

BOROUGH OF WASHINGTON, WARREN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY
WASHINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL MINUTES – February 14, 2017

The Special Meeting of the Borough Council of Washington, Warren County, New Jersey was held in the Council Chambers of Borough Hall at 7:00 pm.

Mayor Higgins read the following statement into the record:

“The requirements of the ‘Open Public Meetings Law, P.L. 1975, Chapter 231’ have been satisfied in that adequate notice of this meeting has been noticed to the Star Gazette and published in the Express-Times and posted on the Bulletin Board of Borough Hall stating the time, place and purpose of the meeting as required by law.”

Mayor Higgins led everyone in the flag salute.

Roll Call: Heinrich, Higgins, Jones, Klimko, Noone, Valle

Absent: Thompson

Also Present: Ann Kilduff, Borough Clerk; and Matthew Hall, Borough Manager

A motion was made by Heinrich, seconded by Valle, to receive and file the correspondence.

1. Letter from the Washington Township Land Use Board re: Notice of Hearing for the Periodic Reexamination Report Master Plan Amendment to the Land Use Element and Master Plan Amendment of Proposed Checklist Ordinance.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

Motion Carried

Mayor Higgins opened up the audience portion for remarks, petitions, statements and testimony from guests not related to the Public Hearing of the Open Space Grant Application. Seeing no one, a motion was made by Heinrich, seconded by Klimko, to close the audience portion of the meeting.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

Motion Carried

A motion was made by Jones, seconded by Heinrich, to open the Public Hearing of the Proposed Acquisition of the Shabbecong Mountain Preserve with Green Acres funds.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

Motion Carried

Mike Franks, 43 Nunn Avenue

M. Franks stated he would like the Borough to secure the purchase of this property with whatever funds possible.

Shawn Gilson, New Jersey Highlands Coalition

S. Gilson stated the New Jersey Highlands Coalition supports Washington Borough's application to preserve one of the last significant open space parcels in Washington Borough and enhance this property for public use and enjoyment. S. Gilson stated there are high ecological and economical values to this area and encourages the approval of this application.

Chris Vitalos, 28 Lambert Street

C. Vitalos stated he was on the Board of Adjustment a few years ago when the development of this land was discussed. The public was against the development because of traffic and environmental concerns. The application was withdrawn due to significant public opposition.

Andrew Turner, 300 Belvidere Avenue

A. Turner stated this property was discussed by the Planning Board approximately twelve years ago. Development was denied due to limited access to the property. A. Turner is concerned with the cost to the taxpayer. He feels as it is difficult to develop on that property it should remain as is. A. Turner doesn't see purchasing this property as a practical solution and feels it already serves as a passive recreation area.

Scott McDonald, 342 N. Prospect Street

S. McDonald stated he disagrees with A. Turner as there is the potential of 450 homes being built on this property. With the uncertainty of COAH, more housing may be required causing a tax burden to the residents.

Mike Franks, 43 Nunn Avenue

M. Franks stated he's lived next to this property since 1986. Borough Officials have spent many hours discussing development of this land by various unsuccessful applicants. As this is the last open space in Washington Borough, he urges Council to act quickly to support responsible use of the Shabbecong Mountain Preserve. He feels the area is not currently serving as a passive recreation area and the purchase will not be a significant tax burden. M. Franks would like to see the property used by the public and improve the quality of life of the residents.

Susan Sloan, 89 Grand Avenue

S. Sloan feels preserving this land would benefit our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She feels the Borough should move forward with the application to provide future generations with undisturbed land.

Suzi Moore, Washington Borough Green Team

S. Moore encouraged Council to move forward on the acquisition and gave a detailed description of the property. She feels the best use of the property is a passive recreation area and development of this land would be catastrophic. S. Moore stated the Green Team recommends preservation of the land and leaving the area in its natural condition. She offered the Green Team's assistance in establishing and maintaining walking and hiking trails.

Executive Members of the Warren Hills Regional High School SAVE Environmental Club

Students of the Environmental Club SAVE (Students Against Vandalizing the Earth) spoke in support of the application, stating once the area is cleaned up it will become an asset to the community. As students and community members, they have a deep love of undeveloped areas and have recently cleared ten bags of trash, numerous tires as well as discarded styrofoam from the area. They feel it is a beautiful area and should be preserved.

Jennifer Lamberti, 96 McDonald Street

J. Lamberti spoke not only for herself, but also on behalf of Grassroots Movements Washington HOPE (Homeowners Protecting the Environment) in support of preserving the last significant open area in Washington Borough. She feels preserving the land now would save money in the future as development of this land would put a burden on the schools and tax payers. J. Lamberti commends Council for applying for this grant.

