

HUNTERDON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Minutes – January 6, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carol Hoffmann, Phil Greiner, Andy Borkin, Gabrielle Bolarakis, Page Stiger, Richard Dodds, Dana Desiderio, Tom Mathews, Commissioner Van Doren, Commissioner Director Lanza

ABSENT: Marc Saluk, Frank Bell

STAFF PRESENT: Bill Millette, Bob Hornby, Carrie Fellows, Katherine Fullerton, Sue Pena, Patty Liedner, Rebecca Deakin, Derek Swanson
Aaron Culton - County Counsel

This meeting was held via ZOOM, online meeting platform:

Director, Carrie Fellows read the Open Public Meetings Act notice and called the meeting to order at 8:15 AM

"This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been provided by prominently posting and maintaining so posted throughout the year in the Office of the County Clerk, Hall of Records, Main Street, Flemington, New Jersey, a public place reserved for such announcements, and by mailing on or before December 17th, 2021 to The Hunterdon Democrat, The Express Times, Courier News, The Trenton Times, Star Ledger, and TAPinto, newspapers designated by the Hunterdon County Planning Board to receive such notices. Notice has also been posted online in the Hunterdon County News."

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Carrie Fellows opened the meeting and requested the report of the Nominating Committee. Tom Mathews presented to the Board the slate of the 2022 officers: Carol Hoffman – Chair, Andy Borkin - Vice Chair, Phil Greiner – Secretary. Moved by Tom Mathews, seconded by Richard Dodds. The motion was approved.

Carrie Fellows turned the meeting over to Chair Carol Hoffmann.

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 2, 2021 MEETING

Motion to approve minutes with the revisions as accepted, Richard Dodds, Dana Desiderio seconded, motion carried.

COUNTY COMMISSIONER UPDATE

Commissioner Van Doren wished everyone a Happy New Year. He reported that Commissioner Lanza is the Director of the Board of County Commissioners and Commissioner Rich is the Deputy Director. Commissioner Lanza and Commissioner Van Doren will be the two regular members on the Planning Board. Commissioner Rich will be the alternate Member and the liaison of the Planning and Land Use Department. Commissioner Van Doren will be the Liaison to the Public Works Department, while Commissioner Soloway will be the NJTPA representative. County employees continue to conduct virtual meetings and remote work. The Commissioners will try to continue in person meetings at the Historic Courthouse based on the continuing data that we have. Hunterdon's COVID numbers unfortunately continue to tick upwards. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and we hope for the best.

Commissioner Director Lanza reported that there are three things the Commissioners are focusing in on this year. First is Economic Development. The Commissioners elevated that division to Department status because economic recovery is crucial post-pandemic. Second, we are attempting to secure services for a testing site and get under contract with a testing company. The County is in dire need of a site, not just for people that are sick, but also for people that might have to prove it for work, travel, and school. Third, we are looking to accelerate the Emergency Services Training Center (ESTC) in Clinton Township. This is the second most expensive project we have ever engaged in, behind the Justice Center that was done 25 years ago. The County has the funding for this project, without going into debt. We are going to maintain the "No Debt, Pay as You Go" without raising the tax rate.

A Planning Board member asked Commissioner Director Lanza about access to the Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC). The County Commissioners have had contact with the President of RVCC and are advising the County appointed Board of Trustee members to support the governing policies, and that major decisions such as student access are entitled to a vote and public discussion.

DESIGNATION OF NEWSPAPERS AND CALENDAR DATE APPROVALS:

Chair Hoffman asked for a motion to set the designation of HC Democrat, Star Ledger, Courier News, Express-Times, Trenton Times and & TAPinto to carry Public Notices & Advertisements. Richard Dodds, Phil Greiner seconded; motion carried. Chair Hoffmann asked for a motion to approve the 2022 Planning Board dates and the approval of the 2022 DRC meetings dates. Richard Dodds, Phil Greiner seconded, motion carried.

STAFF UPDATES

Farmland: Bob Hornby

There are 11 active farmland applications. There were 15 closings in 2021 covering just shy of 1,000 acres in 10 municipalities. There are 2 new applications under review, one in Kingwood and one in East Amwell. Work has begun on the Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan with the Land Conservancy of NJ, a finished product is expected within a year. The process begins with data gathering and public input. The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) continues to discuss Soil Standards on preserved lands. There are several Right to Farm cases that are in mediation or preparation, no hearings are currently scheduled. Friday is the last day that the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic Committee will be accepting applications for mini grants.

Open Space: Bill Millette

Bill reported that staff has been working on distributing the 2021 Open Space tax receipts to the different grant programs, including the allocations to all the municipalities under the Municipal Open Space Grant Program. Work remains on a few potential acquisitions: appraisal reports, final values, and the acceptance of those values with a contract. With that, the County is working on the acceptance of a 70-acre parcel owned by Chubb (aka Belle Meade Development Corp.) on 523 south of Route 78 in Tewksbury. This acquisition is spearheaded by NJCF with no County funding, but the property will be transferred to the County at closing for inclusion in the County Park System. We hope to get that done by the end of the month. Staff is working on 2022 Capital requests for the use of County open space funds for future acquisitions and park improvement projects.

