

Bonnie Begraft

My name is Bonnie Begraft and I'm here tonight to represent my husband and the Hidden Valley ski area and also some other properties within the county. Basically, I wanted to speak on Hidden Valley first. Hidden Valley is, is in a situation with the Highlands that we think is quite unique. It certainly deserves special consideration. As my husband had indicated, after the Highlands maps were released we discovered that Hidden Valley was inadvertently drawn into this Preservation Area of the Highlands. We were told it was an oversight and that someone had overlooked the fact that we were there. This oversight has the potential to devastate our family and threatens New Jersey with the loss of a great natural area, that for decades has provided families with access to nature and beauty that is NJ. The loss of Hidden Valley will have a profound consequence on residents of Sussex County, devastating the surrounding community of 120 home and condominium owners. Hundreds of families who are dependent on the income earned at this premier resort will be negatively impacted by this simple oversight. Hidden Valley, a 200 tract in Vernon Township, was originally developed as a semi-private membership club and transformed into one of Northern New Jersey's best tourism assets. My family and I have invested countless money and energy into the area in the hopes of someday selling the area to new energy to keep the area as a sporting and tourism attraction. The property includes an exceptional ski area, as my husband had indicated, we had an exceptional ski area, a lake, a picnic grounds with all of the amenities for corporate picnics. Winter revenue stemmed from skiing and snowboarding, which is unstable at best. It has forced us to host corporate picnics and to add a much needed summer revenue stream. The Hidden Valley's revenues are dependent upon our ability to remain competitive and after a few very long winters, it was determined that we needed to add to our tubing area to increase these revenues. We met with Noah McGuire, who was at that time the Commerce representative for the area. He suggested we submit an application for an exemption based on science, that we would not be impacting the environment to any extraordinary degree and that we would in turn offer the DEP conservation easements on the 45 plus acres surrounding the lake for hiking trails. We paid an engineer to draw plans for the conservation easements and met with the township of Vernon, who has fully endorsed our effort, rightfully so, since we are one of Vernon's biggest tax payers. We paid the \$500 nonrefundable application fee to have the council review our tubing area. The exemption, after one year, was denied. We have tried within the limits of the Act to do the right thing and it hasn't mattered. We are still denied. Are there any other means by which we can bring this unique situation to the forefront of the Council? We are willing to work with the Council on a compromise. We just need to have an additional revenue stream in order to stay afloat. Is the Council prepared to offer us the \$3-\$4 million for the pre-Act assessed value of the property? Are there funding mechanisms being setup to support tourism related industries that are threatened with bankruptcy as a result of this act? I'm done on Hidden Valley but now I'd like to have more time to read some other things as well. My daughter, Karen Driscoll, owns 20 plus acres on Highland Lakes Rd, Route 638 Vernon, NJ. She says, my husband and I purchased these 20 plus acres of property in Vernon over 8 years ago. The reason for the purchase of the property was that when our children grew up and wanted to subdivide the property and build homes near ours for them to live. We've always been good stewards of the property and have run a sports store at Mastodon Lake for the benefit of local naturalists. We recently realized that we would not be able to subdivide the property as it was in the Highlands preservation area. Some drastic changes have taken place in our family recently. The

passing of both my son and my husband have made the subdivision of the property an economic necessity. That property was our retirement. And my husband's unexpected death at a very early age has created the need for me to sell the property. Except I can't do that, neither can I build homes for my daughters. I would like the Council to refer me to an agency that would be able to give me the value of the land that we planned on. I would like to ask if there is a fund for extreme cases that require immediate intervention and financial relief from the terrible loss of our investment. I frankly don't have the luxury of time to wait for compensation. Please advise me as soon as possible. I apologize that I didn't realize that I could submit these this evening in writing. But I will do so through email. One last thing: My husband and I and my children and my grandchildren are owners of other properties as well under the name of Donald F. Begraft, Inc. These properties are over 100 acres and are in the townships of Sparta and Vernon. The Highlands has adversely affected these properties. In particular we own a 50 acre tract of land which is contiguous to the Hidden Valley ski area. This 50 acre tract was once designated for Multi Family Housing and at one time was considered for senior housing and an executive golf course, which is a 3 park. Now we have no building rights. We have also at one time offered this property to the Open Space Preservation organizations and they withdrew any interest in the property, simply because they have no reason to purchase it at this time. How will my children be compensated? I've heard testimony this evening and I've also found some other documents that indicate to me that there's no monies available at this time to compensate. You know, years are gonna go by before anything is taken care of here and I have a really great concern for this. I am also getting old in years and I was looking to retire and do something with this money as well as having it for my children. If you look around the room tonight, there were faces here tonight. We are people. We are people who are being affected by this. There are hundreds of thousands of other faces out there that don't even realize the impact that's going to be made on them and their properties and their futures. I wish that you would really consider what is going on here and take care of us. We are the people and we really need to be heard. I thank you for listening today.

