

APPROVED AS AMENDED: October 15, 2024

WEST WINDSOR TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION
March 19, 2024

CALL TO ORDER: President Geevers called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL: Gawas (Zoom), Geevers, Mandel, Weiss, Whitfield

Councilwoman Gawas joined the meeting via Zoom at 9:05 a.m.

STATEMENT OF ADEQUATE NOTICE

Statement of Adequate Notice: March 12, 2024 to The Times and the Princeton Packet and posted on the Township web-site.

ATTENDEES: President: Geevers; Council: Gawas (via Zoom), Mandel, Weiss, Whitfield; Business Administrator: Schmid; Special Assistant to Administration: Giammetta; Chief Financial Officer: Mauder; Township Clerk: Huber; Deputy Township Clerk: Sheehan

SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Ms. Sheehan led the salute to the flag.

Presentation from Land Use Manager on Open Space

Mr. Surtees gave a brief overview of the history of the Township's Open Space Tax. He noted as of today the Township has a 2% Open Space Tax which generates approximately \$1.2 million a year that goes into the Township's open space fund. Mr. Surtees stated currently there is approximately \$3 million in this fund. Mr. Surtees stated the Township uses about 34% of this fund for open space maintenance and the Township is working on acquiring additional properties for preservation purposes.

Mr. Surtees presented a map to Council showing all current preserved open space in the Township, which accounts for about 50% of the Township. He explained the Township's Open Space Plan and noted it is the Open Space Recreation Plan which is one of the elements of the Township's Master Plan. Mr. Surtees also explained the process of the Planning Incentive Grant Program, requiring the Township to adopt an Open Space Recreation Plan that has to be updated every 10 years. He noted the last update was in 2018. Mr. Surtees stated the Township

received about \$700,000.00 in 2023 and a \$1.1 million Green Acres Grant was applied for this year. Mr. Surtees presented a slide of the Open Space Recreation Plan which showed 101 properties for acquisition and noted not all properties were successfully acquired. He gave an overview of the acquisition process and noted to Council the farm preserved properties on the Township Open Space Location Map. Mr. Surtees explained the properties preserved through the County and State Farmland Preservation Program are designated farmland in perpetuity. He explained the difference between farmland preservation and open space preservation. Mr. Surtees noted the Township collects more money from Township owned properties leased to local farmers to farm for the Township than from privately owned farmland.

Mr. Surtees reviewed membership and duties of the Agricultural Advisory Committee. He noted there are approximately 1,500 acres of farm preserved land and green acres that the Township collects rent on. Mr. Surtees stated the Open Space Plan has been in place for approximately 20 years.

Councilmember Mandel asked Mr. Surtees if the 50% of preserved open space includes farmland to which Mr. Surtees confirmed.

Mr. Surtees stated West Windsor Township Friends of West Windsor Open Space (FOWWOS) are in the State Planning Incentive Grant Program. He explained how FOWWOS has been beneficial to the Township. Mr. Surtees reviewed the Open Space Supplemental Funding Chart that lists all the properties the Township has preserved over the last 25-30 years. He reviewed the Open Space Acquisitions and Utilization Table. Mr. Surtees noted this chart is in the Township Open Space Recreation Plan and is available on the Township website.

Mr. Surtees reviewed the Open Space Location Plan of the Township. He noted specific open space properties and future potential for these properties.

President Gevers asked the possibility of buying open space for preservation.

Mr. Surtees explained to Council the process of property acquisition including acquiring appraisals, the State process involved and how other values of properties could be affected.

Mr. Surtees summarized the grants the Township has applied for this year. He noted the Township applied for Mercer County open space funds and have received just over \$5 million in grants over the last 25 years. Mr. Surtees stated the Township has received about \$8.5 million in Green Acres Grants and the Township is anticipating another \$3.2 million from the State.

Discussion ensued regarding the Township's open space tax and future of open space acquisition and State reimbursement to the Township. Mr. Surtees noted all the maps shown in his presentation are on the Township website.

Council Member Gawas asked if there is enough funding in the Open Space Fund for future purchases.

Mr. Surtees confirmed there is funding available.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

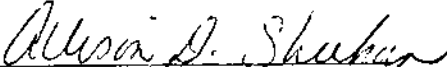
Frank Lavadera, 4 Wynwood Drive, thanked everyone for the presentation. He questioned if the Township should evaluate its plan for open space acquisition to be more aggressive in the future and questioned the open space preservation requirements for the Bridgepoint 8 property.


Mr. Surtees stated the Open Space Acquisition Plan was looked at in 2018 at which time more properties were added. He noted according to the approved Planning Board plan about a third of the Bridgepoint 8 property will be preserved mostly due to environmental constraints.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn: Weiss
Second: Whitfield
VV: All approved

The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m.


Allison D. Sheehan
Township Clerk
West Windsor Township


Linda Geever
Council President
West Windsor Township