

Phil Murphy
Governor

Tahesha Way
Lt. Governor

TRUSTEES

Alex Rivera, Chair
Daniel Harris
Greg Romano
Elizabeth Maher Muoio, State Treasurer
Dept. of the Treasury
Shawn LaTourette, Commissioner
Dept. of Environmental Protection
Edward Wengryn, Secretary,
Dept. of Agriculture
Jacquelyn Suárez, Commissioner
Dept. of Community Affairs

Garden State Preservation Trust



140 East Front Street
P.O. Box 750
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-940-9768
gspt@treas.nj.gov

CERTIFICATION OF CHAIRMAN OF GARDEN STATE PRESERVATION TRUST

I, Alex Rivera, certify that the attached copy of the minutes of the Garden State Preservation Trust is a true and correct copy of the substantial minutes of the December 17, 2024, meeting of the Trust.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Rivera".

Alex Rivera
Chair

December 17th, 2024, GSPT Meeting Minutes

- Chairman Rivera called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM.
- Roll Call
 - Alex Rivera, present
 - Dan Harris, not present at roll call. Arrived approximately 11:45 am.
 - Greg Romano, present
 - Laurie Sobel, present
 - Martha Sapp, present
 - Glen Ceponis, present
 - Chuck Roohr, present
 - Anthony Longo, present
- The minutes of the November 1, 2024, meeting were approved.
 - Glen Ceponis made the motion. Seconded by Alex Rivera.
 - Rivera – Yes
 - Harris – not present
 - Romano – Yes
 - Sobel – Abstain
 - Sapp – Abstain
 - Ceponis – Yes
 - Roohr – Yes
 - Anthony Longo – Abstain
- Chairman's Comments
 - Chairman Rivera briefly reviewed the legislative and funding history of GSPT, the job description of the Executive Director, and his perspective on the previous 25 years of GSPT's existence, and his hopes for the next 25 years.
- Executive Director's Report
 - Mr. Everett introduced Jim Waltman, Executive Director of the Watershed Institute, which is hosting this meeting and offered he make some welcoming remarks. Mr. Everett stated that the word "water" appears in the GSPT and Preserve NJ acts more than 50 times and is largely the impetus for hosting the GSPT's 25th anniversary meeting at the Watershed Institute. He also described several long-standing vacancies on the GSPT Board and that one has been filled with Laurie Sobel, whom he introduced and described her long-time experience (since 2009) in the Middlesex County Department of Planning as a professional planner.
- Open Session - A 25-Year Retrospective and Prospective of the Garden State Preservation Trust
 - Mr. Everett provided a comprehensive overview of the past 25 years of the GSPT including acreage preserved (historical vs. the past five years), funding (collected vs. appropriated, unappropriated, expended, and available), and then delved into 10 major strategies for expending significant available funding with the backdrop of declining preserved acreage annual averages and stewardship challenges. Many of the recommended changes require limited effort (policy or

practice changes), some require a little more effort (regulatory changes), and some require statutory changes. The identified major strategies include:

1. More Robust Land Stewardship and Climate Resiliency
2. Expand Resource Development
3. Achieve a Balanced Conservation Lands Portfolio
4. Deploy Strategic Acquisition Techniques
5. Integrate Urban Conservation
6. Obtain More Robust Enforcement Authority
7. Enhance Partnerships
8. Develop Conservation Tax Incentives
9. Leverage Funding
10. Establish Acreage Goals

Much of the presentation centered on rethinking the current paradigm, which is paying cash for fee transactions from reticent sellers rather than leveraging funding by utilizing Zero Coupon Bonds and attendant Installment Purchase Agreements and their inherent tax benefits, which can attract willing sellers. While this financial arrangement works for fee or less than fee (i.e. conservation easements) and statutory authority exists in New Jersey, it has been used only at the local level. In looking at the conservation lands portfolio in New Jersey and applying scientific methodologies on how much land should be fee vs. easement, New Jersey has already surpassed target acreage for fee while easement acreage targets are far from being achieved. If IPAs are utilized, funding capacity is increased by a modest 5%, and transactions are roughly 50% fee and 50% easement, New Jersey can meet its acreage goals without compromising stewardship or development goals. A lot of this success is dependent on local open space tax collections, which on average net more dollars annually than CBT collections. Meanwhile, if the status quo that has existed for years in New Jersey continues to be deployed, New Jersey will realize only a fraction of its acreage goals and provide limited support for post-acquisition responsibilities (i.e. stewardship and development). Further, in departing from the status quo, new areas of the state that have received limited funding heretofore could be opened up with new strategies, such as urban conservation and forestland conservation.

