass to seek modifications in the rule change.

Former Deputy Commissioner David Glass told the Board, "In 2008, NJDEP proposed reclassifying 909.5 miles of rivers and streams to C-1, but ultimately removed 227 miles from the rules, in large part due to engagement and data provided by the public through the public comment period, including from elected governing bodies.

My recommendation is that the Freeholder Board provides the NJDEP with reasoned and thoughtful comments suggesting alterations to the proposal prior to the end of the comment period on June 3rd."

The proposed NJDEP plan is to reclassify 749 miles of rivers and streams, primarily located in the northwestern part of the state, to Category-1 (C-1) status which would require a 300-foot buffer to streams and not permit wastewater discharge to increase beyond present permitted levels.