



New Jersey Pinelands Commission **PRESS RELEASE**

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Pinelands Commission approves agreement allowing closure of landfills and redevelopment at Stafford Business Park

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular meeting today, the Pinelands Commission approved an agreement that will enable Stafford Township’s government to proceed with a plan to redevelop its Business Park as a means to pay for the environmentally safe closure of landfills onsite.

Under the Memorandum of Agreement reached between Stafford Township, Ocean County and the Pinelands Commission, Walters Homes, Inc. will properly close the landfills at its expense in return for the opportunity to redevelop the Business Park as a mixed use, residential office and commercial development.

“This agreement provides a detailed plan for Stafford Township to properly close landfills that are polluting groundwater and the Mill Creek, and it includes a multitude of significant environmental measures to offset the negative impacts on two rare plants and two rare animals, including the Northern pinesnake,” said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Commission. “In turn, the agreement reinforces the water quality and waste management policies that are crucial parts of the Pinelands Commission’s efforts to protect and preserve the region’s natural resources.”

The Stafford Business Park is situated on a 363-acre site located just south of Route 72. It is located within a Pinelands-designated Regional Growth Area, a land use area in which intensive residential and business development is authorized by the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan. The Pinelands Commission approved the business park in 1990, with a plan for the development of 67 lots. Despite numerous marketing efforts, there are only 12 developed lots on the property, including a motor vehicle inspection station, an animal shelter, a recycling center and other buildings. The site also is home to a 55-acre licensed landfill and three unlicensed landfills that are polluting groundwater supplies and the nearby Mill Creek Stream with a number of constituents such as ammonia, arsenic, benzene and lead.

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Remediating the unlicensed landfills and closing the licensed landfill with an impermeable cap will have significant benefits to water quality. However, the work necessary to close the landfills and redevelop the business park will have an impact on habitat for rare plants and animals on the property and is not consistent with Pinelands regulations governing threatened and endangered plant and animals species and wetlands buffers.

The Commission determined that although the agreement allows activities that are not in strict compliance with Pinelands regulations, it is accompanied by measures that will, at a minimum, afford an equivalent level of protection of Pinelands resources than would be provided through the strict application of Pinelands standards.

Under the agreement, the Township will buy and deed restrict 570 acres of land for conservation purposes. A portion of the land will be located within the Mill Creek drainage area to help protect water quality, and the remainder will constitute suitable habitat for Northern pinesnakes. Stafford also agreed to the following offsets:

- Requiring its designated redeveloper to reduce by at least 50% the amount of pollution that directly enters Mill Creek from Route 72, where the highway crosses the creek;
- Requiring its designated redeveloper to incorporate low impact and “green building” design measures in developing the property. These design measures are intended to promote pedestrian oriented designs, reduce energy and water uses, improve indoor air quality and reduce pollution from stormwater runoff. The measures also should reduce non-point source pollution by as much as 96%;
- Limiting the amount of acreage on the capped landfill to be utilized for the relocation of Ocean County’s leaf composting facility to 20 acres;
- Deed restricting the area of the capped landfill and other open space on the redeveloped business park site so that those areas remain undeveloped in perpetuity and;
- Requiring its designated redeveloper to implement a Species Management Plan devised to help mitigate impacts on threatened and endangered plant and animal species. The plan must be designed to achieve the following goals: protect the threatened and endangered plant and animal species from harm during the implementation of the landfill closure and redevelopment plans, reestablish the impacted plant species on the site and reestablish the impacted threatened or endangered animal species on or near the Business Park site, or at appropriate areas designated by the Pinelands Commission and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

In addition to those offsets, Ocean County has agreed to buy at least 75 acres of land containing suitable habitat for Northern pinesnakes through its open space purchase program.

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