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The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met for a work session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on May 15, 2002 at 7:32 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Director Doherty and upon roll call, the following members were present: Freeholder Michael J. Doherty, Freeholder John DiMaio and Freeholder James DeBosh. Also attending were County Administrator Steve Marvin, Planning Director Dave Dech, CFO Charles Houck and Deputy Clerk Tammy M. Lynn.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was led by Director Doherty.

Director Doherty read the following statement: **“ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT BY FORWARDING A SCHEDULE OF REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS TO THE WARREN COUNTY CLERK, THE STAR/GAZETTE, THE EXPRESS-TIMES, STAR-LEDGER, BLAIRSTOWN PRESS, THE NEWS AND BY POSTING A COPY THEREOF ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS. FORMAL ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS AT THIS MEETING. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. IN ORDER TO ASSURE FULL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO WISH TO ATTEND THE MEETING SHOULD SUBMIT ANY REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE”.**

Director Doherty announced that this is a work session meeting. He further explained that the Freeholders have them scheduled and periodically call them for researching ideas. Mr. Doherty confirmed to the public that there would not be any action taken tonight.

Planning Director Dave Dech and Gregory Sipple began the presentation of the Open Space Land Acquisition history. They advised the Board this began in 1994 after the Open Space Tax non-binding referendum was approved by the voters in November 1993. He confirmed that the Board of Chosen Freeholders approved and adopted the NJ State rules and procedure changes of 1996 and 1999. Mr. Dech explained that information gathered from the Warren County Board of Recreation Commissioners, Warren County Municipal and Charitable Conservancy and the Warren County Planning Dept. was given to the Warren County Open Space Task Force who then prepared a revised plan adopted by the Board in 1999. He mentioned initially 4 acres were owned by the county in 1993, currently there are 1,328 acres owned by the county in Open Space. Some highlighted areas described were: 1) White Lake 386 acres, 2) Oxford Mountain purchases total 420 acres, 3) portions of Lopatcong and Harmony Townships equal 272 acres. He pointed out these areas on the pictorial map he provided and he offered to take the Board around to see all the areas throughout the county.

Mr. Dech also noted the Morris Canal project originated in Greenwich Township with the Jim Lee inclined plane and now has expanded to areas in Franklin Township, Mansfield Township, and Hackettstown. The State of NJ owns the area of the Morris Canal in Allamuchy Township and unfortunately, 25% of the Morris Canal corridor had already been redeveloped through private purchases before the Open Space program began. Mr. Dech recommended that 75% of the remaining Morris Canal corridor should be acquired to keep that part of the county history available for future generations. He mentioned 35% could be purchased within the next 3 years if the Board would approve the long term \$5.5 million Bond issue now and use the Open Space Trust Funds to pay off the debt service over time as discussed during the 2002 budget hearings. Mr. Dech advised

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the Board that the Green Acres Grant program also provides 50% reimbursement initiatives. He feels this would enhance Eco-Tourism improvements in Warren County and this would complement the future Railroad Museum targeted for Phillipsburg and the Crayola Factory in neighboring Pennsylvania. He further noted that the properties that he identified for purchase in the next 3 years would carry out the goals and missions of the Open Space Trust Fund to provide the public recreation for hiking, fishing, birding and sightseeing. It would also conserve and preserve nature resources, including the protection of aquifers reminding the Board that the entire county is served by ground water.

Mr. DeBosh commented that he went on a tour with Mr. Dech and Mr. Sipple recently and was satisfied with what he viewed and had no questions at this time.

Mr. DiMaio stated he read the original resolution passed by the voters in 1993 and asked for an explanation how the original resolution wording of 1993 was changed during the second referendum to include Historic Preservation. Mr. Dech explained that the New Jersey Open Space statute changed in 1997, which added the Historic Preservation segment. After prior County Counsel Mr. Wallace reviewed this, he advised that the County wording had to be modified to comport with State statute. Mr. DiMaio thanked him for the clarification.

