

**New Jersey Highlands Council
Chair Report for Land Conservation Committee
Meeting of September 22, 2005**

On September 22, 2005, the Land Conservation Committee held a meeting at the Highlands Office in Chester. Notice of the meeting was provided to the public on the Highlands Council's web site. Council members present at the meeting were: Eileen Swan, Chair; Debbie Pascarelli, John Weingart (by phone). Council staff members present were: Laura Szwak, Tom Borden, and Kim Ball Kaiser

Eileen Swan called the meeting to order at approximately 11:45 a.m. and 6 members of the public attended the meeting.

Update of funding report

Laura Szwak presented an updated version of the "Public Funding for Land Preservation in the Highlands Region" report. The only change in the report was an update that included figures provided by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) for Planning Incentive Grants (PIGs). This funding had not been represented in previous versions of the report. The report now includes over \$56 million in SADC grants available to Highlands municipalities to purchase development rights for farmland over a 10-year time period. The members thanked staff for the report and mentioned that it was good to keep this document a living document through regular updates.

Funding Source Ideas to Acquire Land in the Highlands

In accordance with a previous Highlands Council Resolution asking the Committee to investigate alternate funding sources for land acquisition in the Highlands, staff presented a draft report listing alternate sources of funding. Laura Szwak explained that the list was not exhaustive, but it was representative of some new ideas. The draft report also makes no recommendation on which approach(es) may be most applicable in New Jersey.

John Weingart suggested that staff add an introductory paragraph to the paper describing the purpose of the report in order to ensure that whoever read the report understood that the list was part of a research process and not to be interpreted as recommendations of the Highlands Council. Eileen Swan suggested including Conservation Reserve Program and other NCRS programs to the list. From the audience, Bill O'Hearn recommended including Natural Resource Damage (NRD) as a funding source as well as wetlands mitigation banks. The Committee asked staff to narrow the list of topics based on feasibility and provide more in-depth information about the alternatives.

Meeting agenda items with SADC & Green Acres staff

At the last meeting of the Committee, the members suggested a meeting with staff of the State conservation funding agencies to discuss land acquisition priorities and funding for the Highlands. In preparation for this meeting, Laura had drafted a list of

suggested topics to discuss with the administrators of SADC & Green Acres, Susan Crafts and John Flynn, respectively. She also had coordinated a date for this meeting, October 17. This date seemed agreeable with those members present. Staff will draft a formal invitation to attend a roundtable discussion. The members discussed the agenda items and added or clarified a few others. Laura Szwak will revise the agenda in preparation for a joint meeting and share with the members. Eileen recognized members of the public, particularly Bill O’Hearn, Executive Director of the Highlands Coalition, and Nicole Goger from the New Jersey Farm Bureau, who concurred with many of the agenda topics and added a couple of others.

Partnership and TAC Update

Laura Szwak gave each member a copy of the report from the Land Preservation Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) as well as the summary from the partnership meetings concerning land preservation. These reports will keep the members informed about the outreach efforts and issues concerning land preservation identified by the public.

Comments on Environmental Infrastructure Financing Trust (EIFT) New Rules

Laura Szwak reviewed the new rules for the EIFT funding program and produced a report for the Committee that summarized the changes. EIFT provides low interest loans to local governments to acquire land for open space and recreation needs. The Committee agreed with Laura’s assessment that the changes made the program more in conformity and consistent with other state conservation funders. The Committee decided there was no need to make a formal comment on these changes. Debbie Pascarelli asked if the EIFT funding could be used retrospectively. Eileen Swan said that the funds could not be used by a municipality to pay for properties already bought with public funds.

Other comments

The Committee asked the staff to make a list of the county, state and municipal contacts for open space and farmland preservation funding. The intention of this list is to put landowners in contact with potential conservation buyers for their property. It was suggested that such a list could be posted on the website.

A motion to adjourn ended the meeting at 12:40 p.m.