

**NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COUNCIL
LAND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

**CHAIR REPORT
FOR THE MEETING OF MAY 18, 2006**

On May 18, 2006, the Land Conservation Committee held a meeting at the New Jersey Highlands Council office in Chester, New Jersey. Notice of the Committee meeting was provided on the Council's web site. Council members present were Committee Chairwoman Debbie Pasquarelli, and Council Members Tim Dillingham, Kurt Alstede and Janice Kovach. Council staff present included Dante Di Pirro, Tom Borden, Steve Balzano, and Jeff LeJava.

Ms. Pasquarelli called the meeting to order at 11:23 a.m. She began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the Landowner Forum that was held on April 15, 2006. She explained that presentations were given by SADC, Green Acres and Council staff, and that people were then free to meet with various state, county and non-profit land preservation entities to discuss preservation opportunities. Ms. Pasquarelli stated that over 100 people attended the forum and a number of people had to be turned away. She requested that staff determine the number of people who were unable to attend to make sure that they were invited to any future Landowners Forums.

Mr. Dillingham suggested that Council staff, SADC and Green Acres arrange one-on-one sessions with municipalities and their citizens to have more targeted discussions about land preservation options. Ms. Pasquarelli proposed holding a second Landowners Forum in September without any presentations. Mr. Borden then recommended that the Council ask the non-profit land preservation community to take the lead in arranging a future meeting. Mr. Balzano suggested that the meeting be held somewhere other than the Council's office, which is unable to accommodate the number of people interested in these forums.

Mr. Balzano suggested that members of the Technical Advisory Committee ("TAC") be invited to attend the next committee meeting to discuss strategies and approaches for land conservation generally, and to talk about arranging the second Landowners Forum specifically. All committee members present agreed with that suggestion.

Discussion then turned to the Land Equity Initiative that is being developed by Council staff, SADC and Green Acres. The purpose of this initiative is to establish a more efficient process for land preservation and to assess which properties are "falling through the cracks" of State preservation activities. Mr. Di Pirro explained that Council staff has met with staff of SADC and Green Acres to begin this dialogue and to look at options for addressing current shortcomings in the various State programs. Mr. Alstede stated that, in his opinion, it is the landowners with large parcels, owners of wooded property and owners of commercially zoned but currently vacate property that are being most affected by the Highlands Act and the Highlands Rules. He suggested that efforts be targeted to address these types of properties first.

Mr. Di Pirro was then asked about the current status of efforts to renew the Garden State Preservation Trust ("GSPT") Fund, which funds are due to be expended in 2007 or 2008. Mr. Di

Pirro stated that Council staff has had discussions with NJDEP and SADC about the renewal. Committee members stated that the Highlands Council must be involved with the renewal process. Ms. Pasquarelli suggested that Council staff prepare a resolution and a draft letter stating the Council's position on renewal of the GSPT.

Ms. Pasquarelli then moved to the next agenda item regarding the legal overview of the Highlands Act pertaining to land preservation. She thought it preferable to allow Committee members additional time to review the legal memorandum and have a discussion at the next Committee meeting.

The final item discussed during the meeting concerned the status of Senator Smith's proposed water fee bill. Mr. Di Pirro provided a brief update on the bill's status. Mr. Dillingham concurred with Mr. Di Pirro's frank assessment of likelihood of the water fee bill.

Mr. Alstede recommended that an important issue to be addresses is extending the sunset provision set forth in the Highlands Act regarding the use of the January 1, 2004 date for purposes of determining pre-Highlands Act property values. Mr. Alstede explained that this date should be extended as long as possible so that property owners receive some equity protection for the impacts on property values occasioned by the Highlands Act and the rules.

Ms. Pasquarelli then opened the committee meeting for public comment.

Hing Lum, Mt. Olive. Mr. Lum stated that the Council "snookered" the public because it did not permit public comment at the Landowners Forum. Ms. Pasquarelli responded that not allowing any public comment after the presentations was deliberate so that the limited time was devoted to the dissemination of information about land preservation options.

Nicole Goger, NJ Farm Bureau. Ms. Goger stated that she had recently attended the SADC's bid-down meeting, which is used to determine which farms will be included in the farmland preservation program. She explained that a number of farms in the Highlands Region want to participate in the farmland preservation program, but that funding is inadequate to include all such farms. She suggested to the Committee that it look carefully at how the Council can aid these farms in their efforts to become preserved farms.

Tom Dallessio, Regional Plan Association. Mr. Dallessio explained that there needs to be a schedule of acquisition priorities for the Highlands Region. He stated that the total bill for attempting to preserve all appropriate lands in the Highlands will be prohibitively expensive, and that gathering more data is essential to determining how limited funds may be allocated for preservation efforts.

Julia Somers, Highlands Coalition. Ms. Somers introduced herself, explained that she is the new Executive Director of the Highlands Coalition, and stated that she looks forward to working cooperatively with the committee and Council to achieve the objectives of the Highlands Act. Ms. Somers suggested that the Council contact the various "green table" programs that have been started in several Highlands counties, which bring together various land trusts to discuss

preservation activities. Ms. Somers also stated that the Highlands Coalition would support the Council in its efforts to have a seat at the table for discussions regarding renewal of the GSPT.

Elizabeth George-Cheniara, New Jersey Builders Association. Ms. George-Cheniara asked when the Council would like recommendations or suggestions regarding amendments to the Highlands Act. Mr. Balzano stated that the best time for such comments would be after the Council releases its draft Regional Master Plan and during public hearings on the draft plan. Ms. Pasquarelli explained that members of the public are free to provide comments at any time, but that the Council has determined that it will address issues relating to any amendments to the Highlands Act as part of Regional Master Plan process.

Ms. Pasquarelli then adjourned the Land Conservation Committee meeting at 12:35 p.m.