Mr. Doherty asked if the Open Space Tax funds collected within the six different regions are distributed back to those specific regions equally. Mr. Dech explained that there is no formal ratio agreement. It is based on the number of applications that are received by all the municipalities in Warren County. He noted the largest portion of the applications are received from the northern part of the county. Mr. Dech did comment that he knows the various boards and commissions that review the applications have representation throughout the county, which he believes, creates a level of fairness in the final decision for acquisition. Mr. DeBosh commented that it was his understanding that the make up of the committee was to assure that there was representation throughout the whole county to reaffirm this fairness process is followed during application review.

Mr. Duane Copley, Director of the Warren County Soil Conservation District began discussion on the Farmland Preservation programs. He reviewed with the Board the October 2001 proposal to increase their budget for 2002 by \$100,000. He mentioned that two part-time individuals are not what were intended. Mr. Copley noted that originally the current staff was satisfactory to cover the 5 to 6 applications submitted, but now there are on average 19 or more applications which has generated the request for the full-time position to process all the necessary forms in the timelines of the program.

Mr. Copley advised the Board that his committee also feels that there should be more funds set aside for Farmland Preservation as it requires less maintenance in the long term. He would like the Board to look at this as an option to the Open Space proposals presented tonight; he feels having someone in the office from 9a.m to 5p.m. would greatly assist the timely processing. It was not his intent to take anything away from their needs however; he feels the Board needs to know there are alternative options. He explained that the program goal was to obtain 1,500 acres a year. Currently there are 7,000 acres of Farmland in the program. They currently have submitted applications for 1,900 acres and are waiting approval from the State. Mr. Doherty asked him to explain his itemized staff request. Mr. Copley explained that they had requested a full-time Farmland Preservation Specialist administrative person to handle all the application review and supplying that person with a part-time clerical position. This would allow him times to get out and communicate with the municipalities and farmers, which is limited right now. He noted that there are only three other counties that have acquired more acres than Warren County. That shows to the Board they are out getting a good portion of the funds that the State is offering for the Farmland

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Preservation program. The Board thanked him for his presentation.

There were no public comments on agenda items.

RESOLUTION 348-02

On motion by Mr. DeBosh, seconded by Mr. DiMaio, the following resolution was adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren at a meeting held May 15, 2002.

RESOLUTION TO PAY BILLS FOR MASTER VOUCHER NUMBER 2002 -19.

Be and it is hereby resolved that Master Voucher Certificate **For Certification/Ratification for Payment No.2002-19 dated May 15, 2002** in the amount of **\$ 1,773,367.52** including bills and investments, is approved subject to the review of the vouchers
By the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

2002-19**\$ 1,773,367.52**

I hereby certify the above to be a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren on the date above mentioned.

Tammy M. Lynn Deputy Clerk

ROLL CALL: Mr. DeBosh: yes, Mr. DiMaio: yes, Mr. Doherty: yes

There were no Freeholder comments or questions.

Under closing public comments, Director Doherty announced that there would be a 3-minute time limit for each individual wishing to speak with the Board. Mr. Robert Canace, 836 Route 94, Frelinghuysen Twp., NJ stated he sits on the County Agriculture-Development Board and is the President of the Ridee and Valley Conservancy, Nature Trust Conservancy Task Force. He described their State Farmland funding formula initiative was 20% dedicated solely for Farmland Preservation, then the second referendum stated to use two cents to be dedicated for Farmland which would bring it to 50% of the total Open Space Trust Funds they could assist the county in purchasing that would require no maintenance expense. He noted that with the issue of maintenance there are a large number of volunteers that dedicate themselves to the needs of maintenance, also Open Space and Farmland Preservation programs allow public access and their Conservancy programs do as well. Their program offers the county reimbursement through the State Green Acres Grant without all the maintenance costs. He was not sure if the Freeholders were aware of what they can offer and wanted to bring some of these highlights to their attention.

Mr. DiMaio asked if the county transferred Open Space or Farmland to the conservancies would public access remain? Mr. Canace confirmed that yes it would with an easement agreement through the Green Acres Grants. He further noted the property is maintained as part of the tax rolls where the Open Space purchases come off the tax rolls in the county.

