

## **Open Spaces Board Meeting – OPEN SESSION**

Tuesday, July 28<sup>th</sup> , 2020 – 10:00 am

Meeting via Zoom – Zoom instructions posted on Open Spaces page of County Website

### **Board Member Attendance:**

Neil Byrne

David Craig

Dave Clemans

Peter Lomax

Will Morey

Leslie Gimeno

### **Others In Attendance:**

Barbara Ernst

Scott Mullen

Joe Molineaux (Economic Development / Zoom Meeting)

### **Call to Order:**

Mr. Lomax called the meeting to order at 10:12 am.

### **Pledge of Allegiance:**

Mr. Lomax led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Open Public Meetings Act:**

The Open Public Meetings Act Statement was read by Mr. Lomax.

### **Roll Call:**

Neil Byrne, David Craig, Dave Clemans, Peter Lomax, Freeholder Morey, and Leslie Gimeno were in attendance.

### **Adoption of Minutes:**

Mr. Craig made a motion to adopt the June 23<sup>rd</sup> minutes, as amended per comments from Mr. Lomax. Mr. Byrne seconded the motion. All in favor.

The minutes from February 25<sup>th</sup> were tabled to allow for time for board members to review. They will be considered for adoption at the August meeting.

#### **Chairman's Report:**

Mr. Lomax thanked everyone for being in attendance. He said that he anticipates applications for the August funding round to start coming in, and indicated that staff will do preliminary reviews to ensure that they are complete. He said that there had been two preapplications recently. North Wildwood will be coming in with a Gateway Project that will include a Gold Star Memorial, and they are looking for additional funding sources in support of this comprehensive project. Avalon will be submitting an application for elements of their Municipal Marina, which will include an ADA-accessible kayak launch, Creative Placemaking-themed site furnishings, waterfront promenade, boat ramp upgrades, and other infrastructure-related elements. Mr. Lomax indicated that he and Ms. Gimeno had provided feedback to both of the municipalities with regard to Open Spaces Program priorities and eligibility.

#### **Director's Report: None**

**Financial Report:** Financial reports had been received from the Treasurer's Office that cover the February to May timeframe. As of 5/1, there was a fund balance of \$11.786 million; Ms. Gimeno said that there was still \$3 million reserved for the Lower Township Aquatic Center, but that she had received correspondence that the application had been withdrawn by the Township, so the available funds are \$14.786 million.

#### **Correspondence:**

- 1) Letter dated 1/27/20 from Alma George to Ms. Gimeno following up on a discussion held with respect to a potential land acquisition of her property, which is located adjacent the Strassenburgh property in Dennis Township. The document outlines a list of concerns and requests related to her property as she contemplates the submission of an application.
- 2) Letter dated 6/24/20 from Mayor Sippel transmitting Township Resolution 2020-185 which withdraws the proposed Aquatic Center from the Open Spaces program.
- 3) Letter dated 7/6/20 from Mayor Pikolycky thanking the Open Spaces Board for our ongoing support of the EcoPark Project and expressing enthusiasm for the County providing financial support for the landscape design services that will be used to integrate the Jake's Law Playground into the EcoPark site.

#### **Discussion / Project Updates:**

Strassenburgh: Mr. Lomax indicated that we had received the 2 appraisals for the Strassenburgh property and had issued an offer letter. While Mr. Strassenburgh initially agreed to the purchase at a price of \$400,000, he subsequently sent an email to Ms. Gimeno indicating concerns over the County not purchasing his 50% ownership of Magnolia Lake. Ms. Gimeno explained that she had emailed Mr. Strassenburgh asking for him for additional time to see if we could negotiate with Ms. George, and Mr. Strassenburgh declined. Mr. Lomax expressed disappointment at this result, as there was an expectation that Mr. Strassenburgh was acting in good faith throughout the process, and that this had been a rare opportunity to reassemble a legacy property for the County. He further noted that a significant amount of time and effort had gone into the application process for this property, to no avail.

Alma George Property: Mr. Lomax inquired if the Board was still interested in pursuing the possibility of a land acquisition for Ms. George's property, given her correspondence and list of issues. Mr. Craig said he felt that the fact that there are rights of first refusal on the property (the same as with Strassenburgh), that this is a red flag and that this makes the process too difficult. Mr. Byrne said that he felt that the Open Spaces Board was dragged into the middle of a long-standing family dispute and that we had been taken advantage of, with Mr. Strassenburgh having gotten 2 appraisals out of the process. Ms. Gimeno said that she feels that Ms. George's expectations are unrealistic, and that she is not interested in moving ahead at this point. Consensus was reached that Ms. George would be contacted to see if she would act to reassemble the Estate by exercising her right of first refusal, then offer the property in its entirety to the Open Spaces Board. It was determined that the Strassenburgh application be kept in 'active status' in the event that he changes his mind and decides to preserve the property.