- Board Member Comment
 - Martha Sapp made a clarifying statement regarding the amount of funding available to Green Acres for state acquisition when considering legislative ratios required to support development and stewardship.
 - Chuck Roohr commented on the potential perception and impacts of SADC receiving and utilizing penalty enforcement authority to support monitoring and compliance with conservation easements. He stated that more robust enforcement authority is needed as many non-farmers own the land (in the past, farmer-only land usually did not result in enforcement proceedings).
 - Glen Ceponis discussed the need for additional staff capacity within all agencies to effectuate the strategies recommended by Mr. Everett.
- Public Comment
 - Eric Olsen – The Nature Conservancy
 - Mr. Olsen expressed his hope for adaptive management of natural lands; support for the Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey initiative; increasing the appeal of conservation to landowners; and funding for stewardship.
 - Jennifer Coffey – Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

- Ms. Coffey expressed her concern that acquisition/stewardship/development funding would support regular maintenance and capital projects rather than climate resiliency and support of flora and fauna; concerns about enhanced agricultural production and water availability; the tension between forestry and forest stewardship; and her belief that urban conservation and removing the five acre rule in SADC was low-hanging fruit.
- Jaclyn Rhodes – Pinelands Preservation Alliance
 - Ms. Rhodes expressed her support for natural lands stewardship of state lands, particularly in addressing the stewardship backlog.
- Jay Watson – New Jersey Conservation Foundation
 - Mr. Watson echoed Martha Sapp’s comment regarding the availability of funding for acquisition; his pleasure with the new path and innovation coming from GSPT; his desire for multiple pathways for land owner conservation; his hope for greater project funding ratios to minimize the need to manage the expectations of multiple funders; and the decline in nonprofit willingness to hold easements and his hope for support to organizations holding easements
- Tom Dallessio – Musconetcong Watershed Association/American Planning Association – NJ Chapter/Mercer County resident
 - Mr. Dallessio detailed his history with land conservation policy from Governor Whitman’s administration and stated GSPT was created to leverage funds for acquisition; GSPT setting acquisition and financing goals was important; the importance of land conservation as critical infrastructure equal to roads and rails; and his hope GSPT can find additional state partners.
- Ashley Kerr – New Jersey Farm Bureau
 - Ms. Kerr expressed her pleasure with the direction set by GSPT and the overlap with Farm Bureau priorities; the need for land conservation to preserve both the farm and the farmer; support for an urban agriculture program; support for a forest conservation easement program in SADC; and called for the GSPT Executive Director to resume their historic seat on the SADC board representing the Department of Treasury.
- Martha Baez – Invest Newark
 - Ms. Baez expressed her support for an urban conservation program and the need for conservation to benefit home values in low-income communities the same way they have in others.
- Brian Schilling – Rutgers University/State Agricultural Development Committee Member
 - Mr. Schilling expressed his concern for agricultural industry viability; his perspective on the role of GSPT in supporting farmers through research and development and technology; and his hope for agriculture to support climate adaptation
- David DeFrangé – Mercer County Community College/State Board of Agriculture Member
 - Mr. DeFrangé expressed his hopes and support for an urban conservation program; the need to develop a supportive narrative around agricultural viability; and the hope that farmers can rally behind the growth of agriculture in non-rural areas.
- Jim Waltman – The Watershed Institute
 - Mr. Waltman expressed his opinion that water links all types of conservation; his concern about the impacts of Harmful Algal Blooms; his belief that water is managed through the land; and that incentives exist for landowners to help manage water through smart land management.

- David Golden – NJ Department of Environmental Protection
 - Mr. Golden expressed his thanks to Mr. Everett for highlighting New Jersey’s historic leadership in conservation and the unique position of a surplus of conservation dollars; his hope that the conservation community can overcome the false choice between funding both acquisition and stewardship; and his desire to increase the capacity of NJDEP to manage lands.
- Jenn Rogers – Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space
 - Ms. Rogers hopes that the pillars of any future stewardship efforts are invasive species and deer management and that stewardship garner partnerships, have advocates, and receive public support.
- Andrew Szwak – Land Trust Alliance
 - Mr. Szwak urged GSPT to support land trusts the way other Mid-Atlantic land trusts are supported through strategies such as capacity grants, formula-based awards, due diligence revolving loan funds, and principal forgiveness.
- Mr. Rivera thanked each person for their comments.
- Closed Session
 - GSPT entered closed session to discuss potential litigation and personnel matters.
 - Glen Ceponis made the motion, seconded by Martha Sapp. It passed unanimously
 - No formal action was taken as a result of closed session, and as a result, there are no separate closed session minutes.