Bill Hahn, 183 Hagerty Blvd., Phillipsburg, NJ gave history regarding the Open Space Task Force recommending Bonding for acquisition of as much land in a shorter period of time and to use the Open Space Tax Funds to pay off the debt service. The Freeholders at that time enacted that segment and acquired as much Farmland as possible. The Open Space acquisitions were held off at the time but their proposal was put on hold. Now it seems time to enact the second proposal and consider the bonding recommendation mentioned tonight for the Open Space acquisitions while they are still reasonable and before they are privately purchased for development purposes. Mr. DeBosh asked Mr. Hahn how he felt about the current

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distribution of 37% Farmland, 37% Open Space, 25% Municipal acquisitions considering his position on the Warren County Board of Recreation Commissioners and Warren County Planning Board. Mr. Hahn stated that he felt the distribution was reasonable. However, he was disappointed relating to the maintenance issue and the elimination of the Park Ranger position during the budget process. The Open Space Trust Fund referendum allowed for 10% of the Tax to cover maintenance concerns. Mr. Hahn stated that he would encourage that be reconsidered in future budgets when the Board thinks it appropriate.

Mr. Cavanaugh, Belvidere, NJ asked if it is just Farmland they are looking to purchase or wooded areas too. The Board confirmed Green Acres would cover both types of purchases. He suggested to the Board to have the Park Ranger position moved over to the Farmland Preservation Program and that would fulfill Mr. Copley's request from October of last year. He commented that we need to keep Warren County green.

Rosalie Murray, Blairstown, NJ the Chairwoman of the Blairstown Open Space Committee. She stated their committee was established with the understanding the Farmland Preservation program, Open Space Land and Historic Preservation program would be shared equally. However, looking at area terrain and water supply in Blairstown, their priorities have shifted to a larger concern for Farmland preservation and she encouraged the Freeholders to do the same. Director Doherty thanked her for sharing her concerns.

Karen Buckley, Harmony Township she the Chairperson of the Harmony Projects Committee, Chairperson of Preserve our Scott's Mountain, Co-Chair with Phillipsburg Riverview Organization and a candidate for Harmony Township Committee. She asked the Board to review her letter distributed to them this evening for discussion later. She shared her concerns for Farmland preservation and the need to have the Board work with her group to preserve Scott's Mountain. Ms. Buckley explained that without the county matching funds the State will not release the grant money they were approved for and the Scott's Mountain Preserve will fail.

Six townships are trying to preserve Scott's Mountain, which is a treasure in the Highland's region. Ms. Buckley affirmed that if they do not get the County match they will lose \$6,250 Grant from the NJ Conservancy Program through the Green Acres Grant. In addition, Phillipsburg Riverview was awarded \$1,700,000 in Green Acres Grant Funds, however without the county match we have the potential to lose more opportunities for land purchases.

She delivered a copy of the Burlington County Farmland installment purchase program, which noted the farmers get 10% or \$10,000 and are guaranteed 6% interest distributed two times a year and is Federal and State tax free. She knows two farmers that would sign up tonight if the Freeholders would consider this option. She encouraged them to review this as another option. The Board thanked her for sharing her concerns and suggestions.

Robert Barth, 214 N. Bridge Street, Somerville, NJ and President of the Canal Society of New Jersey. He told the Board he is here to encourage the Board to remember the value Morris Canal history has to New Jersey. He distributed brochures to the Board relating to the Morris Canal Greenway and the Railroad Museum project for the Phillipsburg site. He reminded the Board of the importance of preservation and it would bring pride, recreation and Eco-tourism Programs to the area. He asked the Board to consider the \$5.5 Bond initiative to acquire the additional 35% of the Morris Canal corridor within the next 3 years. He concluded with asking the Board to reinstate the Park Ranger position.

Jake Mathenius, prior Warren County Freeholder described a history of the Open Space Trust Funds when he was on the Board. He told the Board that there is a window of opportunity now to put the Farmland Preservation as top priority. He explained the process is longer and

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harder, and there needs to be more staff to accomplish this in a timely manner and to allow Mr. Copley to communicate properly with the farmers in the county. Mr. Mathenius concluded that Farmland Preservation gives Warren County the needed open space and the food and fiber to feed the residents. The Board thanked him for speaking.

There were no press comments or questions.

On motion by Mr. DiMaio, seconded by Mr. DeBosh, and there being no further official business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Mr. DeBosh: yes, Mr. DiMaio: yes, Mr. Doherty: yes

ATTESTED TO:

Tammy M. Lynn, Deputy Clerk