Marianne VanDeursen, 32 Lambert Street

M. VanDeursen stated Council and other Washington Borough Officials have been talking about this property for years and stated this Council has an opportunity to close the discussion. She encouraged Council to consider the public's input in favor of this application.

Mike Franks, 43 Nunn Avenue

M. Franks encouraged Council to create a legacy of this Governing Body by acquiring the land.

Andrew Turner, 300 Belvidere Avenue

A. Turner asked the amount of the grant and the cost of the property.

Greg Socha of the Trust for Public Land stated he has been assisting the Borough with the potential acquisition of the property and stated the land was appraised at over \$1.5 million in 2013. The total cost of the project is \$1.55 million and the Borough would receive 50% of the total project cost from Green Acres. G. Socha discussed raising money from other sources and explained the appraisal process.

Hearing no further comments from the public, a motion was made by Heinrich, seconded by Jones, to close the public hearing.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0
Motion Carried

M. Hall stated the Borough passed an Open Space Tax in November and it will be collected beginning July 1st whether the Borough applies for the grant or not. A total of approximately \$400,000 will be collected by the time the tax expires in five years which is the maximum amount the Borough can contribute to this project. Other funds would come from the Green Acres Matching Grant, County Grants or Private Foundation Grants. The Borough is applying for a 50% Planning Incentive Grant. M. Hall noted this money was earmarked for both open space and recreation.

S. McDonald noted Council could go back onto referendum after five years if they so choose.

A. Turner asked if the property could be acquired solely through grant money as the Borough already owns property on Railroad Avenue and has not yet developed it for recreation. G. Socha stated it is possible, but Green Acres and the County look for a municipality to contribute towards the project.

C. Vitalos asked when the Borough will learn how the tax revenue would be allocated. Mayor Higgins stated it will be after the Borough learns the total amount of money to be awarded. M. Hall replied he should hear something in late summer or early fall of this year.

Mayor Higgins asked when the Borough should begin seeking alternate funding. G. Socha explained why he will begin within the next few months.

M. Hall stated the Open Space Plan will be updated in accordance with the grant. The last update to the OSRP was done in 2000, at which time the property in question had been targeted for preservation.

Resolution 2017-45 – State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Enabling Resolution

RESOLUTION 2017-45

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
GREEN ACRES ENABLING RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Program (“State”), provides loans and/or grants to municipal and county governments and grants to nonprofit organizations for assistance in the acquisition, development, and stewardship of lands for outdoor recreation and conservation purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Borough of Washington desires to further the public interest by obtaining funding in the amount of \$1,288,000 from the State to fund the following project(s):

Shabbecong Mountain Preserve

at a cost of \$1,550,000;

NOW, THEREFORE, the governing body/board resolves that Matthew C. Hall (name of authorized official) or the successor to the office of Borough Manager (title of authorized official) is hereby authorized to:

- (a) make application for such a loan and/or such a grant,
- (b) provide additional application information and furnish such documents as may be required, and
- (c) act as the authorized correspondent of the above named applicant; and

WHEREAS, the State shall determine if the application is complete and in conformance with the scope and intent of the Green Acres Program, and notify the applicant of the amount of the funding award; and

WHEREAS, the applicant is willing to use the State's funds in accordance with such rules, regulations and applicable statutes, and is willing to enter into an agreement with the State for the above named project;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED BY the Council of the Borough of Washington

1. That the Borough Manager of the above named body or board is hereby authorized to execute an agreement and any amendment thereto with the State known as Shabbecong Mountain Preserve.
2. That the applicant will make a good faith effort to obtain its matching share of the project, if a match is required, in the amount of \$775,000;
3. That, in the event the State's funds are less than the total project cost specified above, the applicant will in good faith seek the balance of funding necessary to complete the project;
4. That the applicant agrees to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, and regulations in its performance of the project; and
5. That this resolution shall take effect immediately.

Resolution 2017-45 was moved on a motion by Heinrich, seconded by Jones, and approved. Mayor Higgins read Resolution 2017-45 for the benefit of the audience.

ROLL CALL: Heinrich, Jones, Klimko, Noone, Valle, Higgins

Ayes: 6; Nays: 0

Motion Carried

ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further business, a motion was made by Heinrich, seconded by Valle, to adjourn the meeting at 7:42 pm.

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0

Motion Carried

Mayor David Higgins

Ann Kilduff, RMC Borough Clerk