RE: 2020 Open Space Advisory Committee Annual Report

Dear Commissioner Robinson:

On behalf of the Somerset County Open Space Advisory Committee, I am pleased to submit our Annual Report for 2020. The Somerset County Open Space Preservation Program had another successful year with respect to implementing the County's duly adopted "Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan". With the addition of over 50 acres, the total park inventory now exceeds 14,801 acres.

Despite the challenges faced in 2020, land acquisition and related parks, recreation and open space initiatives continued, with multiple preservation projects, grants for municipal open space preservation, and ongoing progress with the update to the County’s Open Preservation Plan.

The continued support of the County Commissioners is greatly appreciated. Without the Board’s endorsement and follow through, the Open Space Preservation Program would not be as successful as it is today. We look forward to the combined efforts of the Board of County Commissioners, Somerset County Park Commission and Open Space Advisory Committee in 2021 to continue the success of the Open Space Program.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kelly, Chair
Open Space Advisory Committee

Attachment

Shanel Y. Robinson, Director
Somerset County Board of County Commissioners
County Administration Building
20 Grove Street
P. O. Box 3000
Somerville, NJ 08876

February 4, 2021
Membership

The ten members are chosen, two each by the Democratic Party, Republican Party, Planning Board, Park Commission and County Board of Commissioners.

Nine individuals were appointed and served on the Committee in 2020 for a term of one year. Officers were determined by election in accordance with adopted bylaws.

Chris Kelly, Chair
Helen Haines, Vice Chair
Melonie Marano, Commissioner
A.D. Amar
Kerry Haselton
Randy Jones
Gary LaSpisa
Suzanne Ochse
Walter Rusak

Staff/Non-Voting

Thomas Boccino, Principal Planner, County Engineering Parks Section
Adam Bloom, Principal Engineer, County Engineering Parks Section
Geoffrey Soriano, Director, Park Commission
Walter Lane, Director, County Planning Board
Katelyn Katzer, Principal Planner, County Planning Board

County Counsel

Joseph DeMarco, Esq.
Kevin Boris, Esq.
William T. Cooper, III, Esq.

Summary of Meetings

The Open Space Advisory Committee met on nine occasions at the Somerset County Administration Building and via Zoom Conference:

January 15, 2020
February 12, 2020
May 13, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
June 10, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
July 8, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
August 12, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
September 9, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
October 14, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
November 18, 2020 (Zoom Conference)
### 2020 Attendance

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1/15</th>
<th>2/12</th>
<th>3/11</th>
<th>4/8</th>
<th>5/13</th>
<th>6/10</th>
<th>7/8</th>
<th>8/12</th>
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<td>Kerry Haselton</td>
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<td>Randy Jones</td>
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<td>Chris Kelly</td>
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<td>Gary LaSpisa</td>
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<td>Melonie Marano</td>
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<td>Suzanne Ochse</td>
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### 2020 Land Acquisition Summary

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<tr>
<th>Preserve</th>
<th>Acres</th>
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<td>Sourland Mountain Preserve</td>
<td>49.74 ac.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eaton (Hillsborough)</td>
<td>B 171 L 202</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balogh (Hillsborough)</td>
<td>B169 L 55.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warrenbrook Golf Course</td>
<td>1.23 ac.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawrylo (Green Brook)</td>
<td>B 141 L 2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Valley Park</td>
<td>0.23 ac.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset Land Equities (Bridgewater)</td>
<td>B 706 L 9</td>
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</table>
Open Space Preservation Highlights

1) The County acquired parcels from 4 property owners totaling 51.20 acres. The total Open Space Inventory is now 14,801.63 acres.

2) The 26.07-acre Balogh property was the largest single acquisition in 2020 with a purchase price of $288,000. The parcel was subdivided from a larger 61.5-acre residential parcel and makes a connection to a previously isolated open space parcel on the County boundary. The preservation continues the expansion of the Sourland Mountain Preserve west to the County boundary.

3) Following years of negotiation beginning in 2009, the County was able to preserve the 23.67-acre Eaton property for $510,000 (photo right). The long-term plan for the property is to retain the existing canopy of Oak, Maple and Tulip Poplar. Leaving the property in its natural state and allowing public access for passive recreational uses such as hiking and bird watching will enhance the existing environmental quality of the area. The remains of the derelict residence will be removed, and the area restored.

4) The County paid the outstanding taxes of $13,637 and took title to a 1.23-acre parcel of land at the end of Wichser Lane in Green Brook owned by John & Candice Hawrylo. The completely wooded property abuts Warrenbrook Golf Course and will serve as a buffer to the adjacent residences as well as provide emergency and maintenance access to the rear of the golf course if needed in the future.

5) The developer of a 0.23-acre parcel on Newman’s Lane in Bridgewater Township surrounded by County parkland received approval for the construction of a single-family residence. The developer, Somerset Land Equities chose not to pursue the development and agreed to convey the property to the County for $10,000.

6) Heritage Strategies continues the development of the Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Master Plans. A single document will be prepared that coordinates all programs as well as three stand-alone documents. OSAC continues to receive periodic updates and will provide input on the recommendations of the Open Space Preservation Plan.
7) The County is currently under negotiations or under contract for approximately 225 acres totaling approximately $3,258,000.

8) The Somerset County Engineering Division Parks Section continues to assume administrative responsibilities for the Open Space Advisory Committee.

**Open Space Trust Fund**

In 2020, County open space acquisition costs totaled $821,637.18.

Somerset County provided funding to two municipalities for preservation projects.

- Montgomery Township received Special Projects Grant funding in the amount of $500,000 for the acquisition of 45.26 acres of open space known as the “DTCD Limited Partnership” property (B 11001 L 61) with a total purchase price of $2,000,000.
- Peapack/Gladstone Borough received Special Projects Grant funding in the amount of $475,000 for the acquisition of 12.66 acres of open space known as the “Nelson” property (B 8 L 2.03) with a total purchase price of $950,000.

The County Board of Commissioners is in the process of reviewing and amending the current Recreation Grant Guidelines to provide additional opportunities for municipalities to receive County Open Space Trust Funds for the development of active and passive recreational facilities.

As of December 31, 2020, a balance of $7,779,129 was available for acquisitions. This available amount includes the $6,800,000 Commissioner allocation from the Open Space Preservation Trust Fund for open space acquisitions.