Withdrawal of Lower Township Aquatic Center: Board members discussed the project and several indicated that they believed the concept of the project had merit, but that the original operations and maintenance plans were not adequate. Mr. Byrne made a motion to accept the Township's request to withdraw the application from consideration; Mr. Clemans seconded the motion. All members were in favor.

Woodbine EcoPark – Landscape Architecture Services - Mr. Lomax provided an overview of the project, the Open Spaces Board members' efforts to coordinate with the Borough and its professionals on integrating the Jake's Law Playground into the EcoPark site, and the current status of the project. Board members reached consensus that since the project will ultimately be a County-owned park, it would be appropriate to assist the Borough with the costs of the enhanced landscape architecture services. Ms. Gimeno was asked to draft a shared services agreement for consideration by the Open Spaces Board, and to coordinate with County Counsel on getting the agreement executed via the Freeholder Board.

Discussion on Site Naming / Dedication Plaques: Ms. Gimeno gave a brief description of the history of using dedication plaques at Open Spaces funded sites and the effort to develop a new plaque design that contains the Creative Placemaking branding. Matt Leasure from Designing Local had worked up three different options, and these were shared and reviewed by the group. Discussions were had

related to the importance of the sign given that its purpose is to build recognition of the program and to recognize county taxpayers' contributions. Several concerns were outlined regarding the following issues:

- Sign design
- Sign clutter if municipal signs also installed
- Plaque verbiage
- Listing of individuals' and professional firms' names on plaque

Ultimately, consensus was reached on the following:

- Language crediting the taxpayers will remain unchanged
- Need for consensus from Freeholder Board to see if they are amenable to focusing on the contribution of the Program and taxpayers, or if they would prefer to have elected officials' names on the plaques
- Plaque design and installation location will be a required part of future applications to the Program so that expectations are known and met
- Tie plaque design to percentage contribution by municipalities; the higher their participation, the more discretion they have

Grant Agreement Language Modification: This was discussed in an earlier part of the meeting.

Partnership Decisions: A discussion was had regarding program components and eligibility standards to heighten the focus on municipal partnerships in projects and to enhance regional resources and opportunities. Board members reached consensus that evaluation of projects should include an indication of whether project will be more of a benefit to the region – or to the municipality in which the project is located. The Board agreed that there needs to be specific language regarding partnerships and expectations, as municipalities spend considerable time, effort, and monies to develop applications to the Open Spaces Program. Pre-application meetings were identified as being a key resource in the initial vetting of applications. Mr. Byrne suggested setting up a rotating subcommittee for pre-application meetings so that applicants and board members get the full perspective.

Key lessons learned from past applications and guidance for policy changes were as follows:

- Program flexibility is needed
- If County owns the land, then higher Open Spaces Program participation in park/recreation development
- If the municipality gives the land to the County, then higher Open Spaces Program participation in park/recreation development
- Continue to use Special Funding Rounds to incentivize projects with regional benefit; fund these as higher participation rates and scales
- Consider setting limits for non-Special Funding Round projects, or set aside a specific dollar amount for projects considered to only have local benefit
- The higher matching funds provided, then Open Spaces' participation scale will slide upward

- The track record of the municipality with regard to past projects, maintenance, operation, and programming should be taken into account when considering future applications
- Lower priority and participation will be given to projects that are essentially equipment replacement; higher priority and participation for new opportunities
- Demonstration of community support for projects must be highlighted and documented

Ms. Gimeno noted that the majority of these issues are already contained within the existing Program Guide and application documents (including the Factor Sets), but that the language needs to be strengthened and standards for meeting or exceeding those expectations must be clearly defined. She further suggested that the Board reach out to local municipalities, as was done in the past, to ask what their priorities are to see if there are common themes or needs. She was asked to develop a draft letter to the municipalities indicating that we are reexamining the priorities of the Program and asking for municipal input on local and their assessment of regional priorities.

It was further determined that once the new guidelines were established, that updates to all program documents, application forms, websites, etc. would need to be done so that there are multiple points of contact to reinforce the revised rules.

**Public Comment:** No members of the public were present. Mr. Molineaux confirmed that there was no one present in the Zoom waiting room.

**Closed Session:** It was determined that Closed Session was not necessary.

**Further Discussion/Strassenburgh:** Board members expressed disappointment on the outcome of the Strassenburgh application. Mr. Byrne made a motion to request reimbursement of appraisal costs from Mr. Strassenburgh, upon advice from County Counsel. Mr. Clemans seconded the motion. All Board members were in favor of the motion.

**Adjournment:** Mr. Byrne made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:57. Mr. Craig seconded the motion. All in favor.