Planning Issues: Katherine Fullerton

Katherine reported that for 2021 we had 67 DRC applications. Of these, 23 were returns. We have been going through the conditional applications for which we still need additional information. There has been a bit of housing and warehouse units coming around and have been a lot of variances as of late. As of today, we have no new applications to review. The County sent out the RFP for the GMP (Growth Management Plan) for the Highlands Conformance process. We hope to have a response by 1/26. We are currently in the process of submitting the NJTPA 2Q report. NJDEP has stated that the WMP (Wastewater Management Plan) map is set to expire on July 3, 2022 Katherine and Patty need to discuss an update to the existing map. Lastly our new "Planner Trainee", Kris Melchers starts on January 10, 2022.

GIS: Patty Leidner

Patty reported that they continue to review and update the new data server that has been put in place. They are trying to stream more current data. We have been requesting more applications for the Hunterdon Harvest app. Currently we have 27, with nine completed and mapped. There are nine others that have been started, six are not completed and three that have issues. We have been working with the Cultural & Heritage Commission's Marker Committee to web map the sites. We are waiting for feedback on the ease and accuracy of using the site. We are also updating the COVID site. There was a question regarding Hunterdon Harvest since it was being confused with the 579 Trail. Patty replied that the Hunterdon Harvest is an application that farmers or agriculture groups can use to promote their products or services. The farmers agree to participate and refresh the data once they are established in the system. The Hunterdon Harvest and 579 Trail are separate websites. It would be nice to combine them and create a more complete data process. The County has made announcements and promoted participation in the Hunterdon Harvest website, while the Economic Development Department has created the 579 Trail website. There was a question about the "parcel viewer" application, it is a web mapping page that needs updating. The page has no property owner names on it, just block & lot information to comply with Daniel's Law.

Projects: Frank Bell

Carrie reported for Frank as he was unavailable today. The Burn Building (ESTC) is moving along. We are very close to bidding the Historic Courthouse project. The HC Library project has a state grant which will help the library update to much needed new lighting and to revamp spaces.

Department Head: Carrie Fellows

Carrie thanked the members for their continued work and their support. All divisions are working on closing out 2021 grant reports. The 2021 County History Partnership Program (CHPP) and the Local Arts Program (LAP) grants are closing out and contracts are due soon. Capital budget requests are coming due; Open Space requires a lot of funding as does Parks and the Court House. She will be working with Tom Mathews, Dan Bush, Bill Millette, Frank Bell, and Justin Tibbets to review and approve funding requests before the Facilities Committee meeting next week. Planning Staff are on an alternating telecommute schedule. We have 2 groups, an A & B group that flip each week.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive Committee:

Carol reported that the Committee did not meet in December. They would like to plan another “Breakfast Talk”.

DRC Committee Report:

Carol reported that there is no DRC meeting today. Katherine replied that so far there are no applications for the next meeting. Phil and Richard volunteered for the January 20, 2022 meeting, if applications come in. There was a question about why there have been so few applications. Katherine suggested that the holidays have slowed down applications.

Transportation: Tom Mathews

Tom stated that the application for a Quick Check with gas station at County Route 635 and Route 78 is in the “Pre-construction state”. Three years ago, they were given Conditional Approval Not to Construct. Now it seems like they have picked up the project again and are eager to construct.

Tom reported that we are having a shutdown or slowdown on many of the road and bridge repairs, due to winter weather or supply chain issues. The road resurfacing projects have been delayed until Spring.

- Bridge C32 on Payne Road is now open
- Bridge 587 on County Route 617 is now open

The NJ DOT gave notice on 12/22/2021 that the Rockfall Mitigation Program on Route 78 will begin with lane shifts, lane closures, blasting, and traffic pattern changes.

Old Business/New Business:

Richard reported that PennEast is now reimbursing landowners. He also wanted to make sure everyone knew that the Wild and Scenic Grant Closes on 1/7/2022. The focus on the grant would be for Stormwater Mitigation.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau (Raritan Township); comment topics included:

- concern that Economic Development means nature devastation
- Hunterdon’s attraction is its beauty and natural state and we shouldn’t lose sight of that
- RVCC vaccine requirements
- the COVID vaccine development process
- High state taxes

Commissioner Director Lanza responded that the charm and landscape of Hunterdon County is one of the most important aspects of it. As the County is elevating Economic Development from a Division to a Department, we’re renaming it “Economic Development & Tourism” since this showcases the beauty of the County. This type of Economic Development creates a light footprint and promotes development without destroying its beauty. It will not come at the expense of the environment – you can have successful economic development with a light footprint and still preserve nature – you can do those at the same time.

There was no further business to be brought before the Board. Richard made a motion to adjourn the Planning Board meeting, John seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 9:14AM.

NEXT MEETING DATE: Thursday February 3, 2022 at 8:15 AM

Susan Pena for Secretary, Phil Greiner