

MEADOWLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST
PUBLIC MEETING
MINUTES

DATE: April 8, 2005
TIME: 10:15 a.m.
PLACE: New Jersey Meadowlands Commission
Environmental Center, 2nd Floor Commission Room
Lyndhurst, New Jersey
RE: Meeting of the Meadowlands Conservation Trust

TRUSTEES PRESENT:

DENNIS ELWELL
Mayor of Secaucus

MICHAEL GONELLI
Meadowlands Commissions Commissioner

GREG REMAUD (via teleconference)
NY/NJ Baykeeper

CHRISTOPHER GALE
Representative of Bob Ceberio
Executive Director, NJMC

ALSO PRESENT:

KRISTINA SCHVEJDA
Executive Director, Meadowlands Conservation Trust

RENEE HANENBERG
Administrative Assistant, Meadowlands Conservation Trust

AMY DONLON
Representative of Penny Ludman
Deputy Attorney General

DAMON MCDUGAL
NJMC Staff Attorney

ABSENT:

WILLIAM SHEEHAN, Chair
Hackensack Riverkeeper

MARK BECKER, Vice Chair
Co-Director of Bergen Save the Watershed Action Network

ABIGAIL FAIR
Association of NJ Environmental Commission

ROBERT CEBERIO
Executive Director, NJMC

PENNY LUDMAN, ESQ.
Deputy Attorney General

1. After reading the Sunshine Law, Ms. Schvejda read the roll call for the April 8, 2005 meeting of the Meadowlands Conservation Trust.
2. Review and Adoption of Minutes: Minutes of the December 9, 2004 and February 18, 2005 meetings were adopted and approved with a motion made by Mayor Elwell, seconded by Trustee Remaud and unanimously carried by acclamation.
3. Resolution: The following resolution was moved by Mayor Elwell, seconded by Trustee Remaud and unanimously carried –

A. MCT to proceed discussions with Clarke family concerning Demarest conservation easement.

Ms. Schvejda described the property as a home located on three acres that is across the street from a preserved Demarest park. She said the family would donate the conservation easement. The only costs to the Trust would result from an environmental assessment, title search, survey, and appraisal. Demarest would possibly pick up some of these costs. Ms. Schvejda has a meeting with the Clarke family planned for April 11, 2005 and hopes to have the easement finished within six months due to the family's inheritance taxes. Discussions of the resolution concerned the habitat value of the land. The property has manicured lawns and some mature trees. Trustee Remaud suggested that at the next board meeting, the Trust determine criteria to be used when evaluating the value of a parcel of land. Such criteria may include number of acres, wetlands and wildlife benefits, proximity to other open spaces, and open space vs. natural lands. Ms. Schvejda would like to meet with the Land Acquisition Committee to discuss the criteria. Mayor Elwell was concerned that there may be developers looking into this property and that a future legal battle could result. Ms. Schvejda said that the homeowners are environmentally friendly and would like to see their property preserved.

4. Business:

A. Empire Tract Acquisition

- A. The closing of the Empire Tract occurred on March 25, 2005.
- B. Insurance for the Empire Tract is in place. There is a five million dollar umbrella.
- C. Ms. Schvejda found a large sign on the property saying land is for sale and contacted the realtor to have it removed. The realtor is a member of a miniature airplane club that meets across the street from the Empire Tract. He does not want to see illegal ATV riding on the property and is interested in working with the Trust on this matter.
- D. Letters have been sent to neighboring police departments asking that they continue to monitor the Empire Tract and bring any illegal activities to the attention of the Trust. Commissioner Kaiser of the Bergen County Utilities Authority suggested to Ms. Schvejda that contacting county and state police departments might also be beneficial. This is an important matter since the Trust is liable if ATV riders are injured on the property, even though ATV riding is not allowed. Signs prohibiting entrance onto Empire Tract are not posted yet but the Trust is looking into purchasing some. Mayor Elwell noted that signs are good, but people ignore them, so stronger measures such as police patrol and gates or fences should be looked into. There is one fencing structure on the property that can be repaired. Ms. Donlon noted that, although the Army Corps of Engineers limits the Trust from building new structures, there is nothing in the deed that prohibits the Trust from repairing current structures. Mr. McDougal noted that under New Jersey law, the owner of private property only has to provide a warning that there is a hazardous condition on the land. Ms. Schvejda mentioned that BCUA received a grant for homeland security purposes and may be able to include a portion of the Empire Tract within their design. Trustee Remaud suggested contacting the Trust's insurance agent to see if there is a checklist of steps that should be taken to secure the property.

Commissioner Gonnelli suggested contacting the Commission's Conservation Officers to possibly have them incorporate the Empire Tract into their routine monitoring.

- E. Presentation by Dr. Beth Ravit and Pete Kallin about funding for the wetlands: The presentation intended to show how the Trust could obtain funding for restoration work on the Empire Tract as well as introduce the possibility of working with Dr. Ravit and Mr. Kallin on Empire Tract hydrology. The presenters spoke about a 20-acre forested freshwater wetlands restoration project within the Overpeck Park System. It is a 46-acre park run by the Teaneck Creek Conservancy (TCC) located in the middle of dense urban habitat. The goal of this project is to remove excess nitrogen from the environment. There is a strong public/private partnership involved: Bergen County, USGS, TCC, TRC Omni, and Rutgers University. Dr. Ravit noted that wetlands restoration success in this area is extremely low, making this kind of research very important. Mr. Kallin discussed the project in depth and highlighted funding. He mentioned that packaging the project by land use, such as recreation or wildlife habitat, may increase the opportunities for funding. It may also, however, make management of money difficult. In regard to the Empire Tract, Dr. Ravit ended with saying that until there is an understanding of what is happening on the land from a hydrologic point of view, the chances of completing a successful restoration are low.
- B. NJ Land Trust wrap up – There were approximately 400 participants at this year's rally. A small group attended Ms. Schvejda and Chairman Sheehan's presentation about the Empire Tract. Overall, the rally went very well.
- C. NJ Land Trust Council update – The NJ Land Trust Council is composed of all of the land trusts in NJ. Their next meeting will be held at the Commission on May 12, 2005. The Commission will be providing two boats and Hackensack Riverkeeper will be providing one boat.
- D. Hudsonia update – This project is moving forward. Mimi Sabatino has created two designs for the first four pages. We will soon be obtaining bids for 1000, 2000, and 5000 copies. The booklet is approximately 40 pages. Trustee Remaud mentioned that Kristi MacDonald, a PhD candidate who helped write this document with Dr. Erik Kiviat, is joining Baykeeper.
- E. Norwood Central Woods update – This is an ongoing project involving over one hundred acres of land in Norwood. The Trust's goal is to have this conservation easement completed by the beginning of the summer.
- F. Emerson Tract Baseline inventory – On April 7, 2005, the Trust, along with Ken Hoffman, completed its first baseline study of Emerson Woods. Digital photographs were taken to create a living history of the park. One violation, an encroachment of thirty to fifty feet into the park, was noted. A friendly letter will be sent to the homeowner.
- G. Van Buskirk Island Conservation Easement proposal – Ms. Schvejda spoke with the council and they are interested in having the Trust take an easement on the island. The county holds the land now but would like to add another layer of protection.
- H. Walden Marsh – It was decided to hold off on this matter until Capt. Bill is present.

9. Next Meeting set for June 17, 2005, at 10:00 am.

10. Motion to adjourn meeting was made.

Meeting adjourned at 11:30 am.

Kristina R. Schvejda, Executive Director
Meadowlands Conservation Trust