

**NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS COUNCIL
LAND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING
CHAIR REPORT
FOR THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 9, 2006**

On February 9, 2006, the Land Preservation Committee held a meeting at the Highlands Council office in Chester. Notice of the meeting was provided to the public on the Highlands Council's web site. Council members present at the meeting were: Debbie Pasquarelli (acting chair), Scott Whitenack, Janice Kovach, and Chairman John Weingart. Highlands Council staff attendees included: Dante DiPirro, Laura Szwak, and Kim Ball Kaiser.

Landowner Outreach Event

At the last Highlands Council meeting, Chairman Weingart requested the Land Conservation Committee organize a landowner outreach event that would bring landowners together with potential conservation buyers. Staff developed three proposals for such an event for the Committee's review. The Committee decided to combine two of these proposals by having a brief program with an "open house" type format. The program would provide an overview of available land conservation funding programs to last no more than an hour. The remainder of the event will provide an opportunity for landowners to visit "booths" or tables representing various conservation groups (listed below) as well as speakers.

The Committee designed the agenda for the program as follows:

- Welcome by Highlands Council Land Preservation Chair or Executive Director
- Introduction to the Highlands Council role and overview of land conservation funding process and programs presented by Highlands Council Land Preservation Coordinator
- Presentation of Green Acres program by Green Acres representative
- Presentation of Farmland Preservation program by representative from the State Agriculture Development Committee
- Discussion of financial benefits and estate planning considerations for landowners considering preservation of their land, led by tax attorney/financial advisor who has worked with Highlands landowners

Groups invited to participate at a "booth" or table will include the following:

- State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC)
- Green Acres Program at NJDEP
- County Agriculture Development Boards (CADBs)
- County Open Space Program Managers
- Water Providers—New Jersey Water Supply Authority; North Jersey Water Supply District Commission
- Nonprofits working in the Highlands—Trust for Public Land, Morris Land Conservancy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Passaic River Coalition, Ridge & Valley Conservancy, Canal Society of NJ, Great Swamp Watershed Association, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, New York-New

Jersey Trail Conference, Upper Raritan Watershed Association, South Branch Watershed Association.

Other concerns about the event discussed by the Committee:

- Publicity/how event will be publicized—Suggestions included: letters to property owners using the Highlands database; notification of nonprofits through email to share with their “clients”; Highlands Council website; Farm Bureau/agencies; Highlands Council press release; work with newspapers to get an article, fax notices to municipalities.
- Follow-up—Ms. Kovach indicated that staff should make a concerted effort to ensure that landowners seeking information receive sufficient follow-up from their contacts. A list of attendees will be obtained and staff will follow-up directly with each landowner. In addition, Ms. Szwak described that she has established a systematic process of follow-up with SADC & Green Acres for ongoing Highlands projects.
- Handouts—Participants will be encouraged to bring their own handouts. Highlands Council staff will also produce a handout for our activities.
- Landowner success story—One of the staff proposals for the event’s program included a landowner who had successfully gone through the process of selling property to a conservation buyer, post-Highlands Act. To keep the program part of the event brief, Committee members suggested that staff develop case studies describing successful transactions to serve as handouts at the event.
- Timing—Ms. Szwak explained that she had reached out to Nicole Goger of the NJ Farm Bureau to learn the optimum times for holding such an event and be sensitive to the needs of farmland owners. She recommended from mid-March to the first week of April in the evening to avoid the busy spring planting season. The Committee agreed with this suggestion and proposed the program begin at 6 p.m. with the following dates as options: March 8, 15, 21, 22; April 5, 6. Staff will coordinate with the state agencies to finalize the date. The event will take place in the Highlands Council meeting room in Chester.

Public comments

Nicole Goger, NJ Farm Bureau, said that she will put a notice about the event in her organization’s newsletter once we establish a date.

Other Landowner Outreach Activity

Mr. DiPirro reminded the Committee that the Chairman also asked that landowners who have repeatedly testified before the Council be individually invited to have staff learn more of their story and offer assistance. Committee Chair Pasquarelli asked how many landowners this effort would entail. Mr. DiPirro indicated that he thought it would be about a dozen people. Ms. Kovach cautioned staff to be clear about outcomes of the activity and to not build too high expectations. Chairman Weingart shared that we should get the facts about landowners’ situations, help them apply all options, and find solutions if possible. Committee member Kovach requested an updated copy of landowner outreach activity of Highlands Council staff.

Other Information Discussed about Land Conservation

Acting Commissioner Lisa Jackson of NJDEP wrote a letter dated January 23, 2006 to David Dech of Warren County's Planning Department to describe how NJDEP will handle exception areas created through the farmland preservation process in the regulatory program of the Highlands Preservation Area. The letter was provided to the Committee as information.

Public comment

Nichole Goger requested that the Council consider asking the NJDEP to recognize non-severable exceptions that were entered into after the Highlands Act up to the adoption of the NJDEP rules in May 2005. Ms. Pasquarelli asks Mr. DiPirro what committee should consider this issue. He suggested, and she concurred, that the Natural Resources Committee should discuss the issue.